

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE 15

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24 YEARS Osprey OBSERVER YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER POSITIVE NEWS
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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE 23

CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS

BLOOMINGDALE HIGH SCHOOL DRUMLINE KICKS OFF HILLSBOROUGH DAY AT THE CAPITOL

By Jane Owen



The Bloomingdale High School Drumline at Hillsborough Day at the Capitol.

On January 28, community leaders and business owners from Hillsborough County invaded the state's capital. Hillsborough Day at the Capitol is a day when people from Hillsborough County set sail for Tallahassee to share the heritage of the county and connect with lawmakers.



This year, for the first time, Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) kicked off the event with pomp and circumstance. Bloomingdale Senior High School's drumline played and represented the music programs of Hillsborough County schools.

School board member Patti Rendon said Hillsborough Day at the Capitol was exciting.

"It was an incredible day for our community. I was excited watching Bloomingdale High School band perform. They put on an impressive performance," Rendon said.

Rendon was thankful that Lt. Gov. Jay Collins and State Representative Danny Alveraz took time to visit with Bloomingdale's students after their performance. They were there to collaborate on issues that matter to Hillsborough County. Spending time with the students was part of that.

Jordan Fraze, Bloomingdale's band director, said it was an honor for Bloomingdale to be selected to represent Hillsborough County's music education programs.

"The students walked away from this event with a feeling of pride knowing that they represented their school and county well through their performance," Fraze said.

Jon Sever, supervisor of secondary music education for HCPS, said Bloomingdale students left a powerful impression on everyone.

"The Bloomingdale High School Drumline delivered an outstanding performance, showcasing not only their remarkable musicianship but also the pride, discipline and excellence of Hillsborough County and Hillsborough County schools," Sever said.

The students shined on Capitol Day, and HCPS made their trip impactful.

The day before the event, Bloomingdale's students were able to visit Florida State University (FSU). They observed a rehearsal for the FSU Symphonic Band, took a tour of campus and attended a masterclass given by the marching chief's Big 8 Drumline. They learned practice techniques at FSU to further their musicianship.

STRIKING GOLD: LEANN'S COOKIE OWNER RECEIVES CUSTOM FLUTE

By Libby Hopkins



LeAnne Crabtree of Seffner poses with her solid gold flute from the Wm. S. Haynes Company, a lifelong dream that now plays a role in her motivational speaking as she continues to inspire the community through faith, music and service.

LeAnne Crabtree of Seffner is an author, a motivational speaker and the owner of LeAnne's Old Fashioned Cookie. Her cookies have been warming the hearts and igniting the taste buds of her customers for more than 36 years.

Crabtree is known for having a servant's heart and giving back to her community whenever she gets the chance. Her two books, God Has a Sweet Tooth and The Encourager, have inspired many people in our community.

"I love being a part of this community and giving back to it when I can," Crabtree said.

In addition to being a baker, entrepreneur, motivational speaker and author, Crabtree can now add 'performer' to her resume.

"Ever since I was little, I loved playing the flute," Crabtree said. "I always wanted to have my own gold flute made by the Wm. S. Haynes Company. My father's friend had one of their flutes, and he let me play it. It was an absolutely amazing experience that I have carried with me my entire life."

The Wm. S. Haynes Company is one of the oldest flute-making companies in the world. The company started in 1888 making wood flutes. By the 1920s, it started making silver flutes. In 1935, the Wm. S. Haynes Company made the first American platinum flute for the leading flutist of the time, Georges Barrère.

The Haynes Company has such a long and rich history that it is no wonder some of the most eminent flutists in the world are so attached to their Haynes instruments. Principal flutists of the world's greatest orchestras, international soloists and recording artists, college professors at the most elite musical and academic institutions — professionals at the very highest levels of artistry and achievement every day trust their Haynes flutes to inspire, challenge and enrich their musical lives.

"The company makes a solid gold flute what I absolutely fell in love with when I saw it," Crabtree said. "I knew owning a gold flute was something I would never have, or so I thought."

One day, while her husband was at work, God spoke to him and told him his wife deserved to have her dream come true of owning the gold flute, Crabtree said.

"When he came home from work, he told me what God had told him and he said to me, 'We are going to get you your gold flute,' and I was in total shock," Crabtree said. "It took a few months, but when it arrived, I was so thankful."

Crabtree did a live unboxing of her flute on her Facebook page and even played it for her followers.

Now, her gold flute goes everywhere with her. During her motivational speaking sessions, she plays her flute for her audience.

"I love how my flute has helped me to inspire so many people," Crabtree said. "It's truly a gift from God."

If you would like to learn more about Crabtree or buy one of her books, visit her website at https://leannecrabtree.com/.

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Construction is underway at The Gallery Tampa on Bell Shoals Rd in Valrico, a new 202-home senior living community designed around art and hospitality while preserving the site's oak trees. See full story on Page 3.



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THE GALLERY: 202-HOME SENIOR COMMUNITY ON BELL SHOALS ROAD

By Brian Bokor







L: Bob Delle Donne - Regional Sales, Launa Moore - Executive Director, Nick McLaughlin - Director of Sales. C: Executive Director Launa Moore and Director of Sales Nick McLaughlin (front row) with Guests

Along Bell Shoals Road, a new senior living community is under construction, emphasizing art-focused design and a hospitality-driven lifestyle.

Officially named The Gallery Tampa, the community is located on a 17-acre property at 5049 Bell Shoals Rd. in Valrico. Formerly, the site was occupied by St. Stephen Catholic Church, before the congregation relocated to its Boyette Road campus. Developed by Experience Senior Living, the community will introduce 202 homes across multiple levels of care.

Preserving existing oak trees was central to the site's original design. Buildings were positioned to avoid mature oaks, with winding walking paths following the natural lines of the remaining canopy to preserve privacy, maintain a connection to nature and retain elements of the site's long-standing character.

Construction is underway, with the community projected to welcome its first residents in the final quarter of 2026.

Company leaders said the Tampa-area project was intentionally designed to combine hospitality, wellness and connection within an arts-inspired environment.

"This marketplace has been so supportive. I have never worked somewhere before where people have been so helpful. It's wonderful to be in such a collaborative environment," said Launa Moore, executive director, during a recent on-site event.

The Gallery Tampa will encompass more than 240,000 square feet and include 202 residences, consisting of 115 independent living homes — including six villas and 24 flats — along with 45 assisted living and 42 memory support residences, all within a single integrated campus.

Moore said the Bell Shoals Road site was selected in part for its natural setting.

"We chose this specific site and wanted to make sure that we could preserve as many trees as possible," she said.

Experience Senior Living operates several Gallery-branded communities elsewhere in Florida, including locations in Naples, Cape Coral, North Port and Port Orange, with an additional Reserve-branded Sarasota community currently under construction.

Beyond scale, project leaders said the campus is designed to support residents as their needs change over time without forcing them to leave a community they've already built. Early interest has included a husband and wife who have committed to living on the same campus, with one planning to lease an independent living villa while the other resides in assisted living, allowing them to spend as much time together as possible.

One of the defining features of The Gallery concept is its approach to food and hospitality. Adam Galloway, culinary specialist for Experience Senior Living, said the company has intentionally moved away from traditional senior living dining models.

"We don't have dining rooms or dining venues," Galloway said. "We have restaurants."

The Tampa campus is planned to include five on-site restaurant venues, including full-service dining, bars, and a raw bar, along with neighborhood-specific restaurants serving memory care residents.

In addition to its hospitality-focused dining program, the campus is planned to include a range of on-site amenities designed to support wellness, creativity and daily convenience. Planned features include an on-site chef, cocktail bar, a resort-style pool, a pickleball court, outdoor entertainment areas with grills and an outdoor kitchen, a smart fitness center, a full-service salon, an art studio and pet-friendly accommodations. Residents will also have access to personalized transportation, a medical alert system and 24-hour, on-site clinical staff.

"Everyone that lives in assisted living has that purpose and an amazing career background. Finding that passion they still have, whether it's food, activities, or wine, really matters," Galloway said.

Nick McLaughlin, director of sales, said the community's focus goes beyond amenities or floor plans and centers on how residents are treated day to day.

"We want to be known for really great connections and really great quality and service," McLaughlin said.

He emphasized that many people entering assisted living bring decades of professional experience, personal passions and strong identities with them, and he said the service model is designed to recognize those qualities through consistency, attentiveness and personal connection, from staff knowing residents by name to supporting continued engagement in meaningful interests.

"What brings us all so close together is we share that same common bond to serve seniors and be the most amazing footprint in their life when sometimes it can be the last chapter of their life," said Louise Odom, senior vice president of sales, during the same event.

The leasing center is now open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m., with weekend appointments available, as the community moves toward an opening in the final quarter of 2026. Additional information is available at 813-642-4430.





CHAMBER CELEBRATES BUSINESS STARS AT DINNER, AWARDS $16,000 TO HOPE FOR HER AND ANNOUNCES 2026 CAUSES

Staff Report



Bikes For Christ was named Non-profit of the Year at the VFCC Annual Dinner.



Amani Med Spa received dual recognition as Small and Woman-owned Business of the Year.



Edge Pools was named winner of the Large Business of the Year at the VFCC Annual Dinner.



Tiffany Achille of Citizens Bank & Trust in Valrico was named Business Leader of the Year.

The Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce (VFCC) rolled out the red carpet for its Annual Dinner and Business of the Year Awards, celebrating standout businesses, professionals and community leaders while reinforcing its mission of service through charitable giving.

Held on January 22 at The Regent, the chamber's signature event embraced the theme 'Hollywood Nights: Celebrating Our Chamber's Stars,' transforming the evening into a glamorous awards-style celebration. Chamber members, elected officials and community partners gathered for a night of recognition, networking and philanthropy, many arriving dressed in awards-night glam or as favorite movie characters.

Throughout the evening, the chamber honored excellence across a wide range of categories. Tiffany Achille of Citizens Bank & Trust in Valrico was named Business Leader of the Year, while 55 Rides earned Emerging Business of the Year. Other honorees included Burn Boot Camp as Franchise Business of the Year, Edge Pools as Large Business of the Year, iSmash as Medium Business of the Year and Faith Based Fitness Bus as Minority-owned Business of the Year.

Amani Med Spa received dual recognition as both Small Business of the Year and Woman-owned Business of the Year, with Dr. Gina Brar recognized for her leadership. Additional awards went to Bikes For Christ as Non-profit of the Year; Katlyn Agosta of Papaya Primary Care as Solo Entrepreneur of the Year; Next Level Lending as Startup Business of the Year; Dream Vacations, owned by Jenifer Breaux, as Veteran-owned Business of the Year; and Laurie Partanio of Professional Pets Florida as Young Professional of the Year.

Community service was also highlighted, with Angie Kagey of the Impact Program receiving the Community Impact of the Year award. Kevin Kemp of Kemp Designs earned the Member Spotlight Award, voted on by the chamber's executive board, while Rebecca Kerzan of Brandon Massage Oasis was named Ambassador of the Year.

In addition to celebrating business achievements, the chamber spotlighted its charitable efforts. During the program, VFCC announced that its 2025 Charity of Choice, Hope for Her, received a $16,000 donation raised throughout 2024. The funds will support women and children facing crisis situations in the local community.

Looking ahead, the chamber also announced its charities of choice for 2026. Seeds of Hope Inc. was selected for its mission of nourishing those in need through student-led initiatives, while We Are The Essentials was chosen for its work done by former law enforcement and military members who assist in locating missing persons.

Chamber leaders emphasized that the annual dinner is not only a celebration of success but also an opportunity to give back and strengthen the community. Citizens Bank & Trust served as the main event sponsor, helping make the evening possible.

With record attendance and strong community support, the Valrico FishHawk Chamber's annual dinner once again showcased the businesses and individuals who continue to make the region thrive — on and off the red carpet.

The Valrico Fishhawk Chamber of Commerce supports local business owners and non-profit organizations through positive networking, business education, and community involvement.

Members are involved in building relationships and friendships that make a difference. Our Chamber has approximately 300 members representing businesses of all sizes. We focus on building a "know, like, and trust" approach so we're comfortable using and referring others to our fellow Chamber members.

The Valrico Fishhawk Chamber of Commerce (VFCC) works year-round to raise funds for a Charity of Choice (selected by the Board President), collect donations for its high school senior scholarship program for students entering a trade school, and give back to our schools with a great teacher luncheon and donated school supplies.

Visit a weekly or monthly networking meeting or event to grow business through the VFCC. Visit www.valricofishhawk.org.



LIVE2LEAD SOUTH COUNTY TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP DAY AT DAVE & BUSTER'S

Staff Report

On Friday, February 20, Leaders from across Tampa Bay will gather at Dave & Buster's on National Leadership Day for Live2Lead South County, a one-day leadership and growth experience focused on building stronger teams, deeper connections and healthier workplace cultures.



Hosted by Tammy Dotson of Time 2 SHINE Consulting Services LLC and a Maxwell Leadership Certified Team executive director, Live2Lead South County brings world-class leadership content to the local community through exclusive rebroadcast sessions featuring John C. Maxwell, Jesse Cole and Craig Groeschel.

This year's theme, 'Better Together: Leadership That Connects Communities,' emphasizes the importance of communication, collaboration and trust in today's workplaces. The event combines leadership insights with facilitated discussions, interactive activities, and a team-building experience designed to help leaders apply what they learn immediately.

Live2Lead South County is ideal for business owners, executives, managers, HR professionals, educators, ministry leaders and emerging leaders seeking practical tools and meaningful connection.

Registration includes breakfast, lunch, interactive programming, giveaways, a certificate of attendance and SHRM credit. A limited VIP Leadership Experience is also available, offering reserved seating, a post-event leadership roundtable and additional benefits.

For registration and event details, visit https://l2l-southcounty.com/.

About Live2Lead

Live2Lead is an annual leadership gathering developed by Maxwell Leadership. Marking its 12th anniversary this year, Live2Lead has shared leadership and personal growth principles to a live audience and over 325 simulcast locations around the world. Attendees learn from renowned leadership experts in various industries, gain new perspectives on relevant topics and leave prepared with practical tools to maximize their leadership abilities and trajectories.

As an official host, Time 2 SHINE Consulting Services is honored to bring this rebroadcast to the community for the fourth season. A Live2Lead season is from October through February. During the season, there are opportunities for organizations to book private showings or to attend a public event. The attendees leave equipped and excited to lead and create change with renewed passion and drive.

STUDENT RAISING FUNDS FOR MUSIC TRIP TO PRAGUE AND BUDAPEST

By Libby Hopkins

Norah Nadeau of Valrico loves music, singing and playing the piano.

"I've loved to sing ever since I was little," Norah Nadeau said. "I loved it so much that when I got older, I joined the choir when I was in sixth grade. I had a great chorus teacher, and she inspired me to keep singing. Singing, for me, has been totally life changing."



Norah Nadeau is a student and chorus member at Burns Middle School.

Norah Nadeau is currently a student at Burns Middle School, where she has excelled in her chorus program.

Since joining the chorus program at her school, Norah Nadeau's sheer talent and drive have culminated in her being selected by the All-Choral Directors Association (ACDA), All-State and All-County honor choirs as one of their elite student singers chosen from across the state.

As of 2025, Norah Nadeau also became an avid cast member of Brandon Youth Theater, which only continues to propel her talent and catapult her passion for music. She will be at Bloomingdale High School next year, and she recently found out about an opportunity to travel with her high school to perform in Europe.

"Being in chorus and experiencing music this way has had a huge, positive impact on my life," Norah Nadeau said. "This trip only happens about once every four years, which would make this my one chance to go. I believe that this will be an amazing opportunity not only to perform in amazing places but also to experience another culture."

Norah Nadeau and her high school chorus will be traveling to Prague, Czech Republic, and Budapest, Hungary, in March 2027, which means she and her family need to start raising funds for her trip now.

"As a talented and enthusiastic choir student, it is evident that Norah would truly benefit from this chance to experience other cultures through music and performance," said her mother, Amy Nadeau. "The cost of the trip is $4,500 per person, with monthly payments of $450 beginning on January 6 of this year. The payments will cover the cost of airline tickets, lodging, meals and planned events/performances pertaining to the seven-day trip. We started a GoFundMe to help raise the money so Norah can have this amazing opportunity to travel to these countries and perform, which she absolutely loves to do."

