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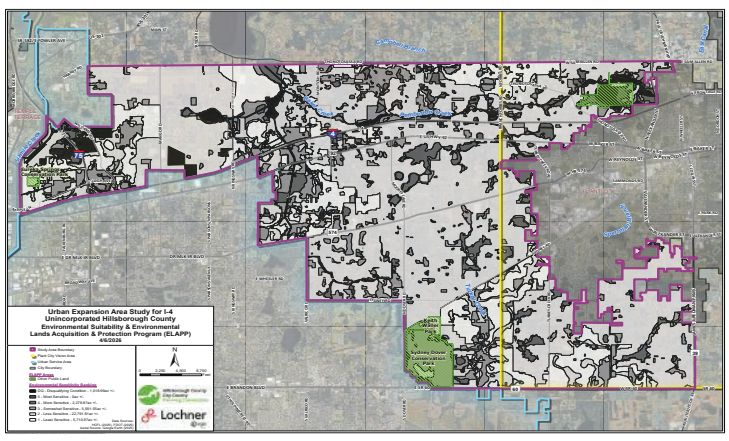
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HILLSBOROUGH PLANNERS MAP POTENTIAL 800 PERCENT GROWTH INCREASE ALONG I-4 CORRIDOR

By Brian Bokor



As Hillsborough County's Urban Service Area (USA) begins to reach its long-term capacity, the Planning Commission has initiated a high-stakes study that could redefine the rural landscape stretching from Thonotosassa to the Plant City line.

The I-4 Corridor Urban Expansion Area Study covers 35,000 acres of what is currently rural land consisting of strawberry fields, cattle ranches and two-lane roads. During a recent virtual meeting, planners made the case that this area, long protected from high-density building, is now the county's primary solution for handling its projected growth.

The core driver of this study is a policy mandate established in 1993. By law, the county must maintain enough land within the Urban Service Area to handle 80 percent of all new growth. The USA is essentially a utility boundary that dictates where the county provides city-style infrastructure, such as central water, sewer and high-density transportation.

However, as available land within those boundaries shrinks, current projections show that the county could fall below the required growth threshold by 2040. To get ahead of the curve, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) directed staff to evaluate expansion zones in South Little Manatee and the I-4 Corridor.

The I-4 Corridor forecasts are striking. While the area currently adds 71 households per year, the County calls for 576 annually by 2050. That is an 800 percent acceleration — an eight-fold jump that creates a massive disconnect between these projections and the reality of our two-lane rural roads and existing services.

This pressure is complicated by shifting markets. Demand for office space has tanked with up to 20 percent vacancy, but industrial and logistics demand remains very strong. With prime I-4/I-75 access, developers are eyeing our Residential-1 agricultural land for large-scale warehouses and distribution centers, even though most residents still rely on private wells and septic systems.

To manage this transition, planners are proposing a nodal development strategy. Under this philosophy, higher-intensity growth would be concentrated in specific nodes, primarily located near existing highway interchanges like Mango Road, McIntosh Road and Branch Forbes Road. The goal is to cluster commercial and industrial uses in these hubs, theoretically allowing the county to preserve the rural character and environmental sensitivity of the land in between.

A central part of the early findings is a new environmental scoring system used to determine the feasibility of this expansion. Planners are aggregating data on floodplains, wildlife habitats and water resource sensitivity to determine which land is most sensitive for development.

Using a color-coded scale, floodways and

Con't on Page 10

SENATOR MOODY HONORS HCA BRANDON NURSE WITH FLORIDA'S FINEST AWARD

Staff Report



Sharon Gibbs, director of critical care at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, (center) stands with Jeff Pollier after being honored with the Florida's Finest Award by Sen. Ashley Moody (left) due to Gibbs' quick actions during Pollier's heart attack at a public community garden.

What began as a life-or-death moment in a community garden has become a powerful story of survival, teamwork and recognition at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital. Recently, Florida Senator Ashley Moody honored Sharon Gibbs, director of critical care at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, with the Florida's Finest Award for her heroic actions that helped save the life of Jeff Pollier.

Jeff Pollier and his wife, Robin Pollier, were present for the surprise presentation, making the moment even more meaningful.

Just months earlier, Jeff Pollier collapsed from a heart attack while gardening with Robin at their plot in the community garden in Sun City Center. By chance, Gibbs was nearby and immediately sprang into action. She began CPR while others retrieved an automated external defibrillator, or AED, delivering the critical care needed to restore his heartbeat.

Emergency responders transported Jeff Pollier to HCA Florida South Shore Hospital, where physicians identified severe blockages in three major coronary arteries. He was then transferred to HCA Florida Brandon Hospital for advanced cardiac care, where a multidisciplinary team performed a life-saving quadruple bypass surgery.

During the award presentation, Moody recognized Gibbs not only for her quick thinking and clinical expertise but also for embodying the compassion and readiness that define health care professionals across Florida. Her actions serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of CPR training and access to AEDs and the impact of being prepared to act in an emergency.

Stories like Jeff Pollier's highlight the critical role of teamwork across HCA Florida Healthcare facilities. From the immediate response in the community to advanced cardiac care in the hospital, every step played a part in giving him a second chance at life.

Now reunited and thriving, Jeff and Robin stood alongside Gibbs during the ceremony, a full circle moment that underscored the lifesaving difference one person and one team can make. For Pollier, that difference means more time with his wife, his family and the life they have built together.

Jeff Pollier described his recovery in simple terms: "I'm living on bonus time now."

For the team at Brandon Hospital and South Shore Hospital, it is a reminder of their shared mission: to care for and improve human life.

IN THIS ISSUE:

SMILEY BEANS COFFEE.....PG 3
BLOOM GIRLS CLUB.....PG 7
NAT'L SAFE BOATING WEEK.....PG 14
YUENGLING BREWERY.....PG 22
EYE ON BUSINESS.....PG 38

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SMILEY BEANS COFFEE BREWS CONNECTIONS WITH RIBBON CUTTING

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly celebrated the grand opening of Smiley Beans Coffee with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held on April 2, following the chamber's 8 a.m. RISE Networking Group gathering.

Chamber President Amber Aaron welcomed attendees and offered words of introduction and congratulations to owners Robert and Natalia Stayton, recognizing their commitment to bringing high-quality, convenient coffee solutions to the Tampa Bay community. In honor of the occasion, BRCC Ambassador Bryan Snyder presented a special proclamation officially declaring April 2 as 'Smiley Beans Coffee Day.'

Smiley Beans Coffee LLC is a locally owned, veteran and woman-owned business specializing in premium bean-to-cup coffee machines designed for offices, gyms, spas and residential communities. Its innovative systems grind whole beans for every cup, delivering fresh espresso, cappuccino, latte, Americano, hot chocolate and other specialty beverages — all from one compact machine.

Following the ribbon cutting, guests enjoyed a live coffee demonstration and complimentary tastings, experiencing firsthand the quality and convenience Smiley Beans Coffee brings to workplaces and shared spaces. The company provides full-service installation and maintenance, premium beans and supplies and flexible service models, including complimentary business coffee programs and pay-per-cup vending systems.

During the ceremony, Robert Stayton expressed his appreciation to the chamber and attendees for their support and encouraged everyone to experience its products and machines firsthand. One of Smiley Beans Coffee's machines is now available at the Brandon Riverview Chamber office, offering members and visitors the opportunity to enjoy fresh, cafe-quality coffee on-site.

Smiley Beans Coffee is dedicated to enhancing workplace environments, boosting employee satisfaction and creating welcoming spaces for clients and guests — all while supporting the local community through strong partnerships.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is proud to welcome Smiley Beans Coffee and looks forward to its continued success and impact within the business community.

For more information about Smiley Beans Coffee, please visit its website at https://smileybeanscoffee.com/ or connect with it through the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce.

SURVIVOR LEADS LOCAL EFFORT FOR BLOOD CANCER UNITED

Staff Report

For Riverview resident Craig Beckinger, life is measured in two chapters: before cancer and after. Now a survivor, Beckinger is turning his personal journey into purpose as he campaigns for Blood Cancer United's 2026 Visionary of the Year, raising critical funds to support local families battling blood cancers.



Beckinger is the founder and CEO of ABC Event Planning.

Beckinger, representing Tampa Bay and North Florida as an All-Star Visionary candidate, said his diagnosis reshaped everything.

"Priorities became clear. Time felt fragile. And survival became deeply personal," he shared. "Surviving didn't just give me a second chance — it gave me a responsibility to help others facing the same fight."

His campaign carries an added layer of meaning this year. Beckinger is dedicating his efforts to the memory of Jill Jofko, his 2023 campaign manager, who passed away from cancer on February 3. He described her as selfless and deeply committed to helping others, saying her legacy continues to inspire the work.

Through Blood Cancer United, funds raised stay within the local community, providing treatment assistance, transportation to chemotherapy, emergency financial support, support groups and patient resources, as well as funding for lifesaving research and advocacy.

In 2023, Beckinger's campaign raised more than $150,000 — a milestone he hopes to build upon this year with the help of community support and a series of upcoming fundraising events.

One of the highlights is the fifth annual 'Runway for a Cause' fashion show, scheduled for Saturday, April 25, from 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. at Aloft Midtown, located at 3650 Midtown Dr. in Tampa. The event will feature spring and summer fashions provided by Dillard's, along with appearances by local personalities, including Babs and Meredith from Wild 94.1, Miss Tampa Halle Burton and Mrs. Universe USA Ambassador Amber Uhler. The brunch and silent auction fundraiser is expected to draw strong community participation.

Additional fundraising efforts include raffle opportunities, such as a $1,000 lottery board featuring scratch-off tickets and a Powerball drawing, as well as a premium 4.5-liter bottle of Jameson Irish whiskey imported from Dublin, Ireland. Winners will be announced during a Facebook Live drawing in mid-May.

The campaign will culminate with a grand finale event at the Motor Enclave, located at 6500 Motor Enclave Way in Tampa, on Friday, May 15, at 7 p.m.

"Every dollar represents hope for a family walking through one of the hardest seasons of their lives," he said.

Beckinger is the founder and CEO of ABC Event Planning. Contact him at 561-876-6845 or email cab92807@gmail.com.