So far, Norah Nadeau and her family have raised $655 for her trip.

"I'm nervous and excite at the same time," Norah Nadeau said. "I'm looking forward to performing and learning more about the culture of the countries we will be in during the trip. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I'm working very hard to raise the money so I can have this wonderful opportunity."

To donate to Norah Nadeau's GoFundMe, you can visit her donation link at https://gofund.me/22e7f3ab6. The Nadeau family appreciate any help the community can give Norah Nadeau to make this once in a lifetime opportunity happen for her.



Edward Jones

> edwardjones.com | Member SIPC

New Year's Financial Resolutions: Making Them Stick

As the calendar flips to a new year, millions of Americans pledge to improve their financial lives. But without a concrete plan, those well-intentioned resolutions often fade quickly.

Financial goals consistently top the list of New Year's resolutions. A 2025 CFP Board study shows that financial resolutions are prominent, with saving more money (45%) and reducing debt (32%) ranking among the top three goals.

Unfortunately, most resolutions don't last. A 2023 Forbes Health poll found that over half of people give up on resolutions by the four-month mark and only 1% make it the full year.

The challenge isn't a lack of desire for change. People may set the same resolution year after year, revealing a disconnect between intentions and action. Or it may be that they try to tackle too many goals at once, or aim higher than is realistic, setting themselves up for disappointment.

Set smart financial goals. Before crafting your action plan, consider which financial priorities matter most to you. If you need ideas, here are some areas where you may want focus in 2026:

• Regularly review your financial goals and track progress toward meeting them

• Increase your 401(k) contributions or max out your IRA and/or HSA contributions

• Pay down debt strategically and negotiate lower interest payments

• Build an emergency savings fund of six to 12 months

• Save more consistently

Be specific. Vague resolutions like "save more money" rarely succeed. Instead, it can help to make goals specific and measurable. For example, rather than making a resolution to "start an emergency fund," commit to a specific goal, such as, "I will put $100 a month into an emergency fund."

This shift from general to specific transforms wishful thinking into actionable steps. When goals are attainable, it's easier to track progress and stay motivated.

Find an accountability partner. Don't go it alone. Having someone to check in with can help you stay on track. This could be a spouse, friend or family member who shares similar goals.

Consider working with a financial advisor who can help you create a realistic plan, monitor your progress and adjust strategies as needed. A professional can provide expertise and accountability, making it easier to stay on track throughout the year.

Start small and build momentum. Rather than overhauling your entire financial life all at once, focus on one or two priority areas. Identify where the largest gap exists between your current situation and where you want to be, then concentrate your energy there.

Breaking larger goals into smaller, manageable actions makes them less overwhelming and more achievable. Each small win builds confidence and momentum for tackling the next challenge.

The new year offers a fresh start and renewed motivation to improve your financial health. With specific goals, a solid action plan and the right support system, this could be the year your financial resolutions finally stick.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor.
Edward Jones, Member SIPC



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www.edwardjones.com/adam-benabram

CANDIDATES SOUGHT FOR HONORARY MAYOR'S RACE OF EAST HILLSBOROUGH

Staff Report



Last year's Honorary Mayor's Race participants Michael Brand of 55 Rides and Abi Merkle of AM Design & Services are pictured during the Chamber-supported event. The pair raised more than $121,000 for local charities, with Brand earning the honorary mayor title after raising $64,000.

Applications Coming Soon for 4th Annual Honorary Mayor's Race of East Hillsborough

The Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce is excited to announce that applications will soon be accepted for the 4th Annual Honorary Mayor's Race of East Hillsborough.

From Monday, June 1 through Tuesday, June 30, selected community members will campaign to raise money for local charities. The person who raises the most money will earn the fun and meaningful title of Honorary Mayor of East Hillsborough for one year.

East Hillsborough County does not have an elected mayor because it is an unincorporated area. This special race gives the community an "honorary mayor" while also raising important funds for charities that help local families, schools, and organizations.

The Honorary Mayor's Race, supported by the Valrico/FishHawk Chamber of Commerce (VFCC), is nonpolitical and focused on giving back. Candidates raise money for a charity or nonprofit they choose by hosting events, reaching out to neighbors, and working together with the community. The goal is simple: have fun while helping others.

Anyone with a heart for the community is encouraged to apply. Applications will be available starting March 1 and are due by March 28. Charities can include school booster clubs, new nonprofits that need more attention, or well-known local organizations. Both the candidate and the charity must live in, work in, or support the East Hillsborough County area.

Last year's race was a huge success. Participants Michael Brand of 55 Rides and Abi Merkle of AM Design & Services raised more than $121,000 for local charities. Brand earned the honorary mayor title after raising $64,000. Fundraisers included bingo nights, a clay shoot, bourbon tasting, concerts, sports events, auctions, and even a Second Chance Prom.

Merkle shared, "I'm so proud of what we were able to accomplish together as a community."

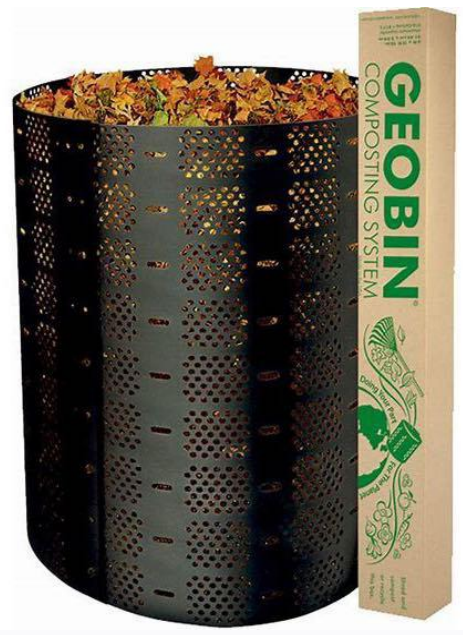
To learn more or apply to run for the race, visit the chamber website at www.valricofishhawk.org.



GET THE DIRT:

2026 TRIPLE WORKSHOPS: COMPOST, MICROIRRIGATION AND RAINWATER HARVESTING

BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT



If you have not previously attended these workshops at the Hillsborough County Extension Service, we hope you will. Make plans to register and spend the first Saturday morning, February through November, by attending our composting, microirrigation and rainwater harvesting workshops at our office in Seffner. Hillsborough County residents can attend one time only and receive one set of items per household. Preregistration is required.

Compost Happens: Learn how to turn trash into treasure. This workshop teaches attendees to recycle kitchen and yard waste while creating a rich soil amendment. Compost adds nutrients to the soil and retains moisture in the root zone, where it can be used by plants. Instead of hauling your yard waste to the curb, compost it on-site. By attending, you will receive a compost bin, bucket and thermometer.

Microirrigation: This teaches you how to have a healthy and attractive landscape while conserving water. Tips on installing and using microirrigation are presented. By attending, you will receive a microirrigation kit. Check our website for two other micro workshops: patio and vegetable.

Rainwater Harvesting: Receive a drilled and spigoted 50 to 55-gallon plastic, food-grade barrel. We will teach you how and where to install your barrel. Collecting rainwater for ornamental plant irrigation reduces erosion and stormwater runoff. Barrels are stored outside, so you may want to bring a blanket to put under the barrel.

By attending one, two or all three workshops, you will expand your environmental conservation education and have fun while learning something new. The cost to attend is $10 per household, per workshop. For additional information and to register, go to the Hillsborough County Extension Calendar of Events at https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/events/?location=hillsborough. Some rules apply, and they are listed on our website.

For more gardening information, please contact our office at 813-744-5519 or visit us at 5339 County Rd. 579 in Seffner, where you can walk through the Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden and see Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ in action. Hope to see you soon.

Contact at Lynn Barber, extension agent, at labarber@ufl.edu.

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Prime Rib* $26.95 5PM-10PM
Live Music On Patio! 7PM-11PM
Karaoke Inside! 9PM-1AM HOSTED BY: "KJ Johnny Q"

SATURDAY Live Entertainment! 7PM-11PM
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Bottomless Mimosa & Sangria 11AM-3PM $20
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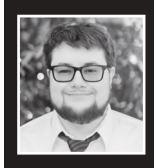
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PATTICAKES FEATURED AT GOVERNOR'S LUNCHEON

By Logan Walz

PattiCakes Custom Cakes LLC has been selected to provide desserts for this year's Governor's Luncheon, held on opening day at the Florida State Fairgrounds. The opportunity marks a significant milestone for the locally owned business, which has grown steadily through word of mouth and custom orders over the past several years.



PattiCakes owner Patti Burnett.

Owner Patti Burnett said being chosen for the event was both exciting and meaningful.

"I was so honored to be asked," Burnett said. "I think it's a huge opportunity, and the visibility of having my brand featured for these honored guests will be priceless for the future growth of my business."



The opportunity came after an event coordinator with the Florida State Fair noticed one of Burnett's previous dessert table displays. After seeing her work, the coordinator reached out to ask if Burnett could create something similar on a much larger scale.

"There was a dessert table display that I had done for another client, which the event coordinator for the Florida State Fair happened to see," Burnett said. "She asked me if I could accomplish something like that on a much larger scale. I was shocked and honored by the request, but I know I can rise to the occasion."

To prepare for the high-profile luncheon, Burnett said she has been carefully planning and organizing to ensure everything runs smoothly.

"I have extra hands on deck, and I'm doing lots of strategic preparation and organizing to make sure everything is fresh and ready to go," she said.

Guests at the Governor's Luncheon can expect a large-scale dessert display featuring a variety of PattiCakes' specialty items.

"I will be doing a large-scale variety dessert table featuring an assortment of my specialty desserts," Burnett said.

PattiCakes Custom Cakes began as a small operation while Burnett stayed home with her children after leaving her teaching career. Over time, the business grew organically through consistent quality and customer satisfaction.

"When I left teaching to stay home with my children, my business began as me simply baking for friends and family," Burnett said. "PattiCakes has grown organically over the last seven to eight years through word of mouth, one satisfied customer at a time."

"I hope this accomplishment encourages readers to keep me in mind for their own events, no matter how big or small," she said.

Call 352-942-3455 or visit directly www.facebook.com/patticakescustomcake/ or email patticakescustomcakes@gmail.com.

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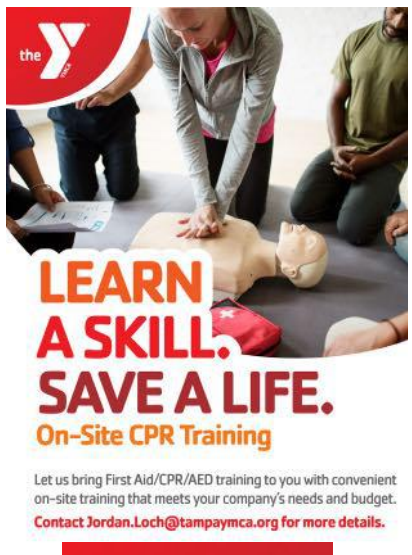
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CAMPO YMCA OFFERS SWIMMING, CAMPS, SPORTS AND AMENITIES

By Olivia Clark



The Campo Family YMCA, located at 3414 Culbreath Rd. in Valrico, has served as a gathering place for families in Valrico, Bloomingdale and surrounding communities for more than two decades. Established to meet the area's growing need for youth development and family wellness programs, the nonprofit facility continues to evolve alongside the community it serves

Named in honor of the Campo family, longtime supporters of the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA, the Campo Family YMCA reflects a commitment to strengthening families through accessible programs and inclusive spaces.

"Campo Family YMCA just celebrated more than twenty years in the greater Valrico community," said Robyn Ostrem, executive director, Campo Family YMCA. "Campo Family YMCA has become stronger because of our community."

The YMCA offers a wide range of amenities, including a fitness center, gymnasium, weight room, group exercise studios and multipurpose spaces. Aquatics programming remains a major focus, with two swimming pools, a splash pad and water slides that are especially popular during warmer months. Swim lessons are available for all ages, beginning at six months through adulthood, and the pools are used throughout the day for lap swim, open swim and instruction.

"The Florida summer is hot," said Mario Gallegos, executive director, Campo Family YMCA. "In the summer, our aquatic center gets heavy use because of the heat. It is a great place to hang out with the family, hang out with friends and cool off while enjoying the Florida sunshine."

Youth and family programming continues to be a cornerstone of the Campo Family YMCA. Summer camps, Kids' Day Out programs and youth sports such as basketball, soccer and volleyball provide opportunities for children to stay active while building confidence and social skills.

"More than four thousand five hundred kids participated in experiences that cultivated values, skills and relationships that led to positive behaviors, better health and educational achievement," Ostrem said.

Childcare options, including the Youth Zone and Stay and Play, allow parents to participate in fitness activities while children enjoy supervised programs. Adult members also benefit from group exercise classes and sports leagues such as basketball and volleyball that promote connection and healthy competition.

As part of the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA network, the Campo Family YMCA provides access to association-wide programs and services. Financial assistance and scholarships ensure that individuals and families can participate regardless of income.

HONOR FLIGHT MISSION 11 OPENS REGISTRATION FOR MAY 2026 VETERAN JOURNEY

Staff Report



Planning is underway for Flight to Honor Polk Mission 11, and organizers are encouraging veterans and community members to apply now for the upcoming one-day trip to Washington, D.C., scheduled for Tuesday, May 5.

The Honor Flight-style mission will depart from and return to Lakeland Linder International Airport, offering participating veterans a meaningful opportunity to visit the national memorials built in recognition of their service. A mandatory orientation for selected participants will be held on Sunday, May 3.

Established in 2015, Flight to Honor Polk is based in Polk County but welcomes eligible veterans from any community to apply. All veterans who have not previously participated in an Honor Flight or Flight to Honor mission are eligible. Priority is given to veterans with severe medical conditions, followed by those who served during World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, though veterans from all eras are encouraged to apply.

Veterans selected for Mission 11 will fly free of charge, thanks to community donations and volunteer support. Each veteran is paired with a trained guardian, who provides physical assistance and ensures a safe and memorable experience throughout the day, from airport travel to visits at the memorials.

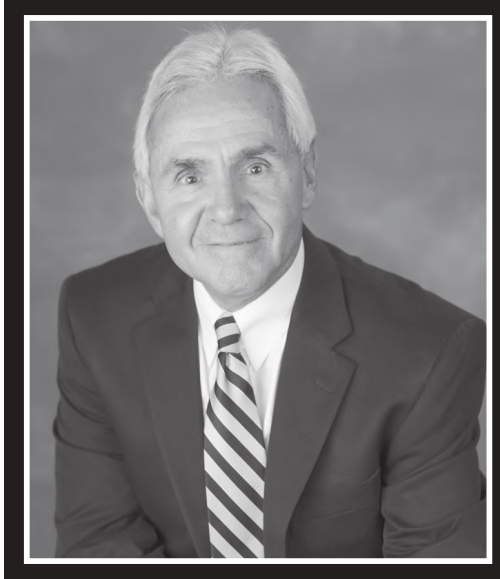
Guardians wishing to accompany a veteran are also invited to apply. Guardians must be between 18-70 years of age and may not be a spouse or significant other of the veteran. Those selected are asked to make a $500 donation to help offset the cost of airfare and related expenses. Guardians play a vital role in the success of each mission, assisting veterans during travel and throughout the day in Washington.

Applications for both veterans and guardians are accepted on a rolling basis and can be downloaded at https://polkveteranscouncil.com/. Completed applications should be mailed to Flight to Honor, P.O. Box 3911, Lakeland, FL 33802.

Fundraising is currently underway to support Mission 11, and organizers stress that community involvement is essential. Tax-deductible contributions can be made through the GiveWell Community Foundation to support Flight to Honor Polk.

Flight to Honor Polk's mission is to promote national security and a strong national defense by honoring veterans, fostering community connections and building goodwill. Visit the website at https://polkveteranscouncil.com/ or email flighttohonorpolk@gmail.com.

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REMEMBERING WANDA WESTBROOK, LAST SURVIVING CHILD OF THE SIMMONS FAMILY THAT HELPED SHAPE RIVERVIEW

By Brian Bokor

Wanda Ruth Simmons Westbrook passed away the month before Christmas, at the age of 95. With her passing, Riverview lost one of its last living connections to the families who shaped the community long before paved roads, interstate highways and large-scale development.

Wanda Westbrook was the last surviving child of Herman G. Simmons and Mildred Long Simmons. She grew up in a Riverview of dirt roads, open land and working farms and lived to see it become the community it is today.

The Simmons family's roots in South Hillsborough County trace back to the 1800s. Descended from Marshall V. Simmons, the family first settled in Bloomingdale and Parrish before establishing permanent roots in Riverview. Over time, Simmons family land stretched along Big Bend Road west of U.S. 301 toward Bullfrog Creek.

Herman Simmons built a home along what became known as Simmons Loop Road, land that decades later would be redeveloped into the site of St. Joseph's Hospital South. During Wanda Westbrook's childhood, Big Bend Road was unpaved, homes were widely spaced, and life centered on farming, church, and family.

After Herman Simmons married Mildred Simmons, who moved to Florida from Tennessee, the couple operated a dairy farm on roughly 60 acres along Simmons Loop. Mildred Simmons later managed the dairy on her own while raising the children, overseeing the daily milking of about 65 cows.

Because of the dairy operation, the Simmons property received electricity earlier than much of South County, where widespread service did not arrive until the early 1930s. Milk was hauled in 10-gallon stainless steel containers to a Tampa dairy cooperative later absorbed by Sealtest. In later years, milk was also delivered directly to nearby homes.



A member of one of the founding families of Riverview, Wanda Ruth Simmons Westrook, 95, passed in November 2025.

Early Riverview life was simple and close-knit. Shopping was mostly local, with occasional trips into Tampa and Ybor City. Bullfrog Creek once ran clear and wide enough for swimming, easily accessible from Simmons family land. Wanda Westbrook also remembered severe storms, including a powerful hurricane in the mid-1930s that flooded the area and uprooted large oak trees.

By the time she reached adulthood, Riverview was already beginning its slow shift away from its agricultural roots.

Wanda Westbrook attended Wimauma High School, back then the only high school serving South Hillsborough County. After graduation, she worked at Margaret Ann's Grocery — later known as Quik Check and Winn-Dixie — where she met her future husband, Charles Westbrook.

Charles Westbrook served in the U.S. Navy, and the couple spent nearly two decades stationed away from Florida, primarily along the East Coast. After his military service, they returned to Riverview, where Herman Simmons provided each of his children with a parcel of land along Simmons Loop.



Photo courtesy of Simmons family

The Wimauma High School graduating class of 1948.

Wanda and Charles Westbrook built their home on one of those parcels, land that today sits directly across from the hospital complex that now dominates the area. Married for 40 years, they raised four children together before Charles Westbrook passed away at age 62 from cancer.

Faith and family remained central throughout Wanda Westbrook's life. She was a longtime member of Simmons Loop Baptist Church, which served as a gathering place for generations of the Simmons family.

Earlier family reunions were held on the Simmons ranch and along Bullfrog Creek, drawing hundreds of relatives. Over time, changes in water flow, particularly following the construction of Interstate 75, altered the creek's condition. When the ranch was no longer available, reunions continued at the church. In later years, those gatherings became harder to maintain due to age and illness, quietly marking the close of another chapter in the family's long presence along Simmons Loop.

For more than four decades, Wanda Westbrook also worked as an Avon representative, becoming a familiar and trusted presence in Riverview neighborhoods. She was remembered for her kindness, steadiness and generosity toward those she encountered.

Today, little physical evidence remains of the Simmons family dairy farm or the open land that once lined Simmons Loop Road. In its place stand hospitals, rehabilitation facilities and medical offices, symbols of Riverview's growth.

Yet the family's legacy endures in the geography itself. Simmons Loop Road is traveled daily by thousands who may never realize it bears the name of a real family whose land, labor and lives helped shape the community.

With the passing of Wanda Westbrook, Riverview lost more than a longtime resident. It lost a living bridge to its earliest days, a reminder that beneath today's development lies a history built by families whose stories still matter and deserve to be remembered.

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TROOP 610'S MULCH SALE RETURNS, HELPING SCOUTS EARN WAY TO CAMP

Staff Report



Scouts BSA Troop 610 members load and deliver mulch as part of their annual fundraiser, helping earn funds for summer camp and troop activities.

Mulch season has officially arrived, and Scouts BSA Troop 610 is once again rolling up its sleeves to support its annual mulch fundraiser — an effort that helps fund summer camp, purchase equipment and support year-round Scouting activities.



The popular fundraiser, now live, has become a cornerstone for the Lithia-based troop, allowing Scouts to earn their way to camp while providing a convenient service for local residents. Each year, community members can order mulch and have it delivered directly to their homes, saving time, gas and heavy lifting.

Scout mom Caitlin Nguyen, who has been part of Troop 610 for seven years, said the fundraiser plays a major role in making Scouting opportunities accessible for families.

"The troop usually profits around $15,000 to $20,000 from this fundraiser," Nguyen said. "Last year, it paid about 80 percent of the cost for our troop to go to summer camp way up in North Carolina."

Mulch deliveries are scheduled for Saturday, March 7, to Apollo Beach, Brandon, Riverview and Valrico. Deliveries to Lithia (ZIP code: 33547) will take place on Saturday, March 14, weather permitting.

Orders must be received by Friday, February 20.

Residents can place orders online using a credit card by visiting https://tinyurl.com/troop610mulch.

Those ordering by mail should include their name, address, phone number, email address and gate code, if applicable.

Troop leaders said the fundraiser not only supports Scouting adventures like summer camp but also teaches Scouts responsibility, teamwork and the value of hard work.

For questions or additional information, contact Mike Nguyen by calling or texting 850-867-6032 or email troop610mulch@gmail.com.

Community support helps ensure Troop 610 continues providing meaningful outdoor and leadership experiences for local youth — one bag of mulch at a time.

TAMPA BAY PARTNERSHIP RELEASES FIRST TRI-COUNTY 'HOUSING REPORT TO ADDRESS AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

Staff Report



Recently, the Tampa Bay Partnership released 'The Housing Equation' report, the region's first comprehensive analysis of housing supply, demand and affordability across Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties.

Made possible with support from JPMorganChase and backed by independent research, this report delivers data-driven, actionable insights that empower investors, businesses, policymakers, developers, nonprofits and the public to better understand the tri-county housing gap, enabling them to shape meaningful solutions.

Tampa Bay is projected to add 564,000 residents and 211,000 households by 2035, a surge that will reshape housing needs. Yet, recent production hasn't kept pace. The research shows that between 2018-23, the region added nearly 100,000 households but built only 82,000 units, fueling rising costs and widening affordability gaps.

"Housing affordability affects every resident and employer in our region, making it one of the most urgent challenges we face together," said Bemetra Simmons, president and CEO of the Tampa Bay Partnership.

Key findings from The Housing Equation include: • Existing gap: The region does not have enough homes priced affordably for households earning 80 percent of the area median income (about $69,500 for a family of four) with an estimated shortage of 80,650 units.

• Future demand: By 2035, the region needs to add approximately 254,700 new housing units, an average of 21,225 units per year, to keep pace with projected growth. That includes 10,685 single-family units and 10,540 multifamily units annually.

• Cost burden: A third of all households — over 408,000 families — spend more than 30 percent of income on housing; 52 percent of renters are cost-burdened, and 24 percent of homeowners.

• Rising rents: Median rent surged 48 percent in five years, while wages rose only 29 percent.

• Funding leverage: If addressed, $273M in gap funding can unlock $663M in additional funding and create $1B in economic impact for Tampa Bay.

"The Housing Equation breaks down what's needed by county, income level and housing type, then points to proven strategies like zoning updates, creative financing and advocacy that can drive long-term economic growth," Simmons added. "Now that we have a clear understanding of how many units we need, we can create a comprehensive Regional Action Plan to meet that goal."

Read the full report at www.tampabay.org/housingequation/.

For more information, please contact: Jessica Vega-Eugene JessicaV@ConsultVistra.com, 813.263.0792

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GTE FINANCIAL'S FAMILY MOTOR FEST DRAWS 8,000 IN RECORD YEAR

By Brian Bokor



The Motor Enclave Founder/CEO Brad Oleshansky (L) with Isaac Baker - Finishing Touch Auto Spa

GTE Financial's nationally recognized Family Motor Fest returned for its third and largest year yet, drawing an estimated 8,000 attendees and showcasing more than 2,500 vehicles at The Motor Enclave on November 22, 2025. The event marked the first time the popular festival was hosted at the motorsports destination and was free and open to the community.

Family Motor Fest has become one of GTE Financial's signature community events, combining a love of cars with a mission to support education. The festival serves as the credit union's largest annual fundraiser benefiting the GTE Scholarship Program, which has awarded more than $1 million to local students over the past 12 years. The scholarship supports students who demonstrate academic achievement, leadership and a strong commitment to community involvement.

"Receiving the GTE Financial Scholarship changed everything for me," said Lleyton Dayes, a University of Florida student and scholarship recipient. "It helped relieve the financial stress of college and showed me that my community believes in my potential. Events like Family Motor Fest make those opportunities possible for students like me."

This year's expanded venue allowed for a broader range of attractions and experiences. Guests lined up throughout the day for autocross thrill rides, where professional drivers delivered high-speed precision laps in performance vehicles. The Enclave Race Lab Challenge, a racing simulator competition, drew enthusiastic participation as attendees competed for the fastest lap. Professional-driven, off-road thrill rides also gave visitors a chance to experience dirt, rocks and steep terrain on The Motor Enclave's exclusive off-road course.

"Family Motor Fest continues to be one of our most exciting traditions," said Brian Best, president and CEO of GTE Financial. "It's a celebration of cars, community and education."

Event organizers said the festival's continued growth reflects both community support and its expanding educational mission.

While the event was free to attend, the GTE Scholarship Program is sustained through the generous support of corporate sponsorships and private donations. Additional funding is generated through on-site vendor partnerships.

For more information, visit the website at, visit https://themotorenclave.com/.

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS TRAINING EMPHASIZES PREVENTION AND VIGILANCE

By Olivia Clark

Human trafficking often looks different than what is portrayed in movies or on social media, according to advocates from the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, who recently led a community awareness training focused on prevention and education.

Stephanie Barona, human trafficking care coordinator at the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, explained that trafficking involves one person exerting control over another through "force, fraud or coercion" for the purpose of exploitation. She emphasized that this control is not always obvious and can take many forms.

"Human trafficking is basically when one person exercises control over another person," Barona said. "This person cannot simply walk away."

Barona noted that trafficking can involve labor or sexual exploitation but stressed that community members do not need to be experts to help prevent it. Awareness of common warning signs is often the first step.

Shayla Gonzalez, sexual assault services and mental health ambassador at the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, encouraged residents to rethink common assumptions about what trafficking looks like.

"There is no perfect picture of what this crime looks like," Gonzalez said. "A lot of times we think of a white van scenario, but in actuality, this is something that is happening within our own city limits."

According to Gonzalez and Barona, potential indicators may include individuals who appear fearful or unable to speak for themselves, lack access to personal identification, have limited control over money or transportation or are closely monitored by another person. While these signs do not always indicate trafficking, advocates said they are worth noting.

Gonzalez explained that traffickers often rely on manipulation rather than physical force.

"They are master manipulators," she said, adding that traffickers may take advantage of trust, emotional connections or financial dependence to maintain control.

The training emphasized that community members should never attempt to intervene directly. Instead, attendees were encouraged to trust their instincts, document their concerns and report suspicious situations to the appropriate authorities.

"If you feel like something is going on, it's better to report it," Barona said. "It's better to say something and it be nothing than to say nothing and it be something."

Both speakers stressed that education plays a key role in prevention and that awareness should extend beyond Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

Residents seeking information, support or referrals can contact the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay's 24-hour helpline by dialing 211.

KAPPA DELTA PHI WELCOMES NEW VALRICO CHAPTER, KAPPA UPSILON

Staff Report



Members of Kappa Delta Phi's newly chartered Kappa Upsilon chapter gather during their installation ceremony held at the home of Lily Barney, PNP.

Kappa Delta Phi Sorority, Inc. has officially welcomed a new chapter to the Valrico community with the chartering of Kappa Upsilon, a social and civic sisterhood dedicated to service, friendship and community involvement.

The chartering and installation of officers for Kappa Upsilon took place on January 10, 2026, at the home of Lily Barney, PNP. The celebration continued with a dinner social hosted at the home of Terry Montefusco, marking the beginning of the chapter's presence in the area.

The installation ceremony was conducted by Cindy Broeker, PNP, of the Counseling Chapter Gamma Alpha Nu in Huntingburg, Indiana. Nancy Wimble, Gulf Coast Regional Director, served as Mistress of Ceremonies for the event.

The newly installed officers of Kappa Upsilon include:

Amy Carey Lee, Chairman of the Board
Geraldine Clark, President
Katie Lambert, Vice President
Terry Montefusco, Treasurer
Nancy Kelley, Secretary
Claudia Yake, Guard
Colleen Barney, Monitor

Additional charter members in attendance included Lily Barney, PNP; Flora Temoin; Aurea Vasquez; and Colleen Wimble.

Kappa Upsilon has already begun making an impact in the community. The chapter kicked off the year by donating more than 26 bags and numerous garment boxes to AMVETS, supporting local veterans in need.

Looking ahead, the chapter has scheduled its first fundraising event to benefit the community. Music Bingo will be held on Friday, March 6, at Bullfrog Creek Brewing Company, located at 3632 Lithia Pinecrest Road in Valrico. Community members are invited to attend and support the cause while enjoying an evening of music and fun.

Kappa Delta Phi currently has two chapters serving the local area—Kappa Upsilon and Kappa Kappa—providing opportunities for women interested in civic engagement, community service and forming lasting friendships.

Women interested in learning more about Kappa Delta Phi, Kappa Upsilon, or membership opportunities may contact Katie Lambert, Vice President, by email at katiew.lambert@hotmail.com

Congratulations are extended to the members of Kappa Upsilon as they begin their journey of service and sisterhood in Valrico.



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MIC DROP TAMPA BUILDS CONFIDENCE, COMMUNITY FOR WOMEN IN BRANDON

Staff Report



Tampa's Mic Drop Club will host its next speaker session on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Bin & Board in Brandon.

A growing women-led speaker series is bringing confidence, connection and powerful storytelling to Brandon this February as Mic Drop Tampa hosts its next community event.

Mic Drop Club Tampa will hold a speaker session on Tuesday, February 17, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at bin + board, located at 807 W. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon. The event is open to women interested in public speaking, leadership development and personal growth, with RSVP required.

Mic Drop is part of a national organization that creates supportive spaces for women to practice public speaking, share ideas and amplify their voices. With the launch of its Tampa Bay chapter at the end of 2025, the organization has quickly gained momentum locally, attracting professionals, creatives and community leaders from across the region.

The Tampa chapter is hosted by Caitlin Gardner, a Brandon-area entrepreneur, professional speaker and owner of Blooming Communications. Gardner brings more than two decades of corporate experience to the role and said the mission of Mic Drop resonates deeply with women in Tampa Bay.

"After two decades in corporate America, I've seen firsthand how many women have incredible stories and expertise but hesitate to claim the mic," Gardner said. "The Mic Drop Club gives us a place to practice, connect and grow the confidence to share those stories boldly. Tampa is filled with powerhouse women who deserve to be heard — and this community is where that courage begins."

Mic Drop Club Tampa is part of Mic Drop Workshop, a global organization founded to help women become thought leaders through public speaking. With chapters in cities around the world, Mic Drop Club is redefining who is seen and heard on stages, in boardrooms and in leadership roles.

Each Mic Drop Tampa session is designed to be interactive and supportive. Attendees participate in speaking prompts, receive structured feedback and engage in personal growth exercises that build confidence both professionally and personally. The events foster a welcoming environment where women can practice speaking skills without judgment and build meaningful connections.

For women seeking confidence, community and a place to use their voice boldly, Mic Drop Tampa offers an opportunity to step into the spotlight.

For more information, contact Gardner and visit www.bloomingcomm.com

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: 2026 NEIGHBORHOODS EXPO BRINGS COUNTY SERVICES TO RESIDENTS

Staff Report



Hillsborough County's neighborhoods are as diverse as the nearly 1.5 million people who call them home, stretching across 1,266 square miles from the rocky shores of Old Tampa Bay to the coastal prairie of the county's southern edge. On Saturday, February 28, residents from every corner of the county are invited to come together to celebrate that diversity at the 2026 annual Neighborhoods Expo.