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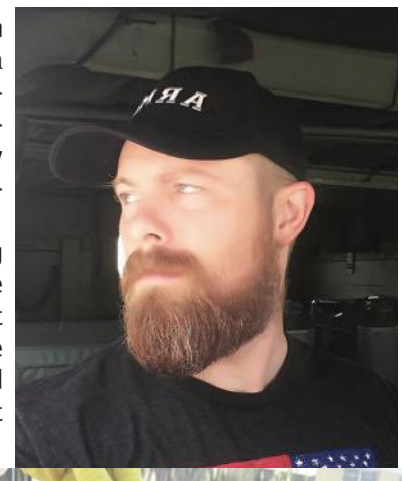

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LOCAL RESIDENT TURNS HOBBY OF BEEKEEPING INTO A SMALL BUSINESS

By Libby Hopkins



Ryan Piatt of Brandon became interested in bees a few years ago after watching a pest control company remove a nest of yellow jacket bees from his mother's home.

"It was very interesting to watch," Piatt said. "The gentleman from the pest control company told me he was also a beekeeper, and we started talking about beekeeping."

That conversation led to Piatt becoming a beekeeper. He spent the next few years learning all he could about bees and keeping them.



"I read tons of books and watched many YouTube videos," Piatt said. "When I had the opportunity to buy a hive, I jumped on it."

From there, Piatt Homestead was born.

Beekeeping is a lot like farming. Some years are good and some years are not so good. Beekeeping offers environmental, economic, personal and health benefits, from pollination and honey production to stress reduction and educational opportunities. Bees are essential pollinators, supporting the growth of fruits, vegetables and wild plants. By keeping bees, you enhance local biodiversity and help maintain healthy ecosystems.

"I have 25 hives but lost a few due to weather conditions," Piatt said. "My goal is to have 40 hives and make beekeeping a full-time job for me and my family. I currently work in construction during the week and do my beekeeping on the weekends."

Piatt's beekeeping business provides services such as honeybee hive installation, honeybee hive removal, swarm rescue, pollination and honey extraction, and he offers honey, wax and of course bees.

"The thing I love most about my business is the conversations I get to have with my clients," Piatt said. "They are very interesting and I love to educate them on the in importance of bees."

Piatt hopes to continue to grow his beekeeping business and educate his clients about bees.

"There are so many health benefits from bees and their honey," Piatt said. "My hope is Piatt Homestead stands out as the kind of beekeeper people look for when they need responsible, humane solutions that preserve the hive, protect allergic household members and potentially allow someone else to care for the bees and harvest the honey."

If you are in need of his services, would like more information, or are interested in raising bees, contact Piatt at piatthomestead@gmail.com or call 813-898-3801.

A COLORFUL TRANSITION: HOUSE OF COLOUR BEGINS NEW CHAPTER

By Olivia Clark

House of Colour Lithia, a business known for helping clients discover confidence through personal color and style analysis, is entering a new chapter as ownership transitions from Barbara Ellis to her longtime associate, Megan Schici.



House of Color owner Barbara Ellis celebrates the new local owner Megan Schici.

Ellis, who first brought House of Colour to the Tampa Bay area after experiencing her own transformation through color analysis, said the journey has always been about more than style.

"I had my color analysis done and it was life-changing information to have," said Ellis. "It made shopping and getting dressed so much easier. I knew I needed to bring the service to Tampa Bay."

Over the years, Ellis built a local following throughout Brandon. She said the most rewarding part of her experience has been the relationships formed and the transformations she witnessed.

"Meeting so many amazing people in our community who have come in for color or style sessions, hearing their stories and seeing their transformations as they apply what they've learned has been incredibly meaningful," said Ellis.

Schici's path to ownership began with her own House of Colour experience in 2021. After initially exploring franchise ownership, she later connected with Ellis at a networking event and joined as her associate.

"That was the day we met, and it truly changed the course of my journey," said Schici, new owner of House of Colour Lithia. "I was fortunate to become her associate, learning from her and working alongside her. An experience that prepared me for this next step into ownership."

"The transition has been totally seamless," said Ellis. "We've worked really well together these last three years."

Schici emphasized the importance of maintaining continuity while introducing her own perspective.

"Maintaining continuity starts with honoring the strong foundation that's already been built," said Schici. "At the same time, I believe growth comes from bringing your own perspective and strengths into the work."

Both owners expressed gratitude to their clients and the community.

"I would like to send a huge thank you to every person whose sat in my chair, referred their friends and family or supported the business," said Ellis. "You are in good hands with Megan."

For Schici, the transition represents a full-circle moment.

"This has been something I've hoped for since I first had my colors done." said Schici.

House of Colour Lithia is located in Lithia. For more information, visit www.houseofcolour.com or call 773-909-0611



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HCA URGENT ER BREAKS GROUND ON BOYETTE ROAD IN RIVERVIEW

By Brian Bokor



HCA Florida Brandon Hospital has broken ground on a new freestanding emergency department at 12910 Boyette Rd. in Riverview, expanding emergency care in one of the fastest-growing areas of southeastern Hillsborough County.

The site, formerly home to the Ace Golf driving range, sits along the busy Boyette Road corridor connecting Riverview to Lithia and FishHawk, an area experiencing steady residential growth.

Hospital leaders, first responders and community members gathered for the April 1 ceremony, underscoring the increasing demand for emergency services across South County.

"This is more than just a 13,000-square-foot building. It's more than a $19 million investment. It represents the commitment to meeting the needs of the community," said Tripp Owings, CEO of HCA Florida Brandon Hospital.

The project builds on the hospital's legacy of serving the community since 1977 and is part of HCA Florida Healthcare's broader statewide network.

When complete, the 13,000-square-foot facility will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with 11 treatment rooms and full-service emergency care, including on-site laboratory services, X-ray and CT imaging.

Rescue Chief Todd Carnell of Hillsborough County Fire Rescue said the new location will improve emergency response.

"They have everything you need in the first few minutes or hours of your emergency. Then they have the ability to transfer you to the hospital by their own ambulance, leaving us available once again," Carnell said. "They bring community medicine back into the community."

Manager of Emergency Services Anna Hendrix, a U.S. Navy veteran and former emergency room nurse, said the project also carries personal significance.

"I live just minutes from here. As a mother, knowing there will be a trusted emergency department nearby gives me peace of mind — the kind every parent hopes for when their child needs help quickly," Hendrix said.

Vice President of Emergency Services Nealy Kinnison emphasized the broader impact.

"These expanded emergency services will save lives in the community by being closer to home for the tens of thousands of residents," Kinnison said.

Freestanding emergency departments provide full-service care, allowing patients to be evaluated and stabilized locally before transfer to a hospital if additional treatment is required.

During the ceremony, Lt. Levic Allen was recognized on his retirement after 34 years with Hillsborough County Fire Rescue.

The new ER adds needed capacity in a rapidly growing area where demand for emergency services continues to rise.

HCA Florida Healthcare operates more than 650 affiliated sites of care statewide, including hospital campuses, freestanding emergency rooms, urgent care centers and physician practices.

FRESH COAT PAINTERS TRANSFORMS FUTURE HOUSE FOR AT-RISK WOMEN

By Jane Owen





Fresh Coat Painter owner Maninder Mundh, Forgotten Angels David Tyler and Cindy Tilley at the Adderly House.

Forgotten Angels, a Valrico nonprofit that helps teenagers who have aged out of foster care and at-risk young adults, is working to open its first transitional home dedicated to young women. Forgotten Angels operates a Valrico on-site housing program for men and already helps at-risk women find housing.

In February, Fresh Coat Painters of Brandon and Valrico painted the exterior of the 3,700-square-foot house at no cost.

Fresh Coat Painters owner Maninder Mundh believes they played a small role in something meaningful.

"Every brushstroke was done with intention — not just to refresh the building but to reflect the strength, courage and new beginnings happening inside. A home should feel welcoming. It should feel like a fresh start. And that's exactly what these young ladies deserve," Mundh said.

Cindy Tilley founded Forgotten Angels, knowing firsthand how hard it is to age out of the foster program. She and her husband, David Tyler, painted the interior of the house. Tilley is grateful for Fresh Coat Painters painting the exterior.

"They were amazing to come along side of us to help. We appreciate them giving their time and resources for us," Tilley said.

The new transitional home will be named the Adderly House to honor Keria Adderly, a young woman who was murdered in 2020. Tilley said Adderly was the kind of person who would help anyone. The Adderly House will be a huge help to at-risk women. It will be more than a house; it will be a home. It will provide a safe, secure home with the added benefits of on-site mentorship, counseling services, job placement assistance and legal assistance.

There is work to be done inside and outside of the house before the Adderly House can open.

"Community support is beautiful. The biggest thing for us is to make sure that financially we can do everything we need to help the kids," Tilley said.

Forgotten Angels changes lives by giving life skills and love to everyone who comes through the program. Tilley and Tyler provide forever support; everyone they assist through Forgotten Angels is family.

To learn more about Forgotten Angels and how to support it, visit www.forgottenangelsflorida.org.

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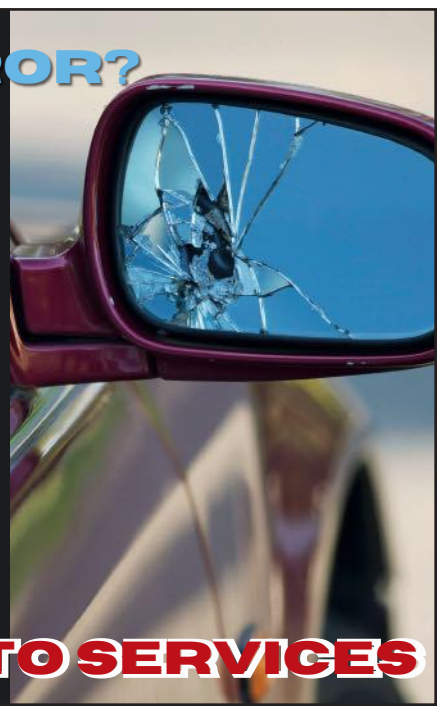


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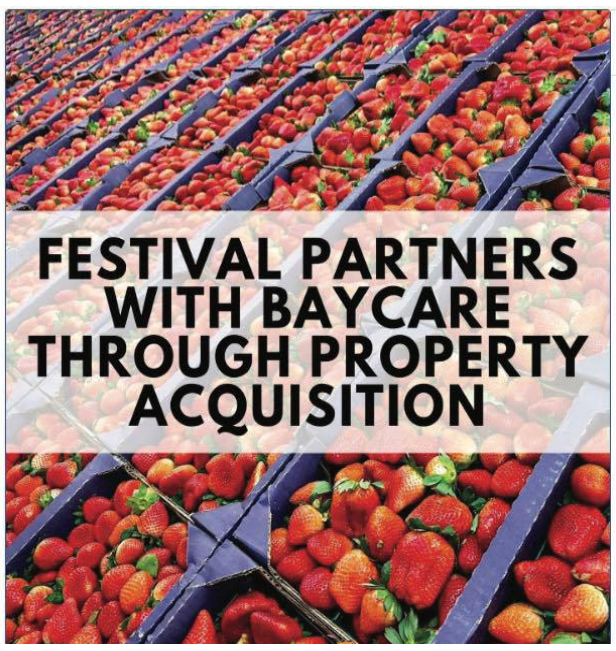


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STRAWBERRY FEST AND BAYCARE INVEST IN FUTURE WITH PROPERTY PURCHASE

Staff Report



The Florida Strawberry Festival announced recently that its partnership with BayCare Health System has widened through the purchase of the property that was formerly home to South Florida Baptist Hospital, creating new opportunities for future festival growth and improved guest access.