Hosted by Hillsborough County Neighborhood Relations, the free event will take place from 9 a.m.-12 Noon at Feeding Tampa Bay's new facility, located at 3624 Causeway Blvd. in Tampa. Doors open at 9 a.m., with a welcome from the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners scheduled for 9:30 a.m.

Now in its 21st year, the Neighborhoods Expo has become a beloved civic tradition, offering residents a unique opportunity to connect directly with the county departments and agencies that help their communities thrive. This year's theme, 'Love Our Neighborhoods,' reflects a renewed focus on building strong relationships between residents and local government.

"This event is really about connection," said Stephanie Agliano, who directs the county's engagement efforts with residents. "We want people to feel comfortable asking questions, learning what resources are available, and understanding how county services support safe, healthy and engaged neighborhoods."

Throughout the morning, attendees can meet face-to-face with representatives from county departments ranging from public safety and code enforcement to permitting and neighborhood services. While the expo is not intended for conducting official business, staff will be on hand to provide guidance, answer questions and point residents in the right direction for follow-up assistance.

The event is designed for longtime neighborhood leaders and first-time attendees alike. Participants can expect informative conversations, hands-on learning and a welcoming atmosphere — along with a few giveaways to take home.

Registration is recommended to help organizers better understand the interests of attendees, but walk-ins are welcome. County officials encourage residents to spread the word and bring neighbors along.

For Hillsborough County, the Neighborhoods Expo is more than an event — it's a reminder that strong neighborhoods are built through shared knowledge, open communication and community pride. Residents interested in attending can register online and learn more at https://hcfl.gov/.



LICENSED ACUPUNCTURE PHYSICIAN OFFERS NATURAL RELIEF BEYOND PAIN

By Denise Sansosti

After six years of practicing acupuncture in Sarasota, Dr. Ashley Carlson has expanded her practice with the opening of a new office in Brandon, bringing her work closer to home.



Dr. Ashley Carlson now offers private one-to-one treatment and consultations in her Brandon office.

A licensed acupuncture physician and doctor of oriental medicine in the state of Florida, Dr. Carlson is also certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. Her path to medicine began at the University of South Florida, where she earned a bachelor's degree in biomedical science. While originally planning a career in pharmacy, her own health challenges shifted her direction.

"I was getting five to 10 migraines a month," Dr. Carlson shared. "I tried pharmaceuticals and injections, but I experienced strange side effects, and nothing really worked."

Seeking a more natural approach, acupuncture relieved her migraines and gave her a new calling. Dr. Carlson attended East West College of Natural Medicine, earning a bachelor's degree in health science and a master's degree in oriental medicine. She is currently completing her doctoral program with a focus on reproductive health, orthopedics and cancer care.

While pain relief is the most common reason patients seek acupuncture, Dr. Carlson emphasizes that its benefits extend far beyond that.

"Most people don't think about acupuncture for chronic conditions like insomnia, anxiety or digestive issues," she explained. "Many people are in so much pain they can't sleep, or their minds just won't shut off. Acupuncture helps balance the system so the body can rest and reset."

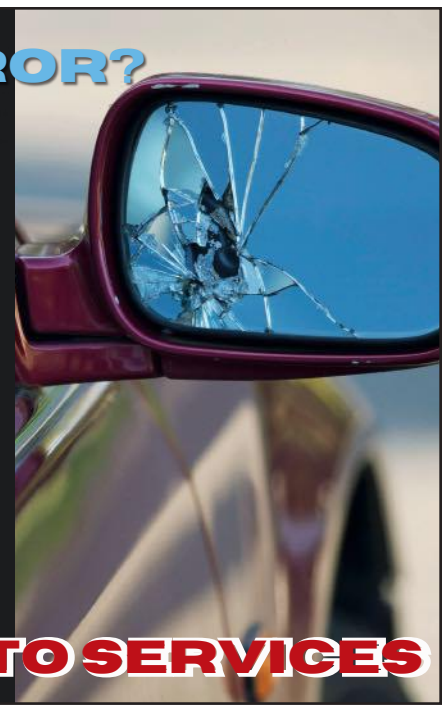
Becoming licensed in Florida requires four board certifications and extensive training. "We have to complete Western medicine boards, and we also have the Chinese herbal board," Dr. Carlson noted. "We still go through all of the anatomy and physiology classes required in Western medicine, plus we study Western and Eastern nutrition."

What she values most is seeing real change in her patients.

"Helping people regain quality of life is the most rewarding part," she said. "Watching someone recover mobility after a stroke or improve their speech through acupuncture is incredible. This medicine is minimally invasive and has virtually no side effects."

If you have a fear of needles, she also provides other traditional Chinese medicines, such as acupressure, cupping, moxibustion, tui na and Chinese herbs. To schedule an appointment, visit https://floatingspringsacu.com/ or call 813-535-0693.

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5704 TPC BLVD

5728 WATERCOLOR DR

5732 STOCKPORT ST

5745 SKYTOP DR

5803 TANAGERSIDE RD

5823 AUDUBON MANOR BLVD

5903 CHERT HILL LN

5909 SANDHILL RIDGE DR

6003 TEALSIDE CT

6727 SIMMONS LOOP

7136 COLONY POINTE DR

7628 INTREPID RD

7885 BRISTOL PARK DR

8337 LAGERFELD DR

8417 MOULTON DR

8611 PARKWAY CIR

9511 LAUREL LEDGE DR

9827 SORBONNE LOOP

10333 SUMMER AZURE DR

10414 WICKER PARK PL

10425 HALLMARK BLVD

10577 CALLUNA DR

10813 DIXON DR

10929 BROOKSNEST CT

10943 VERAWOOD DR

11025 WINTER CREST DR

11110 SWANSEA ST

11512 RAULERSON RD

11521 LAKE LUCAYA DR

11524 RIVER COUNTRY DR

11531 CAMBIUM CROWN DR

11567 WESTON COURSE LOOP

11813 MILE MARSH DR

11882 FROST ASTER DR

11931 SAND MYRTLE RD

12004 CINNAMON FERN DR

13903 NATURES RESERVE DR

14015 KINGFISHER GLEN DR

14153 HOLINESS CHURCH RD

14208 CREEK RUN DR

14834 PADDOCK POND AVE

15063 RIDER PASS DR

15305 FISHHAWK PRESERVE DR

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2626 BERRYFIELD PL


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2707 N WOODROW AVE #2


2727 COLEWOOD LN


2821 HOLLY BLUFF CT


2829 52ND AVE S


3107 RED LION DR


3115 BENT CREEK DR


3125 S MILLER RD


3146 BEAVER POND TRL

3203 BEAVER POND TRL

3212 JOHN MOORE RD

3218 STONEBRIDGE TRL

3280 MANGROVE POINT DR

3301 RIVER WOODS DR

3809 BARBARA LEE CV

3817 COLD CREEK DR

3914 TURKEY OAK DR

3934 CEDAR CAY CIR

4002 W BAY TO BAY BLVD

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5318 CANDLER VIEW DR

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5407 TWIN CREEKS DR

5411 STARLING RIDGE DR

5608 FREESTONE CIR

6007 BURROWING OWL PL

6011 HAMMOCK HILL AVE

6021 FLATWOODS MANOR CIR

6030 SANDHILL RIDGE DR

6112 IBISPARK DR

6115 SHADOWLAKE DR

6120 WATERCOLOR DR

6359 JOURNEY WAY

6644 PAR CT

9931 BAY DR

10015 REMINGTON DR

10108 GOLDEN WONDER LN

10130 PADDOCK OAKS DR

10208 POPS CT

10212 HOLLAND RD

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10282 KEY DEER WAY

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11143 WINTHROP LAKE DR

11162 SPRING POINT CIR

11205 LARK LANDING CT

11229 HAWKS FERN DR

11308 GREAT NECK RD

11309 GRAND PARK AVE

11350 HAWKS FERN DR

11457 CAMBRAY CREEK LOOP

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12402 CREEK EDGE DR

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13121 EARLY RUN LN

13146 HOMESTEAD LN

13163 PASTURE VIEW LOOP

13621 CIRCA CROSSING DR

15625 HAWKS CREST LOOP

15740 STARLING WATER DR

15810 STARLING WATER DR

15817 SORAWATER DR

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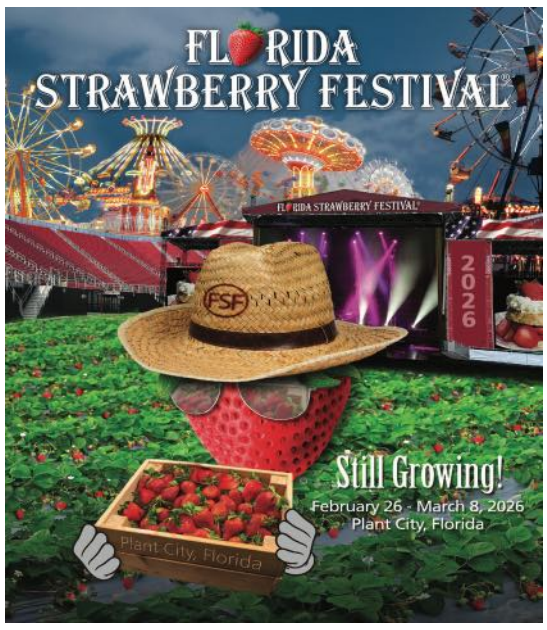
QUEEN AND COURT SELECTED FOR 91ST FLORIDA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

Staff Report





Layla Rothman was crowned queen of the 91st Annual Florida Strawberry Festival Queen's Scholarship Pageant. She is joined by First Maid Marley Mueller and court members Cadence Cape, Addison Griffin, and Addison Pope.



Layla Rothman was crowned queen of the 91st annual Florida Strawberry Festival Queen's Scholarship Pageant, held on the evening of January 17 on the festival grounds. Layla Rothman was selected from a competitive field of 32 contestants. Marley Mueller was named first maid, with court members Cadence Cape, Addison Griffin, and Addison Pope rounding out the royal court.

Brooke Browning was named Miss Congeniality, an honor voted on by fellow contestants and awarded to the participant who best exemplifies kindness, sportsmanship and camaraderie throughout the competition. Browning is a junior at Strawberry Crest High School.

"Words cannot describe how incredibly blessed I am to have this opportunity to serve a community that has been nothing but gracious to me my entire life," said Layla Rothman. "I have dreamed of being able to represent the Florida Strawberry Festival and make every single person who walks into those festival gates feel seen and cared for. God has been with me throughout this entire journey, and I pray He will continue to shine through me. Thank you so much, everyone, for the unwavering support — I couldn't be more excited for BerryFest26!"

Layla Rothman is the daughter of Mark and Rebecca Rothman and a senior at Plant City High School. Among her awards and accolades, she is dual enrolled at Hillsborough Community College, ranked in the top 7 percent of her class and is a member of the National Honor Society.

The Florida Strawberry Festival Queen's Scholarship Pageant is sponsored by the Plant City Lions Club. The competition includes five components: a personal interview, on-stage speaking, casual wear, evening wear and an impromptu question.

"The Queen's Pageant remains one of the most meaningful traditions of the Florida Strawberry Festival, and this year's contestants set a remarkable standard," said Florida Strawberry Festival President Kyle Robinson. "Each young lady displayed impressive talent, confidence and poise, making the selection process especially difficult. We are honored to welcome our new queen and court and are confident these five young ladies will represent the festival with pride and professionalism throughout their year of service."

Throughout the year, the queen and her court will make more than 80 appearances, representing the Florida Strawberry Festival and the Plant City community at various local and regional events. The festival serves as their home base, where they will meet visitors and participate in a variety of activities during the 11-day celebration.

The 91st annual Florida Strawberry Festival will take place from Thursday, February 26, through Sunday, March 8, in Plant City. Festival hours are 10 a.m.-11 p.m. daily and will feature a wide variety of entertainment, exhibits, food, livestock shows, rides, games and competitions. Headline entertainment on the Wish Farms Soundstage includes Alabama, Jo Dee Messina, Jamey Johnson, Lonestar, Ty Myers, Riley Green featuring Hannah McFarland, The Oak Ridge Boys, Legends of Love, Sandi Patty, Lauren Daigle, Forrest Frank, The Offspring, Joan Jett & The Blackhearts and more.

"We are also incredibly grateful to the Plant City Lions Club for their hard work and dedication," Robinson added. "Their organization plays a vital role in creating an event that is exceptional year after year, and their commitment to this tradition does not go unnoticed."

About the Florida Strawberry Festival

The Florida Strawberry Festival is a time-honored tradition in Eastern Hillsborough County celebrating the strawberry harvest with agricultural showcases, live entertainment, and community festivities. Each year, the festival attracts more than 650,000 visitors to Plant City for 11 days of fun, food and entertainment.

For more information, visit https://flstrawberryfestival.com/ and follow the Festival on Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok and YouTube (#BerryFest26).



THREE LOCAL EDUCATORS HONORED AT 2026 EDUCATION AWARDS

Staff Report



Adrian Sarmiento
Morgan High



Jennifer Giannone
Newsome High



Che Counce
Symmes Elementary

Hillsborough County educators were honored on a recent Thursday night as part of the 2026 Excellence in Education Awards, a signature celebration recognizing the individuals who represent the very best of public education across the district.

Presented by Hillsborough Education Foundation (HEF) in partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools, the annual awards ceremony took place on January 22 at Morsani Hall at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts. This year's theme, 'Hillsborough's Treasures,' highlighted educators and support staff whose dedication, leadership and commitment continue to shape student success.

Among the honorees were three local finalists for the Ida S. Baker Diversity Educator of the Year Award: Che Counce, an Access Points teacher at Symmes Elementary School; Adrian Sarmiento, workforce program advisor at Morgan High School; and Jennifer Giannone, an AVID academic teacher at Newsome High School. Each was recognized onstage for outstanding efforts to foster inclusion, equity and opportunity for students across Hillsborough County.

The three educators were selected from a highly competitive pool of 690 nominations submitted by students, families, colleagues and community members. In total, 13 finalists were honored during the evening across three categories: Instructional Support Employee of the Year, Ida S. Baker Diversity Educator of the Year and Teacher of the Year.

"This year's finalists represent the true treasures of Hillsborough County's public schools," said Anna Corman, president and CEO of Hillsborough Education Foundation. "Their commitment to students, colleagues and families creates a lasting impact well beyond the classroom, and we are proud to recognize the difference they make every day."

The Excellence in Education Awards serve as one of the district's most visible celebrations of public education, shining a spotlight on the educators and staff members whose work helps students thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

For more information about Hillsborough Education Foundation and its programs, visit the website directly at https://educationfoundation.com/.

WORSHIP PASTOR SWIMS FROM 37 YARDS TO AMAZON'S NO. 1 SPOT

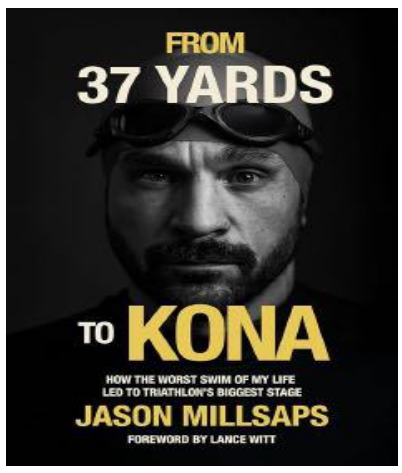
By Olivia Clark

Pastor Jason Millsaps, worship pastor at Bell Shoals Church, is drawing attention beyond the altar this month after his debut memoir, *From 37 Yards to Kona*, climbed to No. 1 on Amazon in triathlon book categories.

The book was released on January 6 and reached No. 1 in both triathlon books and Kindle triathlon. Pastor Millsaps said it also ranked among the top new releases in multiple sports training categories and has earned dozens of five-star reviews. The memoir includes endorsements from Mike Reilly, known as the 'Voice of IRONMAN'; James Lawrence, also known as the 'Iron Cowboy'; and professional triathlete Meredith Kessler.



Pastor Jason Millsaps, worship pastor at Bell Shoals Church, recently released his debut memoir, From 37 Yards to Kona.



A Valrico resident since 2014, Pastor Millsaps said the book follows his journey from 2012, when he could not swim more than 37 yards without stopping, to competing at the IRONMAN World Championships in Kona, Hawaii, in 2024 and Nice, France, in 2025. He pursued the goal while continuing his ministry work, supporting his family and recovering from two back surgeries.

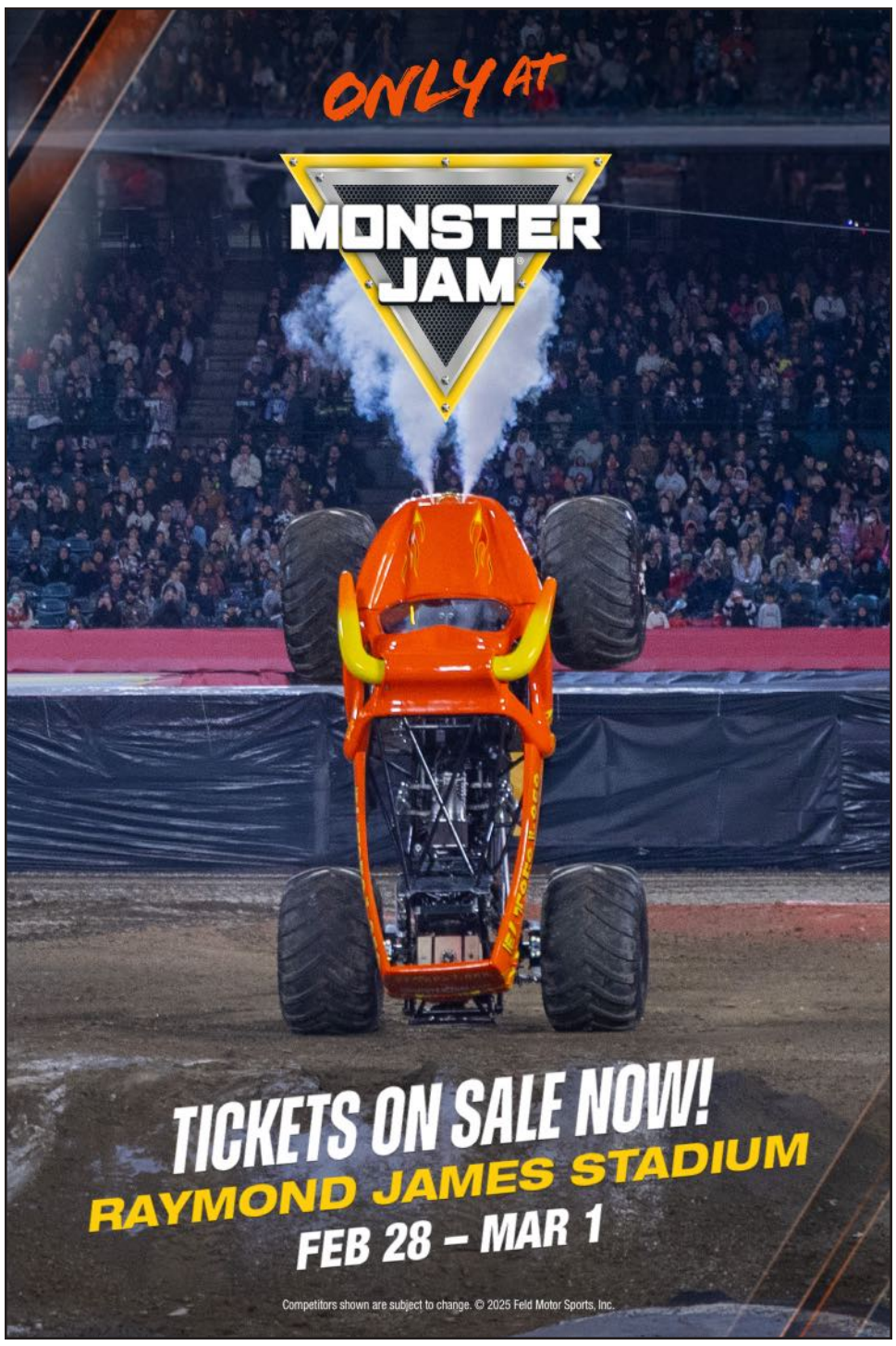
Pastor Millsaps said the turning point came when he recognized how far his health had slipped and decided it was time to change.

"I feel like every one of us has our 37 yards in something, something that just seems impossible," Pastor Millsaps said. "In ministry and life, God doesn't always remove obstacles. He simply shows us what is possible when you refuse to quit."

Pastor Millsaps said the process was built on consistent effort and showing up even on difficult days. After more than a year of training, he completed his first full-distance IRONMAN at IRONMAN Arizona in November 2013. Since then, he has finished 16 full-distance IRONMAN races.

Pastor Millsaps has also expanded into coaching. He is a certified USA Triathlon coach and launched 121 Tri Coaching, a name inspired by Hebrews 12:1 and its message to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

Readers can search for *From 37 Yards to Kona: How the Worst Swim of My Life* Led to Triathlon's Biggest Stage on Amazon.



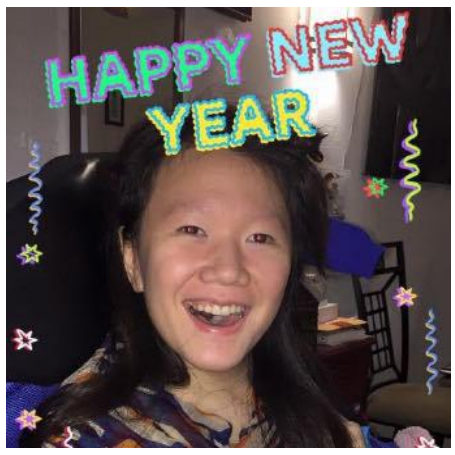
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QUEENA INSPIRES WHILE FACING HER JOURNEY OF HEALING

By Libby Hopkins



Queena Vuong is the survivor of an attack at the Bloomingdale Regional Public Library back in 2008.

Queena Vuong has overcome many health obstacles since her attack at the Bloomingdale Regional Public Library more than 17 years ago. She's battled some tough obstacles. It hasn't been easy, but her fight goes on every day, as miracles continue to take place in her. Many have followed her story over the years and have come to know her as the 'Bloomingdale Library Survivor.'

"In moments of hardship, it can be difficult to recognize the strength still lives within us," said Queena's mother, Vanna Nguyen. "Yet, when we remain open to others, to love, and to possibility, we create space for healing and inspiration to grow."

After Queena's attack, it was the compassion and steadfast presence of those around her that carried her family forward. Over time, that support became a reminder that healing is not meant to be a solitary journey.

"It is something we walk through together," Nguyen said. "When we allow ourselves inspired, we find the courage to keep going, to recognize beauty even in uncertainty, and to reflect hope back into the world."

December 2025 marked 17th anniversary of Queena's discharge after seven months in the hospital and rehabilitation. Her journey continues to be one of perseverance, faith and quiet strength.

"Over the past year, Queena's overall health has remained stable, and we're grateful for that consistency," Nguyen said. "She does occasionally experience a brief mini seizure in the mornings, but otherwise her medical team feels she's doing well."

In her physical therapy at Stay In Step, Queena has seen meaningful signs of engagement.

"She shows increased awareness, often smiling in response to voices, and appears more relaxed during movement exercises," Nguyen said. "Although she still requires full assistance for cycling and walking-based activities, the comfort and responsiveness she shows during sessions are encouraging steps forward."

"She is able to respond to yes/no and simple daily-living questions using gestures and vocalizations," Nguyen said.

Looking ahead, Queena would love to return to both water therapy and oxygen therapy. "These therapies have been beneficial for her in the past, but they are private-pay and extremely expensive," Nguyen said. "As a family, we're hoping to raise additional funds to help cover these costs so she can resume the treatments she enjoys and benefits from. One of Queena's biggest wishes is to visit Disney again. She hopes that an organization might be able to sponsor a future trip for her. Being able to experience Disney would bring her so much joy and would be a truly special moment for her and our family."

If you would like to learn more about Queena's journey or donate to her rehabilitation, you can visit her website at https://joinqueena.com.

FOREVER GREEN LAWN AND PEST CONTROL GROWS ON FOUR DECADES OF CUSTOMIZED, QUALITY CARE

By Makenzie Atkins Noel



Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control combines decades of knowledge to provide a service that is focused on delivering reliable results customers can trust.

Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control is a family-owned lawn care company built on experience, consistency, and a refusal to cut corners.

Operating for more than 40 years as a family-run business, Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control was founded with a straightforward philosophy: do the job the right way, or don't do it at all. That commitment to quality remains at the core of everything the company does today.

Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control serves customers throughout Manatee, Pinellas, and Hillsborough counties, with offices located across the region to better support the communities it serves. The company offers comprehensive care, including lawn treatments, tree and shrub care and pest control.

Experience-driven care is a defining part of Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control's process. With more than four decades of industry knowledge behind the business, the company relies on customized fertilizer blends developed through firsthand experience. These blends are based on an understanding of what works, allowing Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control to avoid generic, one-size-fits-all treatments. The result is a more customized approach focused on producing noticeable and sustainable results for each customer.

"I started this company because I saw too many jobs being done halfway," said Mike Compton, owner of Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control. "We do it the right way or we don't do it at all, which is why I've spent 45 years perfecting our fertilizer blends based on what actually works for each customer."

Supporting that philosophy is a team of licensed and knowledgeable technicians who bring professionalism and consistency to every property they service. Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control places a strong emphasis on proper training, attention to detail and following established processes to ensure lawns, trees, and shrubs receive the care they need to thrive over time.

Founded on higher expectations and long-term results, Forever Green Lawn and Pest Control has grown steadily while remaining true to its family-owned roots.

For more information or to inquire about service, please visit www.fglawn.com.



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COMMUNITY SHOOTERS AIM TO MAKE DIFFERENCE AT ANGEL FOUNDATION SPORTING CLAYS CLASSIC

Staff Report

The Angel Foundation FL is proud to host its fourth annual Sporting Clays Classic on Saturday, February 21, at FishHawk Sporting Clays.

This exciting event brings together supporters with the foundation's welcome breakfast, catered by Fresh Original Foods/Chick-N-Bones, and its awards luncheon, catered by Glory Days Grill. Shooters will enjoy a great morning on the course along with course contests, gun raffles, 50/50 raffle and raffles for exciting prices. Each shooter will also receive our special 'Player's Package' which also includes eye and ear protection and ammo for the tournament.



Representatives from Reed & Reed and Roof X join fellow sponsors in supporting the Angel Foundation FL's fourth annual Sporting Clays at FishHawk Sporting Clays.



CEO Liz Brewer shared, "We are thankful for our Eagle Eye Sponsors, Chadwell Supply, Reed & Reed and Roof X. Also, our High Master Sponsor, Rivard Buick GMC; Sharpshooter Sponsor, PCL Construction; and Brandon Legal Group. It is because of their financial support we are able to host first-class events for our community and raise funds to serve our families in the year ahead to keep them on the road to self-sufficiency when experiencing a life-threatening illness or catastrophic event."

This year, the Angel Foundation FL celebrates 20 years of serving families in our community who are in crisis by matching them with businesses to meet their practical needs as well as providing financial support. The foundation does not give them a 'hand out' but rather holds their hands through their darkest hours, giving them help and hope when they need it the most. For more information or to request assistance, visit https://angelfoundationfl.com/.

You can still register to participate in this event as a sponsor, a foursome or an individual player at the website www.angelfoundationfl.com/. The deadline is Friday, February 13.













UP BEFORE DAWN: ZORAN PAVIC KEEPS THE REGENT RUNNING

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Zoran Pavic stands inside The Regent, where his behind-the-scenes work keeps the venue running seamlessly for weddings, and galas.

Long before the sun rises over The Regent event venue in Riverview, one staff member is already moving through the quiet halls, preparing the building for another full day of community events. For more than 15 years, facilities team member Zoran Pavic has been one of the venue's most dependable and recognizable faces — a steady presence whose work helps keep one of the region's busiest event centers running smoothly.

Pavic, originally from Bosnia and Herzegovina, came to the Tampa Bay area in 1998, bringing with him a background in plumbing and electrical work. That experience shaped the path that eventually led him to The Regent.

"He did plumbing and electrical in his home country and was able to find work doing those things here, which led him into facility maintenance working for Sodexo, who had the contract for HCC and the Regent when it was built," said Shannon Keil, president and CEO of The Regent.

Pavic officially joined The Regent's staff in 2009, and since then colleagues said his reliability and upbeat attitude have become part of the venue's identity.

"My boss, Shannon, is the best," said Pavic. "Communication is good, and together we fix things and make it work good for clients and the community."

His days start early — often before dawn.

"We are busy and have a lot of people at events. I get here at 5:30 a.m. and get rooms ready for the events of that day, sometimes do minor maintenance and check to make sure things are working and ready for event," said Pavic. "I sometimes go home and come back for the events at night. I take care of the needs of the event and clean up, then come back the next day to do it again."

Over the years, Pavic has witnessed countless moments inside the venue's walls, from milestone celebrations to solemn ceremonies. One event stands out.

"We are part of special moments for families, students and members of the community," said Pavic. "One of my favorites is the Menton Dinner for Black Dagger Hunt Club, an organization for Gold Star families and wounded veterans. We hang a 40 ft. flag that was jumped from Normandy and have a 98-year-old Rosie the Riveter who comes every year. I like to listen to the speakers and see them recognize the soldiers who have been injured."

To those who work alongside him, Pavic's presence is more than operational support — it's a source of calm and consistency. Outside of work, Pavic keeps his priorities simple: spending time with his family, grandkids, wife and dogs.

"I really enjoy time with my family, and a really good bourbon!" he said.

The Regent is located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview. For more information, visit www.experiencetheregent.com or call 813-571-2494.

ANNUAL BILL CAREY SPORTING CLAY TOURNAMENT RETURNS ON MARCH 28

Staff Report



Shoot for a cause at the 14th annual Bill Carey Sporting Clay Tournament on Saturday, March 28, at FishHawk Sporting Clays in Lithia.

The 14th annual Bill Carey Sporting Clay Tournament will return to FishHawk Sporting Clays on Saturday, March 28, bringing together sportsmen, community leaders and supporters of local youth for a day of competition, camaraderie and cause-driven impact.

Benefiting the Carey Family Brandon Club, the annual event supports programs serving children and teens through the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tampa Bay. The tournament runs from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. at FishHawk Sporting Clays, located at 13505 Hobson Simmons Rd. in Lithia.

Participants can expect an expanded clay shoot tournament on a larger course, followed by a barbecue lunch provided by BubbaQue's. The day will also feature raffle drawings with prizes including firearms, sporting goods, gift cards and more. Organizers say the event is designed to be both fun and meaningful, offering attendees the chance to enjoy a premier sporting experience while making a difference in the lives of local youth.

Registration for the tournament officially opened in January. Participants can register teams, purchase raffle tickets and explore sponsorship opportunities online at www.bgctampa.org/billcarey-clayshoot.

"Shooting events like this allow our community to come together in support of the kids we serve at the Carey Family Brandon Club," said Jamie McWade, director of events for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tampa Bay. "It's an exciting day that directly impacts the programs and opportunities available to our club members."

The tournament schedule includes an 8 a.m. start time, with lunch served at 11:30 a.m. Sponsorship packages and raffle tickets will also be available for individuals and businesses looking to increase their support.

The event comes as the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tampa Bay celebrates 100 years of impact across the region. Since the Rotary Club of Tampa established the West Tampa Boys Club in 1926, the organization has expanded alongside the communities it serves, eventually merging with the former Boys & Girls Clubs of the Suncoast to better serve youth throughout Tampa Bay. Throughout a century of growth and change, the organization's mission has remained the same: ensuring every child has a place to belong and a path to a brighter future.

For more information about the tournament, sponsorship opportunities or registration, contact McWade at jmcwade@bgctampa.org or by phone at 813-769-7528.





STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE ADDS VICTIM ADVOCATE TO PLANT CITY COURTHOUSE

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



State Attorney Suzy Lopez.

Susan S. Lopez
Office of the State Attorney
13th Judicial Circuit



For someone who has just been victimized, walking into a courthouse can feel intimidating and lonely. It doesn't have to. Justice works best when victims know they are supported every step of the way.

That is why I am proud to share some important news for our East Hillsborough community. The state attorney's office is expanding our Victim Assistance program to the Plant City Courthouse effective immediately. Beginning now, a trained victim advocate will be on-site every Friday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. to help victims and their families navigate the court process and access the support they need.