The newly acquired property will play an important role in supporting the festival's long-term planning, particularly by providing additional parking and operational space for close to 600,000 guests who attend the event each year in Plant City.

Festival leadership said the expansion reflects a shared commitment between the festival and BayCare to continue investing in the community while preparing for the future of one of Florida's most recognized annual events.

"This is an exciting step forward for the Florida Strawberry Festival and for our partnership with BayCare," said President of the Florida Strawberry Festival Kyle Robinson. "The addition of this property helps us plan for the long-term growth of the festival and improve the experience for our guests. BayCare has been an incredible partner, from the multipurpose building showcased during the 2026 festival to now helping make this property acquisition possible. Together, we're investing in the future of the festival and the community we serve."

The expanded partnership builds on BayCare's ongoing support of the festival, including the 15,000-square-foot BayCare multipurpose building that debuted during the 2026 event. The facility provides a climate-controlled gathering space featuring restrooms, a showcase stage, seating areas, vendor space and a permanent strawberry shortcake location celebrating one of the festival's most beloved traditions.

Located just north of the Milton E. Hull Building and south of the Amscot Main Ticket Gate 1, the building was designed to serve both festival guests and the community year-round as a flexible venue for receptions, corporate events, trade shows, competitions and other gatherings. Festival leaders said the property purchase and facility improvements represent a continued investment in ensuring the festival can accommodate growing attendance while maintaining a welcoming and accessible experience for guests.

MAKING A MORE WATER-WISE FLORIDA DURING WATER CONSERVATION MONTH

By Tal Coley, FNGLA



April is Water Conservation Month in Florida, a time to reflect on one of our state's most valuable — and most vulnerable — resources.

Water defines Florida. It shapes our environment, fuels our economy and sustains our quality of life. From our world-renowned springs to our coastlines, water is at the heart of what makes this state special. But it is not limitless.

Right now, much of Florida is experiencing drought conditions. The Southwest Florida Water Management District announced that Citrus, DeSoto, Hardee, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota and Sumter counties, as well as portions of Charlotte, Highlands and Lake counties, are under Phase III extreme water restrictions.

The restrictions include once-a-week lawn watering, tighter irrigation hours and other mandates for car washing and aesthetic fountains.

The good news is that Floridians have more tools than ever to be part of the solution.

Outdoor water use presents one of the greatest opportunities for impact. In many households, irrigation systems account for a significant portion of total water use. During times of drought, even small changes in how we manage our landscapes can make a meaningful difference.

That's where expertise matters.

Florida's irrigation specialists, landscape architects and others trained and experienced in smart irrigation are uniquely equipped to help property owners navigate these challenges.

The principle of 'right plant, right place' is a proven approach to building landscapes that thrive in Florida's climate, even under water restrictions. Drought-tolerant plants, proper soil preparation and thoughtful design can significantly reduce the need for supplemental irrigation.

Technology also plays a critical role. Smart irrigation systems, including those that respond to weather conditions or soil moisture levels, ensure that landscapes receive only the water they actually need. These systems not only conserve water but also help homeowners and businesses reduce utility costs over time.

Horticulture professionals stay on top of trends and seek out education, training and certifications to help Floridians conserve water. They are aware of programs like Florida Water Star, a voluntary certification program for homes and commercial buildings that promotes water efficiency both indoors and outdoors. It sets standards for features like plumbing fixtures, appliances, landscape design and irrigation systems to reduce water use.

Water conservation is not just about responding to drought but also about preparing for the future. Growers are cultivating resilient plant varieties, and landscapers are implementing efficient designs.

This Water Conservation Month, every Floridian is encouraged to take a closer look at how water is used. Small, informed decisions innovation can collectively make a significant impact.

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BLOOM GIRLS CLUB GALA TO CELEBRATE MENTORSHIP, EMPOWER YOUNG WOMEN

Staff Report



BLOOM Girls Club will host its annual fundraising gala on Sunday, May 17, bringing together community members, supporters and students for an evening dedicated to celebrating young women and raising funds to expand mentorship programs across the region.

The event, titled the BLOOM Girls Club Fundraising Gala, will be held at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview, beginning at 5 p.m. The evening will serve as both an awards ceremony and a fundraiser supporting the organization's continued growth and programming.

Founded as a school-based initiative and now operating as a nonprofit, BLOOM Girls Club has spent the past six years working to empower young women through mentorship, academic support, and leadership development. To date, the organization has served more than 150 girls, many of whom have faced academic, emotional and personal challenges.

The organization's name reflects its core values: Belong, Love, Overcome, Overachieve and Motivate. Leaders said those principles guide every program and interaction, with an emphasis on creating a safe and supportive environment where girls feel seen, heard and valued.

Organizers describe the gala as a signature event that honors student achievement while also helping sustain and expand programming. The evening will highlight the accomplishments of participating students and recognize the contributions of community partners and supporters who have helped the program grow.

In 2026, BLOOM Girls Club plans to expand its mentorship initiatives, increase college and career preparation opportunities, host leadership retreats and offer an all-day girls conference designed to reach even more students. The organization also provides enrichment activities, positive role models and academic support intended to help participants thrive both personally and academically.

Funds raised during the gala will directly support these goals, including the expansion of program resources and enrichment opportunities. A portion of proceeds will also fund three senior scholarships, helping graduating students pursue their next steps in education and career development.

Sponsorships and donations remain a key focus for organizers, who are inviting local businesses, community leaders and residents to attend and support the mission. Organizers said community involvement is essential to ensuring every participant has access to the tools and encouragement they need to succeed.

For more information, visit www.bloomgirlsclub.org.



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Impact Teen Huddle, Derby Party, Homeschool Day...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Local Preschool Raises $3,500 For St. Jude's

A Children's Kastle Early Learning Center in Winthrop recently hosted its annual Spring Fling fundraiser in support of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. With the incredible support of its families, staff and local community, it was able to raise over $3,500 this year alone. This brings its total donations to St. Jude to more than $70,000 over the years. Supporting St. Jude is something very close to its heart. Families never receive a bill for treatment, travel, housing or food. Its only focus is helping families' children get better, and it is honored to play even a small part in supporting that mission.

A Children's Kastle is located at 11297 Winthrop Main St. in Riverview, visit its website at https://achildrenskastle.com/ to find out more about the services it offers.

Community Service Scholarship

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

The Derby: A Fundraising Event Benefiting ECHO

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

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

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

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

Impact Teen Huddles

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

Music And Art Homeschool Day At Cracker Country

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

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

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

Mother's Day Celebration

Join the Brandon Caribbean American Cultural Association (BCACA) for The Queens Soiree, A Mother's Day Celebration, honoring the grace, strength and legacy of mothers. This black-tie, formal event will take place on Saturday, May 9, at 117 Windhorst Rd. in Brandon. There is limited seating, so please book early. Pay via Zelle at bcacainc@gmail.com; tickets are $30 if purchased by Monday, April 27. If you have questions, please call 813-318-1384.

HILLSBOROUGH CELEBRATES STANDOUT JROTC CADETS, NAMES CADET OF YEAR

Staff Report





C/LTC Marielis Pena from Brandon High School.



C/CDR Andrew Papp from Riverview High School.



C/LTC Isabelle Rivera from Newsome High School.

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

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

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

This year's winners are:

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

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

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GIRL SCOUTS LAUNCH HANDS-ON HEALTHCARE PATCH PROGRAM WITH HCA FLORIDA HEALTHCARE

Staff Report



Girl Scouts from West Central Florida participate in hands-on simulation lab activities during the new Healthcare Patch Program at HCA Brandon.

A new pilot program is giving Girl Scouts in West Central Florida a closer look at careers in health care through hands-on training, hospital tours and direct interactions with medical professionals.

Girl Scouts of West Central Florida has partnered with HCA Florida Healthcare to launch a Healthcare Patch Program designed to inspire middle and high school students to explore future careers in medicine and related fields. The program officially launched on April 3 with immersive learning experiences held at two Brandon locations.

Participants spent part of the day at the HCA Healthcare Center for Clinical Advancement, where students worked in simulation labs using lifelike mannequins and practiced clinical scenarios that mirrored real hospital situations. Demonstrations included cardiac care, respiratory treatment, and pediatric care, giving students a realistic sense of how health care teams respond in fast-paced environments.

The experience continued at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, where students were taken behind the scenes to observe hospital operations and meet doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. The goal was to introduce participants to the wide range of career pathways available in the medical field and show how different roles work together to deliver patient care.

Organizers said the program was made possible through a grant from the HCA Healthcare Foundation Healthier Tomorrow Fund, which supports initiatives aimed at building a stronger future health care workforce. The patch program is intended to spark early interest among students who may be considering health care as a career path, while also helping older students prepare for higher education and training programs.

Students heard from a diverse panel of professionals representing fields such as nursing, pharmacy, respiratory therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, first response, and health care supply chain management. Educational partners also included Hillsborough College and Galen College of Nursing.

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, a 479-bed acute care facility accredited by The Joint Commission, serves as one of the region's major health care providers.

Through the new patch program, organizers hope to continue building awareness and enthusiasm for health care careers while giving students meaningful, real-world exposure to the medical field at an early age.

The hospital is located at 119 Oakfield Dr. in Brandon. For more, visit the website at www.hcafloridabrandon.com.