This is more than a new office location. It is about meeting people where they are. By placing an advocate right inside the Plant City Courthouse, we are making sure help is closer and available when it is needed most.

The advocates serving Plant City are part of the same experienced team based in our downtown Tampa office. That means victims receive the same level of care and expertise no matter where their case is heard. These advocates do far more than explain court dates and paperwork. They help families understand what to expect and connect them with resources like counseling, shelters or clothing. Sometimes, survivors are just looking for someone to listen.

Our victim advocates are some of the most dedicated and compassionate people on our team. They remind victims that they are not alone in this process. We couldn't do our work as prosecutors without them.

If you or someone you know is a victim living in the east part of our county, you're invited to meet us at the Plant City courthouse. Call 813-574-6391 or visit https://hillsboroughsao.gov to learn more about the services our advocates provide.

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Jimmy Sturr & His Orchestra
Thu. Feb. 26, 10:30
FREE


The Oak Ridge Boys
Thu. Feb. 26, 3:30
$40-$45

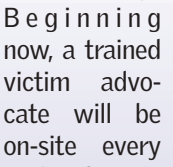

Alabama
Thu. Feb. 26, 7:30
$65-$70-$85


Jo Dee Messina
Fri. Feb. 27, 3:30
$40-$50


Jamey Johnson
Fri. Feb. 27, 7:30
$45-$55-$75

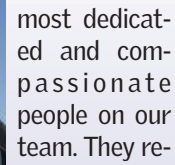

Lonestar
Sat. Feb. 28, 3:30
$35-$45


Ty Myers
Sat. Feb. 28, 7:30
$50-$60-$75


Riley Green
featuring Hannah McFarland
Sun. Mar. 1, 6:30 $110-$120-$135

Gene Watson
Mon. Mar. 2, 3:30
$30

Legends Of Love
Brian McKnight, Ginuwine, Ruben Studdard
Mon. Mar. 2, 7:30 $40-$45-$80


Sandi Patty
Tue. Mar. 3, 3:30
$30

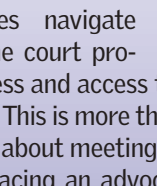

Lauren Daigle
Tue. Mar. 3, 7:30
$70-$75-$85

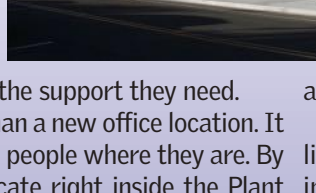

John Foster
Wed. Mar. 4, 3:30
$25-$35

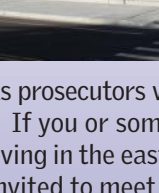

Brantley Gilbert
Wed. Mar. 4, 7:30
$50-$85


Bill Haley Jr. & The Comets
Thu. Mar. 5, 10:30
FREE

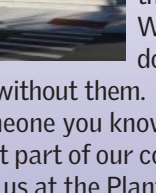

The Bellamy Brothers
Thu. Mar. 5, 3:30
$30


Dierks Bentley
Thu. Mar. 5, 7:30
$70-$80-$90

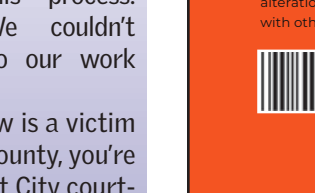

The Marshall Tucker Band
Fri. Mar. 6, 3:30
$35-$40

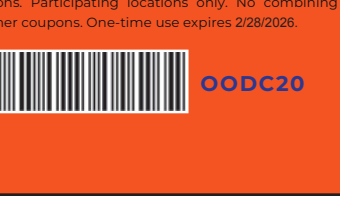


Forrest Frank
Fri. Mar. 6, 7:30
$70-$80-$90



Pitbull Toddler
Sat. Mar. 7, 3:30
FREE


The Offspring
Sat. Mar. 7, 7:30
$70-$80-$90


Joan Jett & The Blackhearts
Sun. Mar. 8, 7:30
$45-$55-$75

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Entenmann's • BayCare Kids • Premier Portable Buildings • Burger 21 • Advantage Restoration & Recovery • Local Ford Dealers • Everglades Equipment Group
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BRIDGEWATER LANDING OPENS LEASING FOR NEWEST 55-PLUS APARTMENT HOMES

By Marie Gilmore



Bridgewater Landing Apartments is now leasing in Riverview, welcoming residents to the area's newest 55-plus active adult apartment community thoughtfully designed for comfort, connection and carefree living.

Designed exclusively for independent adults 55 and better, Bridgewater Landing features one- and two-bedroom residences ranging from approximately 703 to 1,170 square feet. Rental rates currently begin at $1,700 per month for one-bedroom, one-bath apartments and range up to $2,435 per month for spacious two-bedroom, two-bath homes, depending on the floor-plan size and location within the building. Residents may choose from 10 unique floor plans to suit a variety of lifestyles and space needs.

Each apartment is designed with everyday ease and refined living in mind. Homes include private, modern kitchens with quartz countertops; high-end LG appliances; luxury vinyl flooring; soaring 9-foot, 6-inch ceilings; and full-size, in-unit washers and dryers. Many residences also feature private patios or balconies overlooking landscaped courtyards or a lake — a rare amenity in Riverview — allowing residents to enjoy Florida's sunshine and fresh air from the comfort of home. Water, Wi-Fi with 60 cable channels and in-unit laundry are included.

Bridgewater Landing offers a truly maintenance-free lifestyle, complemented by an array of amenities that encourage active, social living. Residents can enjoy access to the Sweet Water Club, an exclusive, on-property clubhouse offering wellness-focused fitness classes, creative experiences, social events and group outings. Additional amenities of the Sweet Water Club include a fitness center and resort-style pool.

The fully accessible buildings include elevator access and wheelchair-friendly apartments. Bridgewater Landing Apartments is also pet-friendly. A dedicated pet park is underway, providing space for residents and their four-legged companions to enjoy. The community also boasts a walking trail, outdoor gathering spaces, barbecue and on-site management and maintenance.

The property is located at 5790 Stockport St. in Riverview — on Bloomingdale Avenue, directly across from the Winthrop Town Centre.

Now open in its first building, Bridgewater Landing Apartments will ultimately include 168 units and complete the larger Bridgewater Landing active adult community of single-family homes and duplexes. The apartments are owned by Bridges Land and Development and were built by local homebuilder Sunrise Homes, which has been developing communities exclusively in Hillsborough County since 1983.

Leasing offices are open Mon-Fri from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Call 813-934-2204. or email directly at leasing@bridgewaterlandings.co.

PARTNERSHIP SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON URGENT NEED FOR BIG BROTHERS AND BIG SISTERS

By Libby Hopkins



For National Mentoring Month, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay teamed up with the Tampa Bay Lightning and Benchmark International.

This past January, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay (BBBS) partnered with the Tampa Bay Lightning and Benchmark International for a dynamic National Mentoring Month campaign designed to spotlight the power of mentorship and respond to an urgent community need: more than 1,000 children across Greater Tampa Bay are currently waiting for a mentor.

From January 5-20, the three organizations came together to raise awareness, celebrate existing mentors and recruited 50 new Big Brothers and Big Sisters who changed children's lives through consistency, connection and care.

The two-week partnership featured in-arena recognitions at Lightning games, a community ball hockey clinic for youth and storytelling moments throughout January, giving the public and media multiple opportunities to see mentorship in action.

"Mentorship is one of the most powerful tools we have to help young people feel supported, confident and hopeful about their future," said Robyn Ostrem, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay. "With more than 1,000 children waiting for a mentor right now in Greater Tampa Bay, this partnership allowed us to meet the moment, celebrating our Bigs while inviting more people in our community to step forward and make a transformational difference."

Throughout the month, Bigs, Littles and supporters were recognized during Lightning games and special activations, amplifying the message that mentorship strengthens families, schools, and communities.

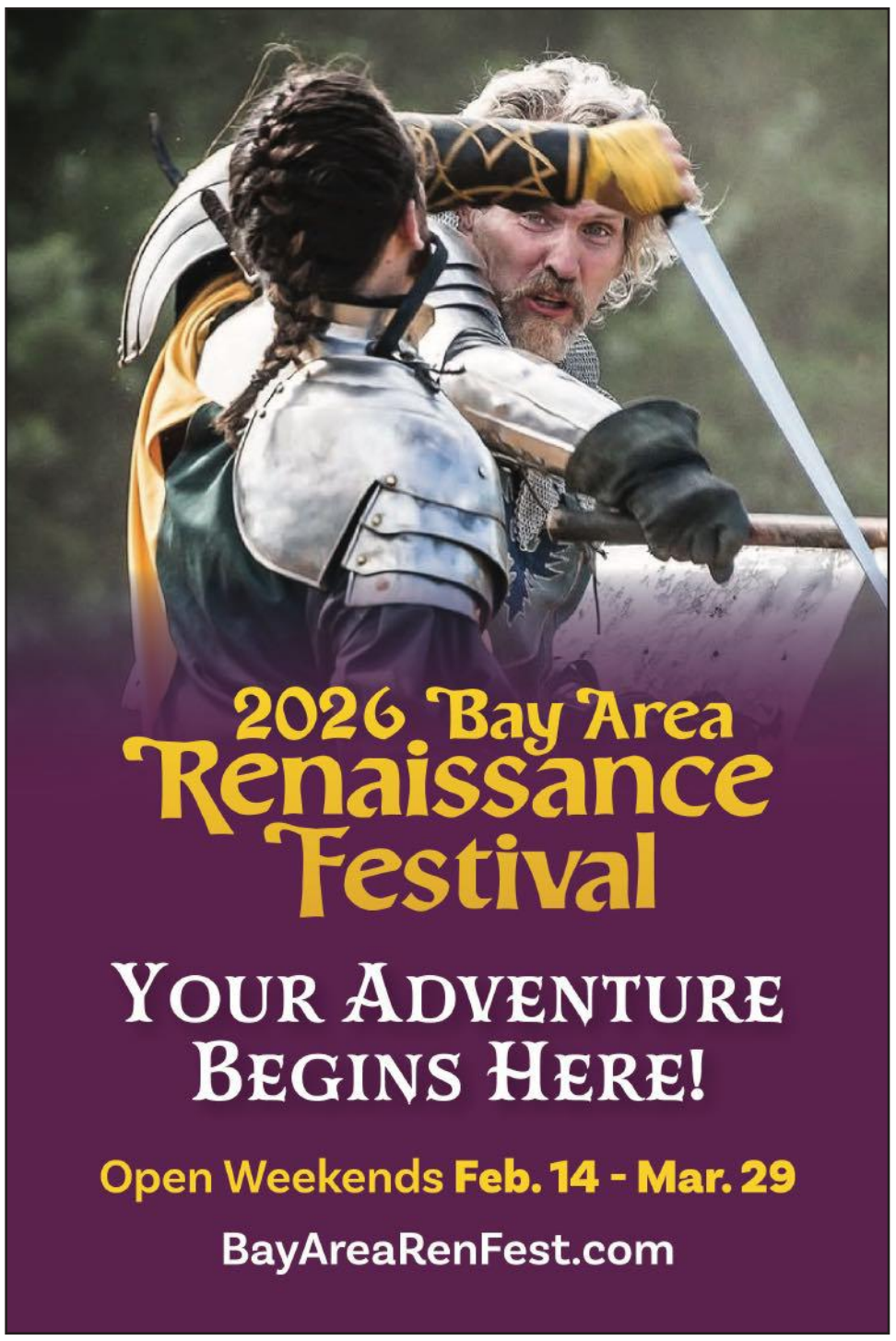
"We believe in using our platform to support causes that create real impact in our community," said Elizabeth Frazier, vice president of community hockey development and social impact for the Tampa Bay Lightning. "By partnering with Big Brothers Big Sisters during National Mentoring Month, we helped to shine a light on the importance of positive role models and creating memorable experiences that inspired kids, both on and off the ice."

Benchmark International's involvement reflected its commitment to investing in people and strengthening the communities where its employees live and work.

Becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister does not require special skills or a large time commitment.

It starts with a few hours a month and a willingness to build a relationship. With more than 1,000 children still waiting in Tampa Bay, the need for mentors continues well beyond National Mentoring Month. To learn more, visit the website at www.bbbstampabay.org/be-a-big/.





FORGOTTEN ANGELS: 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW AND 2026 EVENT SCHEDULE

By Brian Bokor



The Forgotten Angels Foundation, founded by Cindy Tilley and her husband, David Tyler, in Valrico, closed out 2025 with expanded outreach and fundraising efforts, concluding the year with a Christmas event focused on youth support while preparing for a full slate of community events in 2026.

The Christmas outreach event was held in December 2025 at the Forgotten Angels property, located at 3604 Little Stearns Rd. in Valrico, where the organization hosted more than 130 students from Simmons Career Center in Plant City. The event included lunch, gifts from Santa and activities designed to provide a safe and supportive holiday experience for students who often lack traditional family support.

Local businesses and community partners, including Chick-fil-A, Publix, Voodoo Brewing Co. and Marlin James, provided food and support. Organizers said the holiday event reflected the organization's family-style approach to serving youth aging out of the foster care system.

Organizers said Marlin James had also contributed air-conditioning units, facility repairs, food and financial support for multiple events throughout the year.

Forgotten Angels is a nonprofit organization that supports youth aging out of foster care, along with at-risk teens and young adults who often lack stable housing or family support. The organization provides a family-style living environment and focuses on life-skills training, such as financial literacy, employment readiness, education planning and independent living, to help participants transition successfully into adulthood.

"We need the community's support because we get called daily for youth who need our help," said Tilley. "We are housing them, feeding them and teaching them how to become independent. All the fundraising and donations are helping us save lives."

Throughout 2025, the organization also hosted several fundraising events, including the Luke Holmberg Memorial Disc Golf Tournament on March 15, 2025, and the 10th anniversary Fall Campout from October 23-26, 2025, marking a decade of service.

That momentum carried into 2026, beginning with an EKKO RV gathering held in January at the Forgotten Angels property. The event was supported by La Mesa RV and featured Winnebago EKKO vehicles. Organizers said the gathering drew more than 70 EKKO RVs and included structured raffle fundraising activities.

The next major event is the Spring Motorcycle Campout and Rally, scheduled for Thursday through Sunday, March 12-15. The campout will open with a bike night kickoff on March 12 beginning at 6 p.m., hosted at Voodoo Brewing Co., located at 3432 SR 60 in Valrico. The kickoff event will feature live music by Adam Karch.

Additional 2026 fundraising efforts include a Honda Goldwing motorcycle raffle, featuring a long-distance touring motorcycle that has traveled through more than 20 states. Raffle ticket proceeds support Forgotten Angels' programs, with tickets priced at $25 for one, $100 for five and $200 for 25.

Also continuing into 2026 is a 'Trip of a Lifetime' raffle supported by food influencer Joel Hansen.

The raffle offers one winner a VIP trip for two to destinations such as London, England; Las Vegas, Nevada; Orlando; a Mexican resort; a cruise package; a Texas barbecue tour; or Banff, Alberta. Organizers said the prize is valued at approximately $12,500, with the drawing scheduled for March 13.

Beginning in April, Forgotten Angels will participate in weekly Tuesday bike nights and bingo nights hosted at Voodoo Brewing Co. Valrico, which has named Forgotten Angels as its official 2026 charity partner.

Scheduled for Saturday, April 11 is the Forgotten Fur Babies pet adoption event, to be held at the Forgotten Angels property.

Later in the year, the organization will host its Fall Campout from Thursday through Sunday, October 22-25, along with an art auction fundraiser on October 22, involving events at Voodoo Brewing Co. Valrico.

Organizers said the combination of holiday outreach, recurring community partnerships and diversified fundraising events allows Forgotten Angels to sustain programs that provide housing, life-skills training, education planning and mentorship for young people transitioning toward independent, stable futures.

Contact Tilley at ctilley@forgottenangelsflorida.org or visit the organization's website directly at www.forgottenangelsflorida.org.



HEROES PARADISE, BRANDON'S FAMILY-OWNED ENTERTAINMENT CENTER, ADDS FIRST U.S. EPICSURF DEEP-WATER STANDING WAVE

By Brian Bokor

A new surf attraction under construction at Heroes Paradise in Brandon will introduce the first U.S. EpicSurf deep-water standing wave, bringing an inland surfing experience designed to replicate real ocean conditions.

The project is part of Heroes Paradise's long-term expansion plans, with ownership selecting EpicSurf as its technology partner and incorporating the attraction into the existing Brandon venue. The installation is being developed in partnership with Aquatic Development Group (ADG), a global aquatic design, construction and manufacturing firm specializing in wave-generation technology. ADG has completed more than 4,000 projects worldwide, including over 550 wave installations and more than 130 surf and board attractions.

"After years of research, discussions and design iterations, we chose EpicSurf as our technology partner," said Julie Pennenga, co-owner of Heroes Paradise.

Tim Pennenga, co-owner of Heroes Paradise and a veteran and former Hillsborough County sheriff's deputy, said much of the design process involved learning the technology as it came together.

Unlike shallow wave machines commonly found at resorts or on cruise ships, the EpicSurf system operates with 3-5 feet of water depth, allowing surfers to ride traditional surfboards with fins. The deeper water enables authentic techniques, such as carving, bottom turns and cutbacks, while also providing softer landings and a wider margin of safety.

"This is what's known as a deep-water standing wave," said Julie Kline, director of sales and marketing at ADG. "Unlike sheet-flow wave systems typically used for boogie boarding, EpicSurf generates a true surfable wave with real water depth, creating a more authentic experience for surfers."



Construction is underway on a new EpicSurf deep-water standing wave at Heroes Paradise in Brandon. The attraction will offer an inland surfing experience designed to replicate real ocean conditions, with adjustable wave heights for surfers of all skill levels and abilities.

According to ADG, the wave is formed by using pumps to pull water from a below-deck tank and directing it down a ramp to create a true hydraulic jump, similar to naturally occurring river waves.



"Water is pulled up from the tank, flows down the ramp and creates a hydraulic jump, just like what you see in a river," Kline said. "A great example is the Eisbach in Germany, where surfers ride a standing river wave right in the middle of Munich."

Heroes Paradise will feature an ES46 EpicSurf model, offering 46 feet of surfable wave width within an overall footprint of approximately 66 by 90 feet.

The system is designed to accommodate a wide range of users, including children, seniors, adaptive athletes, and individuals with disabilities. EpicSurf is currently the only surf wave certified as an Autism Resource by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.

"The magic of the system is its ability to generate a consistent 3 to 5-foot deep-water wave that can be adjusted with the push of a button," said Bruce Quay, chief operating officer and partner at ADG. "Surfers can bring any surfboard they want, with any fin setup, in a consistent and safe environment."

Ethan Pennenga, a junior at Bloomington High School, described the origins of Heroes Paradise and the motivation behind its continued expansion.

"The dream started when my dad, a county patrol deputy, found this dilapidated, abandoned tennis court that was being used for criminal activity," Ethan Pennenga said. "He wanted to create a welcoming place where kids, parents and the community could safely interact with military members, first responders, and law enforcement heroes."

Dan Wagner with ARCO Murray, the project's design-build general contractor specializing in complex aquatic facilities, said the system's performance depends heavily on construction execution.

"The system is designed to deliver a consistent, controllable and repeatable surf surface, which places high demands on construction coordination and execution to ensure it performs the way it's intended once operational," Wagner said.

The EpicSurf attraction is scheduled to open by May. Heroes Paradise is a family-owned outdoor entertainment center offering the largest outdoor tactical laser tag in the Southeast,, along with archery tag, rock climbing, and RC car tracks. Located at 733 Knowles Rd, it features a 32,000 sq ft arena (Hades) and an air-conditioned clubhouse.

Key features and activities include:

Laser Tag & Archery: Tactical, outdoor laser tag and competitive archery tag.

RC Raceway: Two tracks, including an off-road track and a tri-dirt oval.

Amenities include a clubhouse with 360° views, a cafe, and a covered observation deck.

Heroes Paradise was founded by Tim and Julie Pennenga in 2020, transforming the former Hidden Palms Tennis Club into a premier recreation spot. For more information, visit www.heroesparadise.com.



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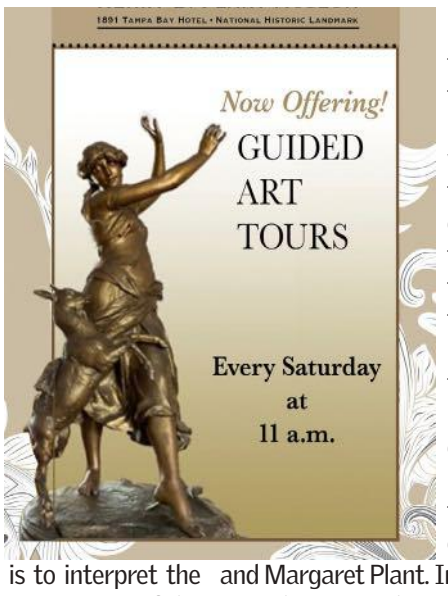
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HENRY B. PLANT MUSEUM OFFERS FREE GUIDED ART TOURS FOCUSING ON THE MUSEUM'S GILDED AGE ARTWORKS

By Libby Hopkins



Since 1933, the Tampa Bay Hotel has been home to the Henry B. Plant Museum and The University of Tampa. The building, renamed Plant Hall, was declared a National Historic Landmark in recognition of its role as a military headquarters during the Spanish-American War. The Henry B. Plant Museum holds the distinction of accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums.

The museum's mission is to interpret the Tampa Bay Hotel and the experiences of the diverse individuals who contributed to its success. The museum awakens thought and transports visitors to another era through exhibits and innovative programs. Original furnishings and artifacts and a dynamic self-guided audio tour immerse visitors in the opulence of a Gilded Age seasonal resort hotel.

"There is a wide range of Gilded Age artworks on view, spanning paintings, sculpture and furniture," said the museum's membership and museum relations manager, Jill D'Anna. "Many of the works reflect the craftsmanship, materials and artistic trends of the period, offering visitors a glimpse into the art that defined the era."

Opened by railroad and shipping magnate Henry B. Plant, the Tampa Bay Hotel faced an uncertain future following his death in 1899. The City of Tampa purchased the property in 1905, and it continued to operate as a hotel until 1932.

The following year, the city established the Tampa Municipal Museum in the south wing of the first floor to preserve the legacy of the Tampa Bay Hotel. The remainder of the building, as well as the property, became home to The University of Tampa.

The museum houses original hotel furnishings and art objects from Europe and Asia collected by Henry and Margaret Plant. In 1974, the Tampa Municipal Museum became the Henry B. Plant Museum, commemorating Henry Plant's contribution to the development of the Cigar City and the creation of Florida's tourist economy.

"The museum now offers guided art tours every Saturday at 11 a.m. and are completely free with paid museum admission," D'Anna said. "During the tour, guests can expect to see a diverse selection of works from our collection, including traditional paintings and sculpture, as well as furniture and decorative objects."

D'Anna hopes the tours help spread awareness about the importance of conservation and restoration while also showcasing the diversity of objects within the museum's collection.

For more about Henry B. Plant Museum, visit the website at www.plantmuseum.com or call 813-254-1891. The museum is located at 401 W. Kennedy Blvd. in downtown Tampa.

KNIGHTS, ARTISANS AND MERRIMENT AWAIT AT 2026 BAY AREA REN FEST

Staff Report



The clang of swords, the cheers of the crowd and the music of wandering minstrels will once again fill the air as the Bay Area Renaissance Festival returns for its 48th season in 2026. One of Florida's longest-running and most beloved cultural traditions, the festival invites guests to step back into a lively, 16th-century European village, brought to life on the scenic festival grounds in Dade City.

Running weekends from Saturday, February 14, through Sunday, March 29, the Bay Area Renaissance Festival will be open Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m.-6 p.m., rain or shine. Families, history enthusiasts and adventure seekers alike can expect a full day of immersive entertainment, food and interactive experiences that transport visitors to another era.

Since its debut decades ago in Largo, the festival has grown into a sprawling celebration featuring 15 stages of entertainment and an expanded roster of performers. Throughout the day, guests can enjoy live music, comedy, theatrical acts and daring feats of skill. A highlight for many is the action-packed jousting tournament, where armored knights clash in thrilling competitions before roaring crowds.

Beyond the entertainment, the festival is known for its impressive artisan marketplace, featuring more than 100 unique craftspeople. Shoppers can browse handcrafted jewelry, pottery, leather goods, costumes, woodwork, metal art, glass and other one-of-a-kind treasures. Each booth offers handmade wares, making the marketplace a destination for those seeking distinctive gifts and keepsakes.

The 2026 season also offers a variety of specialty experiences designed to deepen the immersion. Guests can participate in mead tastings, pub and cocktail crawls, themed teas, romance packages with front-row joust seating, brunch at the joust and even large-scale marriage and vow renewal ceremonies. Costumed characters roam the grounds, interacting with visitors and adding to the atmosphere of a bustling Renaissance village.

Located at 12838 Auton Rd. in Dade City, the festival grounds offer free parking and easy access for visitors from across the Tampa Bay area. With over 60,000 annual attendees, the Bay Area Renaissance Festival continues to be a vibrant celebration of history, creativity and community. Tickets and additional information are available at https://bayarearenfest.com/.

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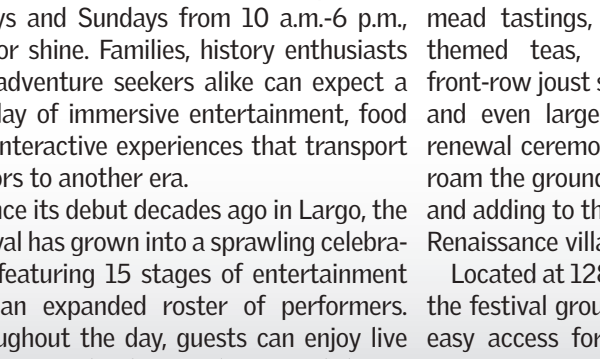
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FEBRUARY IS HEART MONTH, BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORING IS IMPORTANT

Staff Report



Vriscilla Alexander, of St. Joseph's Hospital-South's facilities team, checks her blood pressure in the wellness station in the hospital's main lobby. The wellness station there is used by visitors, hospital team members and medical staff and others for free, quick health self-checks, including blood pressure. Wellness stations like this one are also located in Publix Super Markets.

February is Heart Month, raising awareness about cardiovascular disease prevention. Heart disease can take on many forms and often has subtle symptoms, including chest pressure or discomfort, sluggishness, lightheadedness, sudden dizziness and fatigue.

It's important not to ignore these subtle signs and symptoms. If you are experiencing pressure, heaviness or pain in the chest, the arm, below the breastbone or in combination with sweating, nausea, extreme shortness of breath or irregular heartbeats, you may be having a heart attack. Call 911 immediately.

St. Joseph's Hospital-South in Riverview recommends that you regularly monitor your blood pressure. With support from your health care team, you can lower your risk for heart disease and stroke. You can check your blood pressure at the doctor's office, other medical locations, at home with a blood pressure monitoring device or for free at one of the wellness stations located in local Publix Super Markets.

The wellness stations conveniently provide you with free, interactive screenings giving you personal health stats of blood pressure, body weight and body mass index.

Learn more about St. Joseph's Hospital-South's heart and vascular services at https://stjosephssouthheart.org.

St. Joseph's Hospital-South, part of the BayCare Health System, opened in February 2015 to bring high-quality health care services to Southern Hillsborough County and Northern Manatee County in an environment designed to help patients heal. St. Joseph's Hospital-South features all-private suites and offers emergency care, an ICU, surgical services, imaging, oncology, cardiac catheterization, heart and vascular services, orthopedics, obstetrics, a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), pediatrics and more in a peaceful, relaxing and family-centered environment. The 223-bed hospital is located south of Tampa at 6901 Simmons Loop in Riverview. For more information, visit https://baycare.org/sjhs.

COLLEGE BOARD APPROVES MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH TAMPA BAY RAYS

Staff Report



Standing at the podium is Dr. Ken Atwater, college president. Behind him on the left is Greg Celestan, chairman of the Hillsborough College District Board of Trustees. On Atwater's right is Ken Babby, Tampa Bay Rays CEO.

The Hillsborough College District Board of Trustees voted unanimously this week to approve a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Tampa Bay Rays, allowing the college to explore a potential partnership tied to the redevelopment of a new ballpark on a portion of its Dale Mabry campus.

Board Chairman Greg Celestan said the vote reflects a shared vision for long-term community impact that extends beyond professional sports.

"This is about so much more than a ballpark," Celestan said. "It's about economic development, opportunity for our students and creating something meaningful that benefits Tampa Bay for generations. Welcoming the Rays home to this site while creating a live, work, play and learn district is an extraordinary opportunity, and we're ready to help get this project in motion."

Under the agreement, Hillsborough College would continue operating on the Dale Mabry campus throughout any planning or construction phases. Instruction and student services would remain uninterrupted, with temporary on-campus facilities utilized as needed to ensure academic continuity. Long-term plans call for the development of new academic buildings and the reconfiguration of existing spaces to integrate into a shared, mixed-use campus environment.

Hillsborough College President Dr. Ken Atwater described the proposal as a transformational opportunity centered on enhancing the student experience.

"A project of this scale and vision creates new pathways for learning, workforce development, internships and career-connected education," Atwater said. "By reimagining the Dale Mabry campus within a dynamic, mixed-use district, we are strengthening our role as an economic and civic anchor while expanding opportunity for our students, faculty and staff."

College officials emphasized that the MOU does not obligate Hillsborough College to move forward with the project. The agreement allows the institution to explore feasibility and collaboration while preserving the board's authority to terminate the MOU at any time.

Hillsborough College serves more than 46,000 students annually across five campuses throughout Tampa Bay, offering associate and baccalaureate degrees as well as certificates and diplomas at approved levels. The college is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

For more information about Hillsborough College, visit www.hcfl.edu.

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Men Of Valor Conference, Art Expo, Women Of Hope & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

03.07 40
T3
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Men Of Valor Conference

New Hope Church is inviting churches and men from across the region to gather for the Men of Valor T3 Conference, a one-day men's event focused on spiritual growth, brotherhood and bold faith, on Saturday, March 7, from 8:30 a.m.-1:15 p.m. Check-in begins at 8 a.m.

The theme for 2026, T3 — 'Test. Transform. Triumph.' — draws from the powerful biblical significance of '40,' seasons throughout Scripture where God tests faith, brings transformation and prepares His people for victory. From Israel's time in the wilderness to Jesus' 40 days in the desert, these moments reveal how God shapes men for what comes next.

"This conference is about meeting men where they are and calling them forward — into deeper faith, stronger leadership and a life fully surrendered to Christ," organizers shared.

New Hope Church is located at 213 N. Knights Ave. in Brandon. For tickets and more information, visit https://menofvalor2026.rsvpify.com/.

Art Expo To Raise Funds For Scholarships

The Women's Democratic Club is holding an Art Expo Fundraiser on Sunday, February 22, at Painters Union Hall, located at 8840 U.S. 301 in Riverview, in honor of past member Sandra Morehouse, an artist herself. It invites you to attend this event. The money raised will support the club's scholarship fund. This one-day event will showcase the talent of several artists in our community. There will be light appetizers, drinks and raffles. The cost is $20 at the event, or go to the website, https://sehillsboroughdwc.org. For more information, email sedwcinfo@gmail.com or call 813-967-1457.

Family Promise Inaugural Fundraising Gala: Tea with a Twist

Family Promise of Hillsborough County invites the community to its inaugural fundraising gala, 'Tea With a Twist,' on Saturday, March 28, at New Hope Church. This unique afternoon tea will feature delicious refreshments, raffles, community connection and the event's signature surprise: a men's fashion show that promises fun, style and a fresh take on the traditional gala format.

As the organization's first official fundraising event, the gala is more than just a celebration; it's a call to action. All proceeds directly support Family Promise's mission to empower homeless and low-income families with children in Hillsborough County to achieve lasting independence. The event is open to the public. Individual tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available at https://familypromisefl.org/. New Hope Church is located at 213 N. Knights Ave. in Brandon.

DELIGHT — Women Of Hope Conference

Take delight in the Lord — and discover the joy of resting in His presence. Join with New Hope Church's Women of Hope for DELIGHT, the 2026 Women of Hope Conference, at the church on February 21, 2026, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

This one-day gathering brings women together from across the church and community for worship, encouragement and connection. Experience powerful teaching, heartfelt worship and inspiring breakout sessions designed to help you deepen your faith and rediscover joy in every season. Tickets include a conference T-shirt and lunch.