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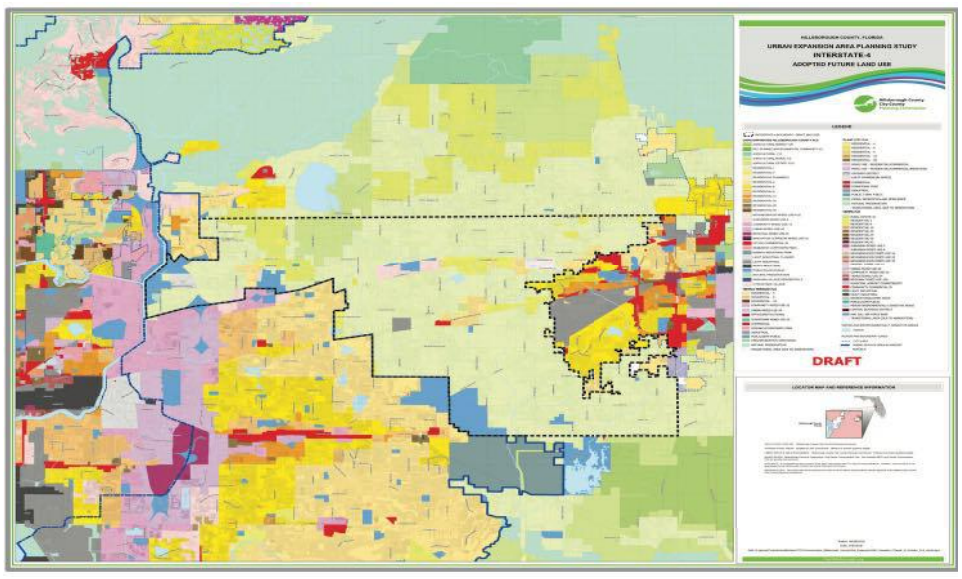
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800 PERCENT GROWTH INCREASE ALONG I-4 CORRIDOR CON'T...FROM PAGE 1

By Brian Bokor



highly sensitive habitats are marked for protection, while white and light-colored areas are seen as the most feasible for expansion. This data will be critical as the county moves into Stage 2 Land Use Workshops this summer, where the actual lines on the map will begin to be drawn.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the expansion remains the infrastructure and the associated costs. The study area is currently a utility desert by urban standards, and bringing central water and wastewater to 35,000 acres is a massive, multimillion-dollar endeavor.

Furthermore, the transportation network is comprised mostly of narrow rural roads that are already feeling the pinch of traffic. While road-widening projects are slated for major arteries like State Road 60 and I-4, the internal collector roads remain a major point of contention.

A focus of the study's scope involves reviewing fees and funding sources, leaving residents to wonder if new development will pay its own way through impact fees or if the financial burden will fall on the broader taxpayer base.

This study is only in the first of a four-stage process, and planners are emphasizing that no final decisions have been made. The Planning Commission is utilizing a community asset mapping tool that allows residents to go online and identify what they value most, from historic sites to scenic views, which they believe should be off-limits to developers.

"We want to understand what the community wants before we go about recommending expansions," the project team stated during the presentation.

The study is scheduled to conclude in the fall of 2026, when final recommendations will be sent to the Board of County Commissioners. For more information and to take the stage-one survey, residents can visit https://planhillsborough.org/.

Detailed data slides and a full recording of the virtual meeting can be found via the project's YouTube channel or by visiting the I-4 Corridor www.planhillsborough.org/.

BANK OF CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPANDS WITH NEW BRANDON LOAN OFFICE

Staff Report

Bank of Central Florida proudly announces the opening of its new loan production office (LPO) in Brandon, which officially opened on February 23. This location marks the bank's seventh office along the I-4 corridor and represents continued growth throughout the Tampa Bay market.



Leading the East Hillsborough market is Robert Cobb, East Hillsborough Team Lead, alongside Jeff Campbell (pictured), Commercial Relationship Manager.

The new office is located at 513 Westbrook Ave., Ste. 104, in Brandon. As a loan production office, the Brandon team will assist clients with loan applications, mortgage and loan information and other loan-related services by appointment.

Leading the East Hillsborough market is Robert Cobb, East Hillsborough team lead, alongside Jeff Campbell, commercial relationship manager, one of the bank's newest team members. Both Cobb and Campbell bring deep roots in the Brandon community and extensive knowledge of the local business landscape. Together, they are committed to equipping businesses with the financial tools and guidance needed to achieve their goals.

The East Hillsborough market is part of the bank's broader Tampa Bay expansion, led by Lauren Fernandez, Tampa Bay market executive.

"Relationship building is what we do at Bank of Central Florida," said Fernandez. "We have hired well-known, top talent for this market that will allow us to quickly get more entrenched in the East Hillsborough area."

The bank's expansion strategy combines experienced relationship bankers with modern technology. Clients benefit from comprehensive online and mobile banking services that handle most day-to-day money management needs. For growing businesses with more complex requirements, the bank offers a robust treasury management platform. The treasury management team works directly alongside bankers, visiting business clients and tailoring solutions specific to their industry and operational needs.

At the core of Bank of Central Florida's model is relationship banking. The team prioritizes accessibility, responsiveness and transparent communication. Clients have direct access to their bankers, and calls are answered by a dedicated relationship team committed to delivering a high level of service. This approach fosters trust, reliability and long-term partnerships.

CEO and Chairman of the Board Paul Noris commented on the expansion, stating, "The bank and its team's ability to continue growing and expanding its presence reflects the acceptance of the bank's operating model and commitment to exceptional client experience."

For more information or to schedule an appointment at the Brandon loan production office, please contact Bank of Central Florida directly.

For more information, visit the website at www.bankofcentralflorida.com.



HILLSBOROUGH COLLEGE UNVEILS NEW BRAND IDENTITY AND LOGO

Staff Report

Hillsborough College has unveiled a refreshed brand identity featuring a new logo, updated visual system and an enhanced college seal. The new brand reflects a thoughtful modernization of the college's image, designed to better represent the institution's growth, purpose and long-standing connection to the community.

"Hillsborough College's new branding captures the spirit of the college today: student-centered and deeply connected to the community," said Dr. Kenneth Atwater, Hillsborough College president. "The design honors our past while offering a more modern look at who we are, what we offer and where we're going. It underscores our commitment to expanding opportunity, advancing academic excellence and staying responsive to the evolving needs of our community."

The new brand identity was developed in partnership with Sensory 5 and Trickey Jennus, which incorporated feedback from college leadership, faculty, staff and students to create a refreshed look that reflects the college's mission and values. The updated system blends modern design elements that bring the brand forward with intentional references to the college's legacy visuals, resulting in a more cohesive and contemporary identity that honors the institution's foundation.

"Our visual identity is often the first way people experience the college, and this refreshed brand helps us tell our story with greater clarity and confidence," said Angela Walters Eveillard, executive director of marketing and public relations at Hillsborough College. "It introduces a more modern look while still echoing familiar elements that connect back to our history. Together, those qualities create an identity that feels current, authentic and true to who we are today and moving forward."

Hillsborough College offers more than 200 academic options, including a Bachelor of Science in nursing, associate in arts and associate in science degrees, college credit certificates, postsecondary adult vocational certificates, advanced technical diplomas and certificates as well as continuing education and lifelong learning courses.

The new brand aims to unify how these opportunities are presented across print, digital and physical spaces, providing a consistent experience for students, faculty, staff and community partners.

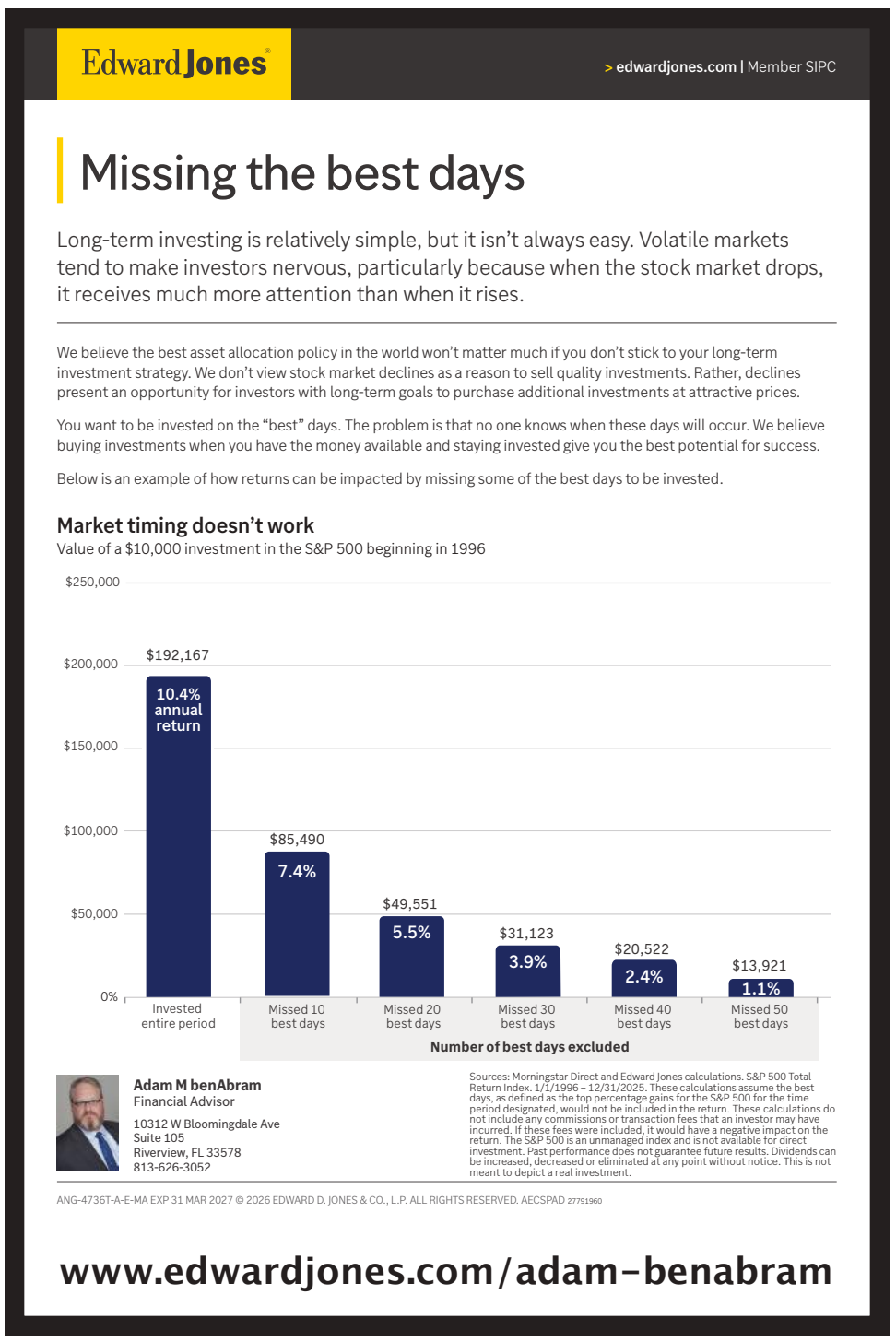
The rollout includes updated signage across campuses, new digital assets, refreshed print materials and a cohesive visual system that will be incorporated into student communications, outreach materials and community engagement initiatives.