New Hope Church is located at 213 N. Knights Ave. in Brandon. Register at https://delightwomensconference.rsvpify.com/.



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PITCH GROUP MARKS MILESTONE, REAL ESTATE PROS INVITED

By Olivia Clark



Real estate professionals gather at Three Bulls Tavern & Brewery on Bell Shoals Road for weekly Brandon/Valrico Real Estate Pitch Group meetings.

The Brandon/Valrico Real Estate Pitch Group, a free weekly meetup for real estate professionals, is marking a milestone year with record attendance and a renewed push to grow participation in the new year.

The group meets every Wednesday from 9:30-10:30 a.m. at Three Bulls Tavern & Brewery on Bell Shoals Road and is open to anyone involved in the home-selling industry, including realtors, brokers, builders, roofers, insurance professionals, title companies and other real-estate-related businesses. The meetings are designed to encourage collaboration, networking and the exchange of timely market information.

The group recently logged its largest turnout to date with 54 attendees. Participants representing a wide range of brokerages and service providers attend to pitch current listings, discuss price changes, promote open houses, share buyer wants and needs and highlight recent success stories.

"It's one of the reasons we're here. Sixteen years we're doing this now. I think we have the most successful pitch group anywhere," said Tim Ryan, an employee of Fidelity National Financial and founder of the Brandon/Valrico group.

Along with listings and buyer needs, professionals use the meetings to share real-world market experiences. One Realtor described a property that "went on the market before the hurricanes last year and it took 15 months to sell," eventually closing on December 29, 2024.

Guest speakers also provide practical guidance on marketing, pricing and client relationships. "Be out amongst the people, that's what is going to help you do great in this business," said Steve Moran, who spoke at the most recent networking event.

Ryan said the group meets every Wednesday for the next 48 weeks and is structured to ensure attendees leave with useful information.

"We want everyone to come here and pitch their listings, learn something and get a piece of information," he said.

Jim Gaffney and Mike Holmes assist with coordinating the meetings.

A state-of-the-industry address focused on the current market is planned for Wednesday, January 21. For more information, contact Ryan at tryan@fnf.com or 813-928-2862.



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COMMUNITY BREAKS GROUND ON ADAPTED HOME FOR ARMY VETERAN

By Brian Bokor

Community members, veterans and local supporters gathered Jan. 10 at Newsome High School to celebrate the start of a new Homes For Our Troops (HFOT) build in Lithia. The ceremony marked the beginning of a custom home that will be donated to Army Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Cornelius, who was severely injured while serving in Iraq.



Community members, veterans and local supporters gather Jan. 10 at Newsome High School to celebrate the start of a Homes For Our Troops build in Lithia for Army Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Cornelius.

The home is being built through Homes For Our Troops, a national nonprofit that constructs and donates specially adapted, mortgage-free homes for severely injured post-9/11 veterans. Built by Elizabeth Evans Custom Homes, the project represents far more than shelter for Cornelius, who is blind.

"There's always a possibility of hurting yourself on something because it's not made for your disability," Cornelius said.

Cornelius enlisted in the U.S. Army at 19 to support his young family and continue a strong tradition of military service. He is the father of five daughters.

"My outstanding youngest one is here with me, still standing by me," he said. "She's actually my official caregiver as well, doing outstanding things for me."

During his third deployment to Iraq in 2008, Cornelius was serving as a platoon sergeant when an improvised explosive device detonated beneath him, leaving him blind. While still recovering at home, he suffered another devastating loss of his wife.

Despite these hardships, Cornelius refused to be defined by them. He discovered a passion for music and now works locally as a disc jockey. He also became a certified massage therapist, "because they said I probably couldn't do it — but I did it anyway," he said, and remains active with the Wounded Warrior Project.

HFOT homes exceed ADA standards and include more than 40 special adaptations designed to restore independence and reduce fall risk.

"Rails along the walls that help me guide myself around the home, so I'm not tripping and falling over things," Cornelius said.

Safety features extend to the kitchen, including an induction cooktop that automatically shuts off.

"It's not going to turn on unless I try to cook something, and when I take it off, it turns off," he said. "Cool safety features."

The home will also include voice-activated technology to improve nighttime security.

Cornelius chose to build in Lithia to remain close to family and fellow HFOT veteran Rusty Carter. Retired Army Brig. Gen. Tom Landwermeyer, HFOT president and CEO, said the organization's mission is restoring independence.

Construction will continue over the coming months, with volunteer opportunities available.. More information is available at www.hfotusa.org.







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AFTER 24 YEARS, OSPREY OBSERVER LAUNCHES NEW SOUTHSHORE EDITION

By Marie Gilmore



For 24 years, the Osprey Observer has shared the stories that matter most. Now, the team is proud to bring its trusted, hometown journalism to SouthShore.

For 24 years, the *Osprey Observer* has built its reputation on a simple but powerful mission: to tell the positive, hometown stories that matter most to local families, businesses and neighborhoods. Now, that mission is growing.

This month, the *Osprey Observer* announced its expansion into SouthShore with the launch of a brand-new local edition, bringing its community-focused journalism to one of the fastest-growing areas of the region. The new SouthShore edition will spotlight local schools, small businesses, nonprofits, civic leaders and everyday residents whose stories often go untold.

Founded in 2001, the *Osprey Observer* began as a small, community-centered publication dedicated to celebrating what makes local towns unique. Over more than two decades, it has grown steadily, earning the trust of readers by focusing on solutions, successes and the people working to make their communities better. While many news outlets have shifted toward national headlines and negative coverage, the Observer has remained committed to uplifting, hyperlocal news.

"Communities deserve a newspaper that reflects their heart," said the publication's leadership. "SouthShore is full of incredible stories, and we're excited to give them a platform."

The SouthShore edition will follow the same proven model that has sustained the *Osprey Observer* for nearly a quarter century: free distribution, locally written content and strong partnerships with area businesses and organizations. Readers can expect coverage of school achievements, youth sports, local events, new developments and profiles of residents making a difference.

Local leaders and business owners have welcomed the expansion, noting the importance of a trusted hometown paper as the area continues to grow. With new neighborhoods, schools and small businesses emerging across SouthShore, the need for a unifying community voice has never been greater.

The *Osprey Observer's* longevity in an ever-changing media landscape speaks to its relevance and reliability. For 24 years, it has been a staple on kitchen tables and in local shops, connecting neighbors through shared stories and common pride.

As the SouthShore edition launches, the *Osprey Observer* is not just expanding its footprint — it is reaffirming its commitment to positive, community-driven journalism. In a time when good news can be hard to find, the paper continues to prove that hometown stories still matter.

To submit a story idea for a future edition, email editor@osrpeyobserver.com or visit www.ospreyobserver.com.

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT OF TAMPA BAY TO RENAME JA BIZTOWN AS MUMA BIZTOWN

Staff Report



Photo By Hillsborough Schools

Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay (JA Tampa Bay) recently announced that JA BizTown in Tampa Bay and Polk County is now Muma BizTown, recognizing the long-standing and transformative support of Pam and Les Muma. The Mumas' multidecade involvement, including a $5 million planned gift and $2-3 million in operational support, has enriched the BizTown experience for 300,000-plus students across the region.

"This naming represents more than recognition — it reflects decades of shared commitment to education, opportunity and the future of our community," said Richard George, president of Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay. "The Mumas' support has helped ensure BizTown remains a place where students don't just learn about the world of work but experience it in meaningful, lasting ways."

In addition to honoring the Mumas' legacy, the renaming underscores JA Tampa Bay's broader growth strategy. The chapter is expanding to 28 3DE Schools and establishing new experiential learning centers across the region, prompting a modernization of brand architecture and donor recognition that reflects both JA's mission and today's philanthropic landscape.

"We truly believe in Junior Achievement's mission and the power of experiential learning to change lives," said Pam Muma. "After so many years, we've seen firsthand how BizTown, along with their other impactful education programs, sparks confidence and possibility. We look forward to what's ahead for students."

Strengthening Local Relevance and Community Ties

Aligning the Muma name with BizTown strengthens local community relevance and links the program to institutions known for leadership in education and innovation, including the University of South Florida's Muma College of Business and Tampa General's Muma Children's Hospital.

From classrooms to boardrooms and from hospitals to innovation hubs, the Muma name has become synonymous with excellence and impact throughout the Tampa Bay region. By aligning BizTown with this legacy, Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay is elevating philanthropic visibility for a donor whose decades of support have directly contributed to the program's success. This renaming also reinforces the importance of long-term partnerships in advancing JA's mission.

20th Anniversary Celebration

The renaming coincides with BizTown's 20th anniversary. JA Tampa Bay will celebrate this milestone at its Spirit of Achievement event on Thursday, March 5, honoring outstanding partners, educators and volunteers who help make Muma BizTown a cornerstone of experiential learning for students throughout Tampa Bay and Polk County. For more information on the organization, visit www.jatampabay.org.

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BUSCH GARDENS TURNS BACK THE CLOCK WITH RETURN OF REAL MUSIC CONCERT SERIES

Staff Report



Busch Gardens Tampa Bay is turning up the volume once again with the return of its longest-running concert tradition, the Real Music Series. Now through Friday, February 20, the park will host a lineup of celebrated performers delivering timeless hits from the 1970s, '80s and '90s, offering guests a chance to relive the soundtrack of their lives six days a week.

Held Monday through Friday with select Saturday performances, the Real Music Series features live concerts included with park admission. Guests can enjoy performances spanning classic rock, soul, pop, jazz and R&B, all presented by artists known for capturing the sound and spirit of legendary music icons. Shows take place at the Stanleyville Theater, making it easy for visitors to build live entertainment into their day at the park.

New this year, select Saturdays add extra excitement with special performances by iconic acts. Village People brought their high-energy hits to the stage on January 17, following a January 10 appearance by Blue Öyster Cult. These special concerts add a weekend highlight to the weekday-focused series.

The 2026 weekday lineup (all Monday through Friday) began in the week of January 5-9 with Martha Reeves and The Vandellas, followed by Blood, Sweat & Tears from January 12-16. Fans can catch Pablo Cruise and Their Hit Songs from January 19-23, and the Artimus Pyle Band honoring Ronnie Van Zant's Lynyrd Skynyrd from January 26-30. February opens with The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra from February 2-6, Revisiting Creedence from February 9-13 and concludes from February 16-20 with Magic Moments, featuring original singers Theo Peoples, Joe Coleman and Jerome Jackson performing classics from The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Platters and The Drifters.

Park officials said the Real Music Series is designed for guests of all ages, whether they are rediscovering favorite songs or hearing classic hits for the first time. With concerts included in admission, the series offers a value-added experience for families, couples and music lovers alike.

For showtimes and additional details, visit www.buschgardenstampa.com.

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EYE ON BUSINESS

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Fax 657-4469 | Email: jbennett@ospreyobserver.com
Deadline: 15th of each month.



Skoops Poop Celebrates First Year In Business

Skoops Poop, a locally owned and family-run dog waste removal company, recently celebrated its first year in business serving the Bloomingdale, FishHawk, Valrico and surrounding communities. In just 12 months, the company has grown from a small startup into the area's most recommended poop scoop service, a milestone the owner credits to an unwavering focus on quality, communication, and professionalism.

"Our business grew because neighbors talked to neighbors," Springer said. "When customers feel taken care of and know they can rely on you, they're happy to recommend you. That's been the foundation of everything we do."

For more information, visit its website at www.skoopspoop.com.



Brandon Favorite Babes Pizza is now open for lunch from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. daily.

Cultivated Home Design Uses Holistic Approach To Transforming Homes

Cyndi Myers, owner of Cultivated Home Designs and a new FishHawk resident, is an interior designer and energy healer who brings the two modalities together to help people harness the energy of their home and its surrounding environment to improve their overall well-being. A lifelong aficionado of interior design, Myers discovered during her two-and-a-half-year journey with leukemia the magic of energy healing and how the combination of the two altered her mindset and ultimately led to her remission from the disease. Contact Myers to begin your life-changing journey to boost your mind, body and spirit. You can reach her at 518-275-8536 or at cmyers768@gmail.com.



Cyndi Myers, owner of Cultivated Home Designs, uses a holistic approach to transforming homes.

Say YES To You And Your Business Summit

The Say YES to You and Your Business Summit is a one-day immersive experience created for entrepreneurs and high-achieving professional women who are ready to release burnout, reclaim clarity and create harmony between their ambition and their well-being. Founded by Say YES to Your Life Coach Pearl Chiarenza, the summit focuses on helping women bridge the gap between professional achievement and personal fulfillment through mindset coaching, mental fitness tools and real-life strategies they can apply immediately. The event will take place at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview, on Thursday, May 14. For more information, tickets and to see available sponsorship opportunities, visit https://sayyestoyousummit.com/.



Professional Pets Florida

Professional Pets Florida, based in Valrico, is the premier provider of in-home pet-sitting and dog-walking care in the Hillsborough County area. Owned by Lauri Partanio, a former certified animal control officer and veterinary technician, Professional Pets Florida is focused heavily on bringing veterinary medicine and animal welfare to pet sitting and dog walking locally. With the pet industry focusing heavily on 'healthspan' over just lifespan, owners of senior dogs and cats are recognizing that the high-stress environment of a kennel can be detrimental to an aging animal's immune system and cognitive health.

"The 2026 pet parent is more educated than ever. They don't just want a pet sitter; they want a professional that treats their pet like their own," Partanio said.

For additional information, visit its website at https://professionalpets.net/.



Nothing Bundt Cakes Celebrates With BOGO Give Away

Nothing Bundt Cakes has been named America's No. 1 Favorite Food Brand for the second year in a row, according to Technomic and Nation's Restaurant News — a back-to-back honor driven entirely by consumer feedback and praise. To celebrate and thank fans nationwide, the brand is rolling out a VIP sweepstakes and a limited-time buy-one-Bundtlet, get-one-free offer. The three sweepstakes winners will receive a trip to Dallas in 2026 for a behind-the-scenes visit to Nothing Bundt Cakes' headquarters and Bundt Lab, where they'll spend time with the brand's bakers and leadership. In addition, guests can enjoy a BOGO Bundtlet promotion from Monday through Sunday, February 16-22, at participating bakeries. Apply for the sweepstakes at www.nothingbundtcakes.com/americas-favorite-food-brand-sweepstakes/.

DML Property Solutions Offers Residential And Commercial Lawn Care And Landscaping Services

DML Property Solutions offers residential and commercial lawn care and landscaping services, helping homeowners, business owners and HOAs keep their properties clean, beautiful and well maintained. Along with routine services, it offers additional services, including sod removal and installation, irrigation inspections and weed control mulching. Find out more on its website at https://dmlproperty.com/.

Hope And Harvest Continues To Expand

Stefanie Emrith is a FishHawk local and the founder of Hope & Harvest, a charcuterie and experiential events business proudly serving FishHawk and the surrounding communities. Over the past year, Hope & Harvest has successfully served the community through workshops, private celebrations, corporate gatherings and community pop-ups. As a locally owned and community-rooted business, it is continuing to expand its offerings in 2026 through new partnerships, themed events and local venue collaborations. Visit its website at www.hopeandharvesteevents.com to find out more.



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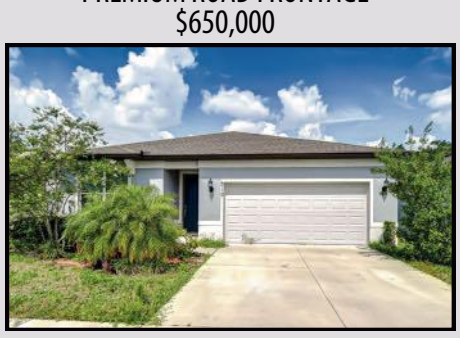
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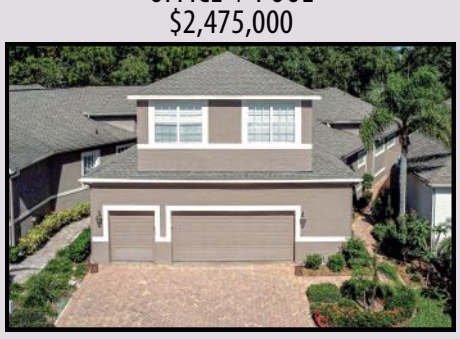
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