Hillsborough College serves more than 46,000 students annually at its five campuses located throughout Tampa Bay. For more information, visit www.hcfl.edu.









BELL SHOALS ACADEMY INVESTS IN FUTURE WITH NEW HIGH SCHOOL

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESERVING BRANDON: GRASSROOTS EFFORT KEEPS HISTORY ALIVE

Staff Report

There is something special about a community that chooses to remember where it came from.

In a place like Brandon, a community that has grown rapidly, it can sometimes feel like history is being replaced faster than it can be preserved. What was once a small town founded in the 1800s has transformed into a vibrant area filled with neighborhoods, businesses and families.

But even as Brandon continues to grow, its story still lives all around us in the names of our streets, in historic homes and in the memories of longtime residents.

That is where Preserving Brandon began.

Nearly two years ago, what started as a simple observation turned into something much more meaningful. There was no central place for people to come together to share stories, learn about local history or support preservation efforts in our community. Rather than waiting for something to exist, a group of passionate residents came together to create it.

Preserving Brandon was born from that shared desire to connect, educate and celebrate the rich heritage of our community.

Since then, what began as a grassroots effort has grown into a vibrant movement. Today, we are proud to be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization bringing together neighbors, historians and community partners who share a common goal: ensuring that Brandon's history is not lost but honored and preserved for future generations.

Through community meetings, partnerships and events, we have created a space where stories are shared, connections are built and history comes to life. Whether it's highlighting historic landmarks, supporting local preservation initiatives or simply gathering to learn from one another, every effort helps strengthen our community.

This May marks our two-year anniversary, a milestone that belongs not just to our organization but also to the entire community that has supported and believed in this mission.

Preserving Brandon is, at its heart, about people. It is about honoring those who came before us, celebrating who we are today and ensuring that future generations will always have a place to look back and say, "This is where we came from."

And we are just getting started.

Everyone in the community can play a part. Please get in touch with us at preservingbrandon@gmail.com.

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YOUR ARE NOTIFED that an action of dissolution of marriage has been filed against you and you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on Gerana Thegenis, whose address is 13130 Garnet Raspberry Ave., Wimauma, FL 33598 on or before May 12, 2026 and file the original with the Clerk of this Court at 800 East Twiggs Street, Tampa, FL 33602, Room 101 before service on Petitioner or immediately thereafter. If you fail to do so, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

TAMPA BAY HEAT ARCHERY WINS BIG AT STATE TOURNAMENT

By Emily Harper

Tampa Bay HEAT Archery is a faith-based program that allows homeschooling students to learn and compete in the sport of archery. This program was formed many years ago when Tampa Bay HEAT Homeschooling was created by Teresa Manganello.

"We put God first and compete for the experience not the accolades," said the Director of Tampa Bay HEAT Archery Katora Whitfield.

This program supports the development of 61 athletes, ranging from ages 9-19. Within HEAT Archery, there are three divisions dividing athletes up by grade level, including elementary school, middle school and high school.

Team practice is held at the Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale, located at 710 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon, between the months of September and May. There on Monday afternoons, its athletes learn the foundation of the sport, allowing them to feel confident in their skills.

The program is guided by the team motto, 'Shoot straight,' meaning to always do the right thing, even when no one is watching. Before competing, the teams gather around in a circle, putting their hands in, and shout in unison, 'Shoot straight.'

Recently, the program achieved remarkable success in the NASP State Tournament, winning five out of the six first-place trophies. All its divisions placed first in the 3D team awards, elementary school and high school got first place in the bullseye team awards, and middle school placed second in the bullseye team awards.







HEAT Archery is now focused physically and mentally on nationals. This tournament will be held in Kentucky on Friday, May 8, and will have families traveling for their archers to compete.

"It is extremely rewarding to work with these individuals. From the youngest to the oldest there are many different personalities and passions that help motivate the rest. Our archers are welcoming and respectful, making any newcomer feel like they belong," said Whitfield.

To get involved, contact archery@tampabayheat.org. Additionally, there is more information about sports at the website www.tampabayheat.org/sports/.

HOW MCAULEY FINE JEWELRY TURNS MEMORIES INTO MASTERPIECES

By Kelly Wise Valdes

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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TGH Senior Center of Brandon

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Dr. Leila Shafiq
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HONEST FOOD GUY GIVES REVIEWS AT A LOCAL RESTAURANT NEAR YOU

By Libby Hopkins



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Staff Report



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

About Quest Inc.

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

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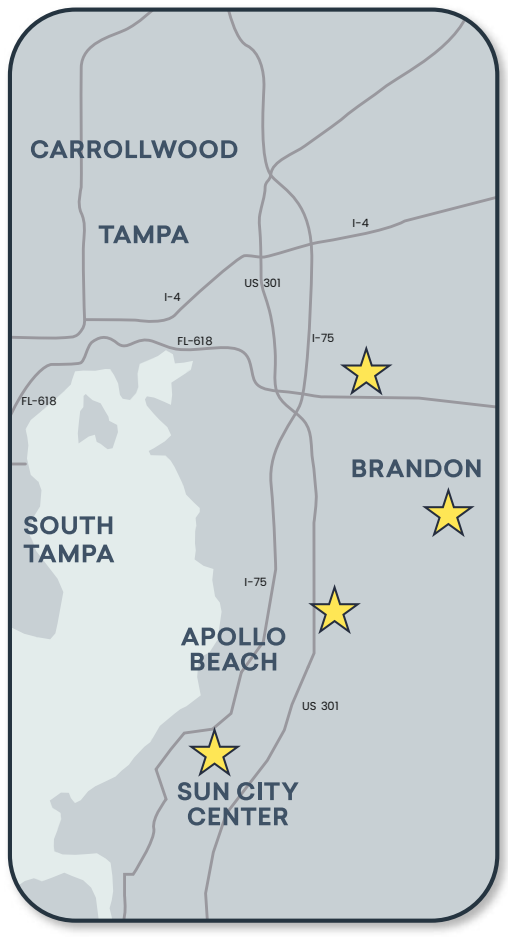
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SAFETY AND BOATING TIPS HIGHLIGHT SAFE BOATING WEEK IN RIVERVIEW

Staff Report



National Safe Boating Week returns from Saturday through Friday, May 16-22, marking the annual kickoff of the Safe Boating Campaign, a global effort encouraging boaters to enjoy the water responsibly. This week serves as a reminder for all boaters to refresh their safety skills and prepare for the upcoming season.

Flotilla 74, Brandon, will support the campaign with two local events at Williams Park, located at 9425 U.S. 41 S. in Riverview:

• Free Vessel Safety Checks on Sunday, May 17.

• Hillsborough County Marine Safety Event on Friday, May 22, 9 a.m.-12 Noon.

According to U.S. Coast Guard statistics, drowning accounts for three out of four recreational boating fatalities, and 87 percent of those who drowned were not wearing life jackets. Choosing the right life jacket — U.S. Coast Guard approved, activity-appropriate and properly fitted — is one of the simplest ways to stay safe on the water.

Top safety tips from the National Safe Boating Council:

• Take a boating safety course. Training options are available for all experience levels.

• Check your equipment. Schedule a free vessel safety check to ensure required gear is present and working.

• File a float plan. Share your itinerary, passenger list, vessel details and communication equipment with someone on shore.

• Wear a life jacket — every time. A stowed life jacket cannot save a life.

• Use an engine cut-off switch. It's the law and prevents runaway vessels if the operator falls overboard.

• Monitor the weather. Check forecasts before and during your trip.

• Stay aware. Know your surroundings, speed zones and navigation hazards.

• Never boat under the influence. Designate a sober skipper.

• Keep communication devices on hand. Carry more than one option that works when wet.

The Safe Boating Campaign is funded through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund and administered by the U.S. Coast Guard. Free and paid educational resources are available at https://safeboatingcampaign.com/.

The National Safe Boating Council, established in 1958, continues to lead national efforts in boating safety education and professional development. Learn more at www.safeboatingcouncil.org.

GASWORX DISTRICT PLANS LIVE NATION MUSIC VENUE WITH SEATING FOR 4,300

Staff Report



KETTLER, a nationally recognized real estate investor, developer and property management company, recently announced plans to deliver a 4,300-capacity music venue within the Gasworx district. The venue will be operated by Live Nation and is designed to complement Tampa's growing live music ecosystem while honoring the unique culture, energy and historic character of Ybor City.

The planned midsize venue is slated to open in late 2028 and will provide an intimate setting capable of hosting a wide range of artists and performances, filling a gap in Tampa's live entertainment landscape. The venue will attract touring artists and strengthen the broader music scene across the Tampa Bay region. Located on North 15th Street near the future marketplace, the site is steps from the Seventh Avenue entertainment corridor, the Centro Ybor parking garage and a future TECO Streetcar stop along Channelside Drive.

"Ybor City has a distinct character and a long tradition of nightlife and live music," said James Nozar, president of development at KETTLER. "Our goal is to create a venue that carries that legacy forward by adding a new destination for residents, visitors and artists. It will bring a distinct atmosphere to the neighborhood and give people another reason to experience Ybor and stay longer."

"We're proud to partner with KETTLER to bring this venue to life," said Brittany Flores, Live Nation's Florida market president. "This project is a meaningful investment in Tampa and in the future of its music scene, growing the market and giving fans more of the shows they want close to home. We're building something that reflects the energy and history of Ybor City and helps grow Tampa as a destination for live music."

As a long-term investment in the community, the venue is designed to strengthen the local economy and support continued growth. The venue is projected to generate $80 million in annual economic impact while drawing visitors who will support nearby restaurants, hotels and local businesses. It will also support approximately 440 jobs and is expected to contribute roughly $6 million each year in state and local tax revenue. The venue will also be available for private and corporate events.

"This investment reflects the strong momentum and confidence behind Tampa Bay's economy," said Craig J. Richard, president and CEO of the Tampa Bay Economic Development Council.

Upon completion, Gasworx will deliver approximately 5,000 new residences, over 500,000 square feet of new trophy office space and 120,000 square feet of ground-floor retail, including a 28,000-square-foot marketplace opening in 2027 that will feature restaurants, market-style offerings and unique retail, along with a new 1-acre park as a central gathering space for residents and visitors.

Gasworx is a joint venture between KETTLER, local developer Darryl Shaw and international property company PPF Real Estate.

For more information on Gasworx and leasing, visit https://gasworx.com/.



SENATOR MOODY PRAISES WOMEN VETERANS HONOR FLIGHT

Staff Report



Senator Ashley Moody thanked a group of Florida veterans taking part in an all-female Honor Flight to the nation's capital in March. Moody met with the group at the Lincoln Memorial, thanking the women for their service to the country. More than 120 veterans participated in the Honor Flight from Lakeland, with the oldest being a Korean War veteran, age 91.

Moody said, "Our freedom exists because of the courage and sacrifice of the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces. Today, I had the privilege of welcoming a group of Florida veterans as they toured the national memorials honoring their service. This extraordinary group of all-female service members shared powerful stories from their time defending our nation. Though we can never fully repay them for their sacrifice, it was an honor to meet them and offer my heartfelt thanks."

This special all-female Honor Flight from Lakeland included female veterans ages 32-91 who have served in every branch of service and in every conflict since the Korean War. This group of 121 veterans gave a collective total of 1,474 years of service to the United States.

Honor Flights are special trips planned for veterans of America's wars to travel to Washington, D.C., from across the country to visit the monuments of the respective wars they fought in and honor the service and sacrifice of the veterans and their loved ones.

Florida is home to more than 1.4 million veterans, one of the largest populations in the nation.

Moody is committed to fighting for U.S. military members and veterans. Since becoming a United States senator, Moody has, among other things:

• Co-sponsored the Military Spouse Hiring Act to address difficulties service members' families face when looking for work.

• Supported the Veterans Education and Technical Skills (VETS) Opportunity Act, which would expand educational benefits for veterans.

• Supported the Restore VA Accountability Act of 2025, which would help ensure that only the most dedicated individuals can serve veterans.

• Held a town hall with VA Secretary Doug Collins in Tampa to discuss issues facing veterans.

• Requested President Trump to send F-35As to Homestead Air Reserve Base.

• Recognized 200 years of U.S. Navy presence in Pensacola and discussed the critical importance of the Navy and Coast Guard's presence in the Florida Panhandle.

When Moody served as Florida's attorney general, she worked through the Florida Military and Veterans Assistance Program to assist service members and their families who have been affected by scams. From 2019 and January 2025, when Senator Moody left the Attorney General's office, MVAP recovered more than $3.7 million from over 2,300 complaints for affected military members and their families.

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

Staff Report

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





STRAZ CENTER BROADWAY SEASON INCLUDES WICKED, HAMILTON & MORE

Staff Report



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



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

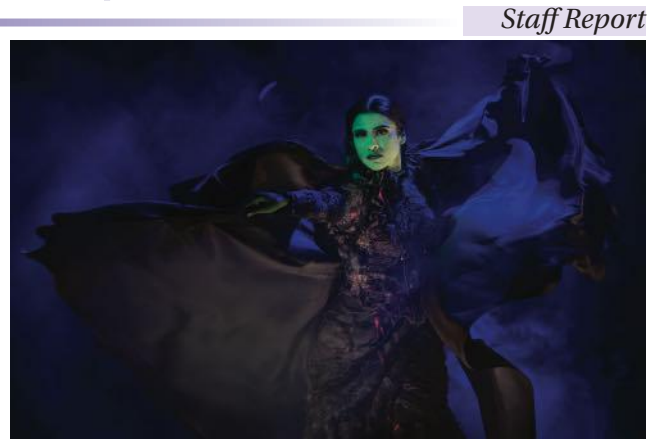


Photo by Joan Marcus
Jessie Davidson as Elphaba in the national tour of Wicked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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







FIRE RESCUE LT. ALLEN RETIRES AFTER 34 YEARS OF SERVICE

By Marie Gilmore



Retiring Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Lt. Levic Allen (center) is pictured with fellow firefighters as he completes his final day after a 34-year career in fire service.

After more than three decades of service, Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Lt. Levic Allen is hanging up his gear and retiring after a 34-year career dedicated to protecting others.

Allen began his firefighting journey in Manatee County before spending the past 30 years serving in Hillsborough County. His final assignment was at Station 2 in Lithia, where he served as a lieutenant, helping protect families in Lithia and the more rural Keysville area.

Reflecting on his long career, Allen said it was always about people.

"The best part of the job is serving the public, and that's really what you get into the job for," he said. "The schedule is good, the people are awesome and they become an extended family."

Firefighters work demanding schedules, typically 24 hours on duty followed by 48 hours off, but Allen said the camaraderie and sense of purpose make it worthwhile. He emphasized that strong interpersonal skills are essential in the profession.

"You have to have people skills to do this job," Allen said. "Start as an EMT, get your fire certification and become a paramedic — that is the best way to get into this job."

Throughout his career, Allen experienced both routine calls and extraordinary moments. In 2005, he was part of the Tampa Bay Area Urban Search and Rescue Team, made up of members from multiple regional departments. The team was among the first to respond in Mississippi following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, providing critical aid in the aftermath of the historic storm.

Allen also noted that the job requires a commitment to lifelong learning.

"We are always learning, taking courses and advancing our knowledge throughout our career," he said.

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue is one of the largest and busiest departments in the state, responding to nearly 140,000 calls each year across 909 square miles. With more than 1,200 personnel and dozens of stations, the department provides a wide range of emergency services, from fire suppression to advanced life support and disaster response.

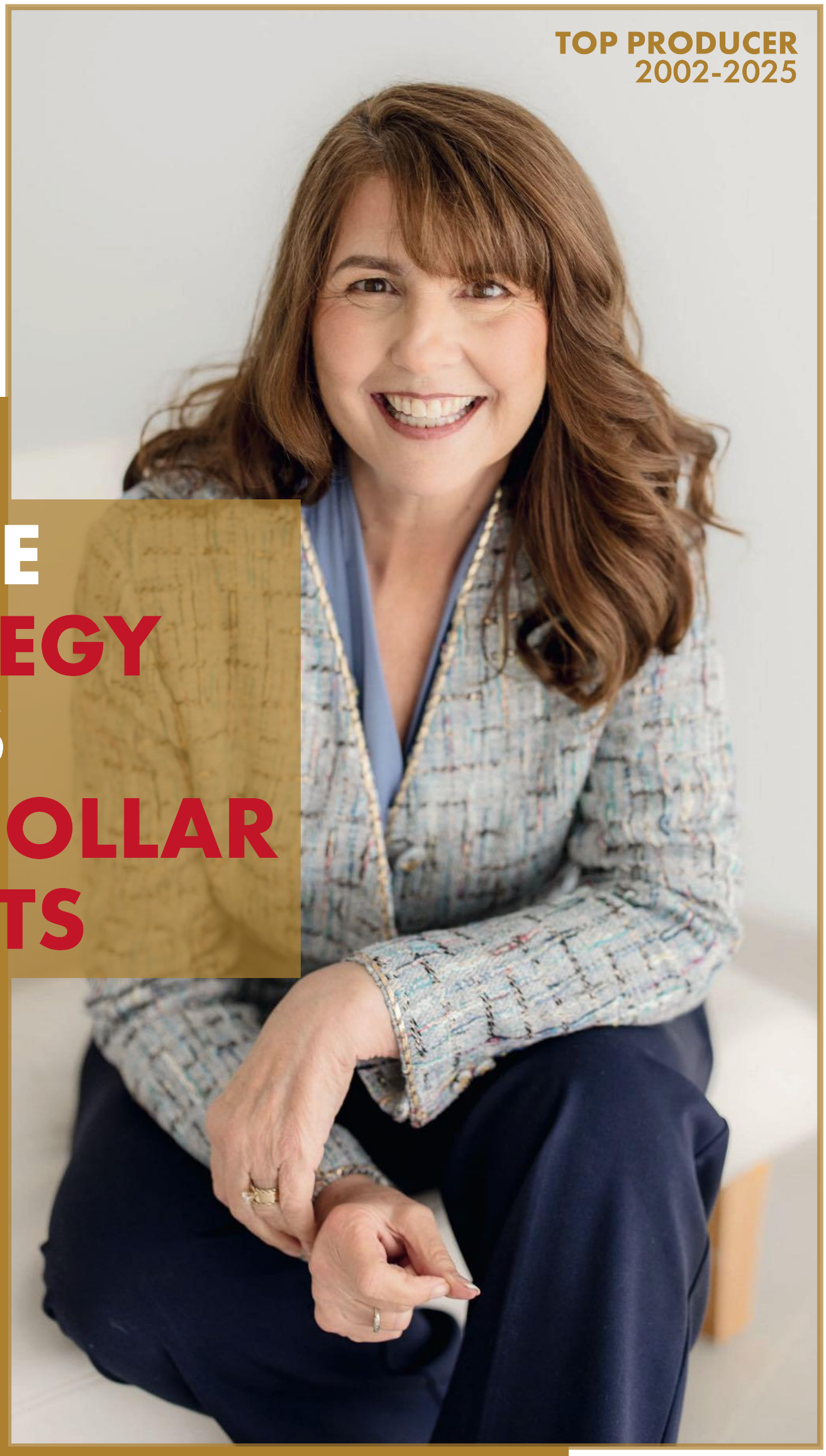
After a distinguished career marked by dedication, courage and compassion, Allen is looking forward to his next chapter. He and his wife plan to relocate to West Virginia, where he will begin a well-earned retirement.

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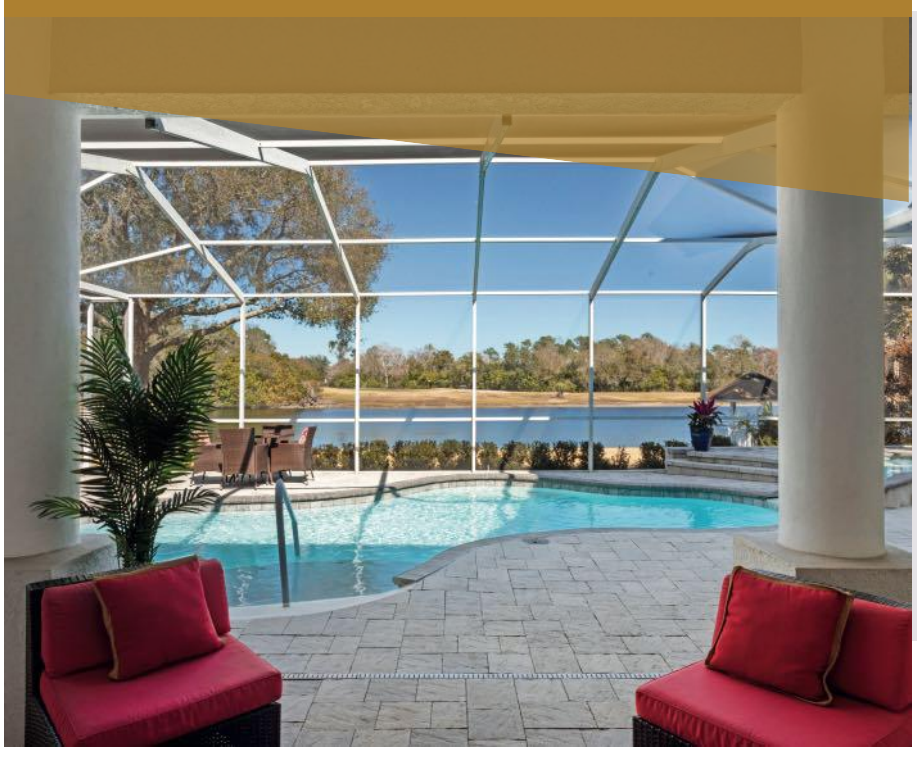
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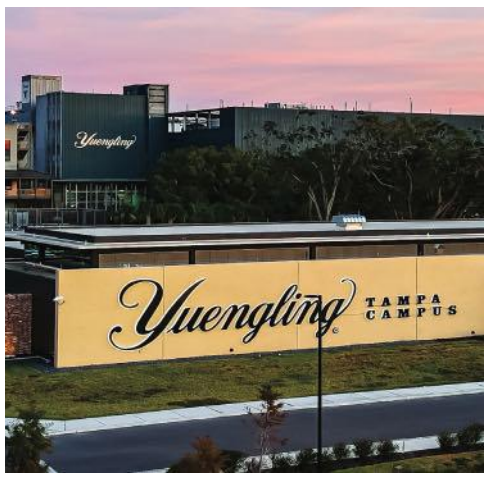
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TOURS RETURN TO THE YUENGLING BREWERY AFTER 8-YEAR HIATUS

By Jane Owen



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

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

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

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

Tour Experience Details

Yuengling Tampa Brewery Tour highlights include:

- An overview of Yuengling's almost 200-year heritage.
- Insight into Florida's oldest operating brewery.
- A guided behind-the-scenes look at the brewing process.
- Photo opportunities throughout the facility.
- Opportunity to taste the broader portfolio of Yuengling brands and special, limited-edition beers only available on-site.

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

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

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

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

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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TRAX FEDERAL CREDIT UNION EXPANDS SCHOLARSHIPS, LOANS & TOOLS

By Emma Snider



Trax Federal Credit Union has been a proud member of Central Florida for decades. From Scholarships and loans to credit services and financial education courses, Trax is a one-stop shop for your financial needs.

Trax Federal Credit Union offers many services for a variety of financial needs. To begin, Trax offers three different scholarships for their customers. Any Trax member, from high school seniors to college and trade school students, is eligible to apply for one of its three scholarships. The Trade/Vocational Scholarship offered by Trax aims to provide its recipients with $500 to further their education. The Trax Academic Scholarship provides a sum of $1,000 to incoming and collegiate-level recipients. Finally, the Giorgianni Legacy Scholarship, named after Trax Federal Credit Union's former CEO, Pete Giorgianni, for his contributions that shaped the current youth program, awards one outstanding recipient with $2,500. Trax aims to support its members in their professional developments through financial aid.

"We're proud to serve our members not just as a financial institution, but as a trusted partner on their financial journey" said Chelsea Smith, marketing manager at Trax Federal Credit Union. "Our focus is on giving members the tools and flexibility they need to move forward at every stage of life, with products designed around their needs."

In addition to Trax Federal Credit Union scholarships, Trax offers a wide range of loans to its members, including student loans, credit builders, auto loans, mortgages and HELOCs. With Trax's current HELOC campaign, lasting until Tuesday, June 30, members who get a HELOC will be eligible to receive rates as low as 3.99 percent APR for the first six months of their loan term. Also, with one of Trax Credit Union's unique credit cards, members can experience competitive rates and no annual fees.

With Trax Federal Credit Union's introduction of its SavvyMoney credit service, members can monitor their credit report daily, set goals, track progress towards credit goals and receive personalized loan offers based on their credit score right from the mobile app. Additionally, Trax members have access to the free digital financial education courses, which cover topics such as saving for a big purchase, budgeting and retirement planning.

To learn more about Trax Federal Credit Union scholarships and services, visit www.traxcu.com.

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CHAMPIONSHIP BANNER RISES AS TAMPA BAY SUN FC CELEBRATES TITLE

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CENTER HELPS RESIDENTS FIND THE HISTORY IN THEIR HOMES

By Libby Hopkins



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

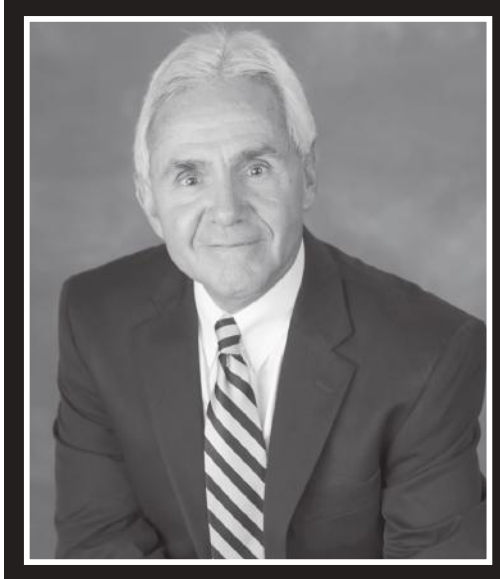
"The Century Club honors homes and buildings in the Tampa Bay region that have stood for 100 years or more," Freeman said.

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

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

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

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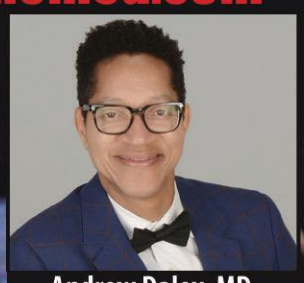
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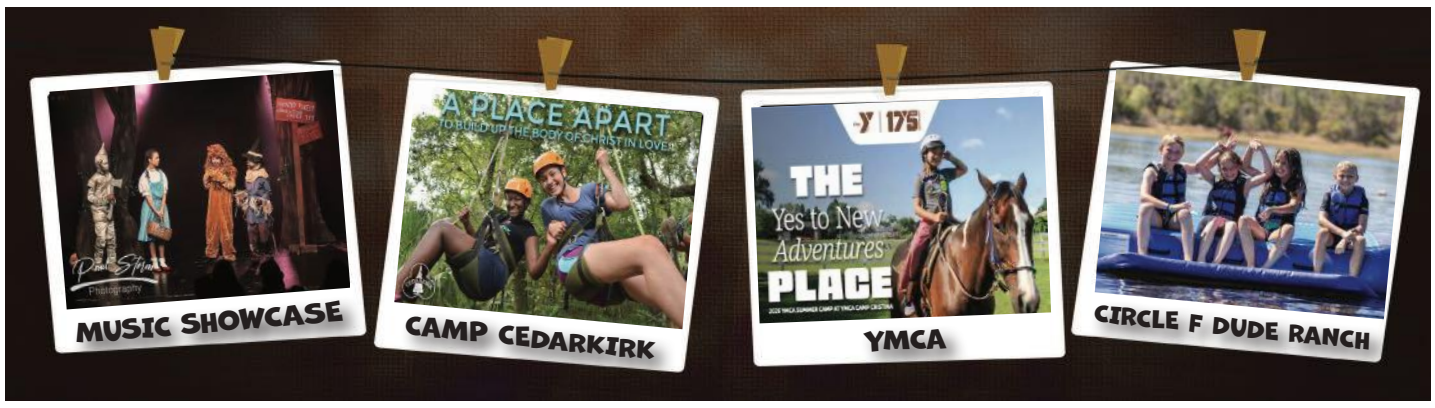


Special Section, More Inside!



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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







SUMMER CAMPS 2026

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PAGE 26

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

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CEDARKIRK BLENDS FAITH, ADVENTURE AND LEADERSHIP FOR SUMMER 2026

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Emily Harper



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MATHNASIUM BRANDON CAMPS KEEP SKILLS SHARP DURING SUMMER BREAK

By Libby Hopkins



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

"Summer is one of the most powerful times for growth," said Mathnasium owner Becky McDaniels. "Without the pressure of school, kids have the space to truly understand math, and that's where Mathnasium shines. It's all about momentum and meeting students exactly where they are, strengthening skills and building confidence so they return to school prepared and proud of themselves."

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

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

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

"We're proud to be a Step Up for Students provider, making personalized math learning accessible for more families," added McDaniels. Learn more about Summer Camps at www.mathnasium.com/math-centers/brandon or call 813-655-6284. Mathnasium is located at 1048 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico. You can also contact Mathnasium of Riverview, located at 13388 South US Highway 301, by calling 813-565-1102 or visiting its website at www.mathnasium.com/riverview.

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FLORIDA ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS OFFERS FUN MUSICAL SUMMER CAMPS

By Libby Hopkins

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TEN WEEKS OF FUN AWAIT FAMILIES AT TAMPA YMCA SUMMER CAMPS

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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CIRCLE F DUDE RANCH CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF ADVENTURE AND TRADITION

By Kelly Wise Valdes



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where In The World



Melissa Hartmann took her Osprey Observer to the Hallgrimskirkja Church and Sun Voyager to see the Northern Lights.

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REGISTER ONLINE
tampaymca.org/LETSCAMP»



SUMMER CAMPS 2026





PAGE 30

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CAMP CRISTINA OFFERS ADVENTURE & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ALL SUMMER

By Olivia Clark





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ULTIMATE SUMMER WITH BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY CAMPS

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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UNLOCK YOUR CHILD'S INNER GENIUS!



& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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DISCOVER CREATIVITY AT OVERFLOW FINE ARTS CAMPS

Staff Report

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

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

A Fun, Faith-Filled Approach to the Arts

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

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

Building Confidence, Community, and Talent

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

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

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

JAM ROOM MUSIC

SUMMER CAMPS
June 8-12 | June 22-26 | July 6-10
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Music & Theater Summer Camps
The Florida Academy of Performing Arts



Musical Arts For All Ages

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the florida academy of performing arts

(813) 490-ARTS (2787)

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402 Oakfield Drive,
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Full and half-day week-long camps, plus daily drop-ins
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- Scholarships and sibling discounts

Musical Theatre Camp
- Productions for all ages and skill levels
- Elementary, Middle School, and High School productions
- Broadway Boot Camp - Broadway Artists To Attend
- Visit FAOPA.org for shows, schedules, and performances

Past Summer Shows



Florida Academy of Performing Arts | Located in Music Showcase (813) 490-ARTS FAOPA.org



SUMMER CAMPS 2026





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

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center

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

Circle F Dude Ranch

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

Mathnasium

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

The Patel Conservatory

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

Busch Gardens

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

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

Easterseals School For Limitless Learning — Inclusive Summer Camp For Neurodiverse Learners

Get ready for an exciting and inclusive adventure designed specifically for neurodiverse young learners and those with other disabilities in kindergarten through second grade. Packed with hands-on and interactive STEAM activities, it's a supportive space where every child can explore, grow and thrive. The Easterseals School for Limitless Learning is located at 2460 Bloomingdale Ave., Ste. 170, in Valrico, and the summer camp is available for six weeks from Monday, June 15, to Friday, July 24, with morning, afternoon and all-day sessions available. Visit www.florida.easterseals.com.

CAMP WEEKS:

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

Overflow's

CREATED for MORE CAMPS





LOCATION: 4929 BELL SHOALS RD, VALRICO FL

LEARN MORE: overflowfinearts.com



& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Camp Mirage Brandon

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

Fellowship Church

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

Music Showcase And The Florida Academy Of Performing Arts

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

Skill Samurai

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

TLC's Gypsy Haven Riding Camps

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

School of Rock Valrico

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

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











SUMMER CAMPS 2026







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

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

High 5 Inc.

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

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



YMCA Summer Camp

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

Code Wiz

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

Kids 'R' Kids

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

AR Workshop

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

Center For Dance Arts

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

Overflow Fine Arts Camp

Overflow Fine Arts Camp, located at 4929 Bell Shoals Rd. in Valrico, provides a wide variety of camps over the summer, including a dance camp, kids musical theater camp, art camp and lego camp. The emphasis at these camps will be on feeling safe and belonging, with a low ratio of teachers to campers.

Camps will run from Monday, June 1, through Friday, July 17. Most camps will start at 9 a.m. and run through 3 p.m. Visit its website at www.overflowfinearts.com or call 813-777-3808 for additional information.



HIGH 5 MAIN CAMPUS | 7AM - 6PM

405 Beverly Blvd, Brandon, FL, 33511

- 1-TIME REGISTRATION FEE - **$40**
- **$175/WEEK** | MONDAY - FRIDAY

**Limited capacity, a waitlist is expected!*

In order to continue to make our programs affordable and accessible for families, High 5 proudly accepts school readiness!

OFF-SITE CAMPUS | 7AM - 6PM

Bevis Elementary School - 5720 Osprey Ridge Dr, Lithia, FL 33547

- 1-TIME REGISTRATION FEE - **$30**
- **$90/WEEK** | MONDAY - THURSDAY

**Pools and field trips NOT included at the offsite location*

SUMMER FUN INCLUDES:

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- PLAYGROUND
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Register Today:
[www.high5inc.org/camp]

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Member Services | **813-689-0908**
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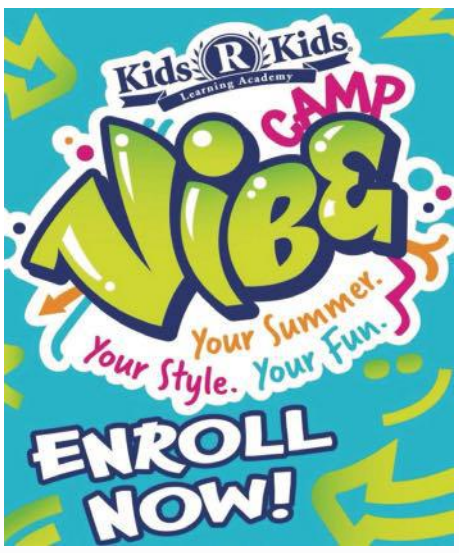


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KIDS 'R' KIDS LAUNCHES CAMP VIBE, BLENDING EDUCATION AND FUN

Staff Report



Families across the greater Tampa area are gearing up for summer, and one local program is already drawing attention with a blend of fun, learning and adventure. Camp VIBE at Kids 'R' Kids Learning Academies is now enrolling, offering children a dynamic camp experience designed to inspire creativity, teamwork and personal growth.

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

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

The program is part of Kids 'R' Kids Learning Academies, which serves families in Valrico, Brandon and the surrounding Tampa communities. The Circa Fishhawk location in Lithia offers a secure, technology-enhanced environment with trained educators, live-stream classroom access and controlled entry systems, providing peace of mind for parents.

Beyond summer camp, Kids 'R' Kids offers accredited programs for children ranging from infants to age 12, including preschool and before- and after-school care. The school emphasizes a well-rounded approach to education, focusing on physical, emotional, social and intellectual development through play and structured learning.

As a family-owned and operated organization, the academy encourages strong parent involvement and prioritizes the individual needs of each child.

With spots expected to fill quickly, families are encouraged to schedule a tour and learn more about what Camp VIBE has to offer.

Kids 'R' Kids Circa FishHawk is located at 5815 Kids Crossing Dr. in Lithia. Call 813-654-7000. Hours of Operation: 6:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Visit the website at www.kidsrkids.com/circa-fishhawk.

ABE HONORARY for Mayor

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



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A League of Their Own at Riverview — Where adults with unique abilities can be included in the game of baseball. www.alotoriverview.org

IMPACT — Educating, equipping, empowering & supporting teens to make healthy choices. www.whatisimpact.com

EVENTS COMING IN APRIL 2026

Kick-Off Party | Bowling Night | Trivia Night | Sports Music Bingo

PLUS Online Auction • Traveling Lotto Board • Sports Memorabilia

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Busch Gardens camp

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Home to more than 12,000 animals and world-class coasters, Busch Gardens® Tampa Bay has camps for both animal lovers and thrill seekers alike.

Kids in Kindergarten through 12th grade can enroll in one-of-a-kind camps.

Day Camp: K-12th • Resident Camp: 7th-12th

Book today and start counting down to the best summer ever.

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Busch Gardens camp | Adventure Island | American Camp Association Accredited | Association of Zoos & Aquariums

Program component, pricing and availability subject to change. © 2026 United Parks & Resorts, Inc. All rights reserved.

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

By Emily Harper



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

Martin reminisced on a funny story about when her family used to cross the cattle, telling how rural the area once was: "My job as an elementary-age kid was to stand in themiddle of Bloomingdale Avenue and hold my hands up, to stop any traffic that might come. Which I stood there, hoping that a car would come so I would get to stop them.



The Quick family homestead around the year 1925.

But typically, there was none. It was nothing but a loose gravel road at that time." In the late 1960s and early '70s, her family had an unoccupied barn on the property. This barn was then utilized and became the first station for the Bloomingdale Volunteer Fire Department.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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ROCK STEADY BOXING HELPS PARKINSON'S PATIENTS FIGHT BACK

Staff Report





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

Rock Steady Boxing FishHawk, founded in 2017, uses training techniques inspired by professional boxers and adapts them for individuals with Parkinson's. Classes include stretching, running, jump rope, balance work, push-ups and guided boxing drills, all led by trained coaches. The program is open to men and women of all ages and ability levels.

"We are fortunate to have this program," said Kathy Glazewski, a NASM-certified personal trainer who completed Rock Steady Boxing's intensive training camp and is now certified to lead classes for individuals with Parkinson's disease.

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

The Rock Steady Boxing method was originally developed in Indianapolis, Indiana, over a seven-year period. In 2012, the organization launched a formal training camp to expand the program nationwide and internationally. Today, there are more than 800 affiliates worldwide. All Rock Steady Boxing coaches complete certification through the organization's headquarters in Indianapolis.

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

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

Parkinson's disease affects an estimated 1-1.5 million Americans, with approximately 60,000 new cases diagnosed each year.

Rock Steady Boxing FishHawk classes are held at 3636 Erindale Dr., Ste. 103, in Valrico. For more information, visit https://rocksteadyboxing.org/ or email fishhawk@rsbaffiliate.com.

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OSPREY OBSERVER Brandon/Winthrop EDITION APRIL 2026 Vol. 23, Iss. 4

Sponsored by: Osprey Observer — Your Community Newspaper



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EYE ON BUSINESS

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

Swim Life Celebrates Grand Reopening And New Pool Deck





On March 7, Swim Life celebrated its grand reopening and new pool deck with a ribbon cutting with the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce. Everyone at the event enjoyed cookies, coffee and swimming.

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

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

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

Hand & Stone Massage And Facial Spa Grand Reopening

Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa recently celebrated its grand reopening with a ribbon cutting from the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce. Hand & Stone is your escape button in the middle of real life. The moment you walk in, everything slows down. The lighting is soft, the air smells clean and calming and the front desk greets you like it's been expecting you. It feels upscale without being intimidating — luxury that's actually approachable.

What makes the Bloomingdale location stand out isn't just the menu — it has a membership model. Clients can join a monthly membership program that makes it affordable to come regularly because it isn't meant to be a once-a-year luxury; it's routine self-care.

Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa is located at 855 E. Bloomingdale's Ave., Ste. A, in Brandon. Visit its website at www.handandstonebloomingdale.com to see the full range of services available.

Southern Construction

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

Whether building your dream home, modernizing your space or responding to unexpected damage, it brings precision, efficiency and care to every project. Its restoration experts are certified in water, fire, mold and trauma cleanup, ensuring properties are restored safely and quickly to their preloss condition. From concept to completion, it manages every detail — permits, design, construction and inspections — so clients can focus on what matters most. Its reputation is built on integrity, reliability and results that stand the test of time.

Visit its website at www.southern-construction.net for additional information.

CoastalVerify Launches as Rebrand and Expansion Of Keeler Notary And Fingerprinting.

Veteran entrepreneur Diana Keeler has launched CoastalVerify, a verification services company serving the Tampa Bay region. The business is a rebrand and expansion of Keeler Notary & Fingerprinting, now offering identity verification, LiveScan fingerprinting and property intelligence services.

CoastalVerify provides secure identity checks and electronic fingerprinting for employment screening, licensing and regulated background checks, helping organizations streamline compliance with state and federal requirements. The company also introduces Property Risk Snapshots, a field-based service for remote property owners, investors, HOAs and managers. Reports document property conditions, occupancy indicators and risk factors to help monitor assets remotely. Keeler brings over 30 years of federal experience in risk analysis, compliance and investigative oversight.

For more information about CoastalVerify and its services, email diana@coastal-verify.com.



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