

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE 47

Riverview Osprey OBSERVER
YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

January 2026
Volume 24, Issue 1

23 YEARS Osprey OBSERVER POSITIVE NEWS

Ph: 813-657-2418

NEW YEAR SALE!
flooringmaster
(813) 714-7232
11531 BALM RIVERVIEW RD
RIVERVIEW FL 33569
See Our Ad On Page23

CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS

BOB'S VETS GROWS INTO FLORIDA'S LARGEST VETERAN GATHERING

By Denise Sansosti

Every Thursday morning in Sun City Center, Bob Evans opens its doors early to nearly 100 veterans, spouses and friends. Known as Bob's Vets, the group welcomes every branch of the military for one simple purpose: breakfast and camaraderie.



Bob's Vets is a group that meets at Bob Evans restaurant in Sun City Center Florida every Thursday morning throughout the year. All veterans and those who support veterans are welcome to attend. No membership is required and no dues are charged for the meeting.

The tradition began in 2008 when Vietnam fighter pilot Sam Martin walked into a Bob Evans in St. Petersburg and spotted three men wearing veteran hats. A casual breakfast turned into a weekly ritual. Martin brought the idea to Sun City Center in 2012, and the group quickly grew. Today, more than 400 veterans are on the roster, making it the largest Bob's Vets in the state. Florida is home to the nation's second-largest veteran population, with Hillsborough County leading the state in the number of veterans who live here.

Bob's Vets is not an official nonprofit, and there are no dues or membership requirements. Instead, the group runs on community spirit. A monthly email keeps everyone informed about VA updates, birthdays and upcoming events. Guest speakers often attend, including representatives from the VA, Social Security, law enforcement, county offices and even local elected officials. Their goal is simple: help veterans access benefits, stay informed and feel supported.

The group occasionally takes collections to assist members with medical needs or to support special situations, such as raising funds to send a disabled female veteran to a Paralympic table tennis competition. Local business or national donations are always welcome. Last year, the Gary Sinise Foundation's 'Soaring Valor' program flew four WWII members to New Orleans for a multiday experience at The National WWII Museum.

As the group continues to grow, Host Steve Browning said, "Unfortunately, we are getting too big for our restaurant, so that is the main problem we're facing. We are trying to get more recognition for our veterans through the media and guest speakers who come and show their sincere support or thanks."

Above all, Bob's Vets is a place where friendships deepen, challenges are shared and no veteran feels alone. To attend, speak or support, reach out to host Steve Browning at 314 853-3932 or browning99@hotmail.com. All veterans are welcome on Thursday mornings from 7-8:30 a.m. at the Bob Evans located at 102 Commercial Center Dr. in Ruskin.

BRANDON RIVERVIEW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ANNOUNCES ANNUAL MEETING & INSTALLATION LUNCHEON

Staff Report

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce its annual meeting, to be held on Tuesday, January 27, at 11:30 a.m. at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce its annual meeting, to be held on Tuesday, January 27, at 11:30 a.m. at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview.



This signature luncheon brings together business leaders, community partners and chamber members to celebrate the successes of the past year, recognize outstanding contributions and share the vision for the year ahead.

During the event, attendees will enjoy an afternoon of connection and celebration, including:

- Reflections and highlights of 2025.
- Recognition of members and community partners.
- Installation of the 2026 chair and board of directors.
- An overview of the chamber's strategic priorities for 2026.

The annual meeting serves as both a celebration and a launchpad — honoring the achievements that strengthened the Brandon and Riverview business community in 2025 while outlining the initiatives that will drive growth, advocacy and collaboration in 2026.

Members, guests and community leaders are invited to join this important gathering as the chamber steps confidently into a new year of progress and partnership.

For more information or to register, please contact the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce at info@brandon-riverview-chamber.net or 813-234-5944.

About the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to strengthening the regional economy, supporting local businesses and fostering a thriving community through leadership, advocacy and collaboration.

For more information about the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce, please visit www.centralhillsborough-chamber.com.

IN THIS ISSUE

SCOUTS HONOR VETERANS.....PG 3
RIVERVIEW ARTIST.....PG 7
WINDOW BIRD SAFETY.....PG 14
HOPE HOUSE OPENS.....PG 24
EYE ON BUSINESS.....PG 33

PRSTD STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MANASOTA, FL
PERMIT #1456

ECRWSS EDDM
Postal Customer

Osprey Observer
2109 Lithia Pinecrest Rd.
Valrico, FL 33596



Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful offers opportunities such as Adopt-A-Road, hosted cleanups and educational outreach to support local environmental stewardship. See Full Story on Page10.



Happy New YEAR



Dr. Caroline Dau

Dr. Laura Bridges

BRIDGES DENTAL

LAURA COYLE BRIDGES, D.M.D.

4316 New River Hills Parkway
Valrico, FL 33596

813-654-3399

www.bridgesdental.com

New patients with dental insurance

COST TO MOVE

$0

We will waive any out of pocket expense that insurance company fails to cover due to your move.

With this coupon. Not valid with other offers or prior services. Expires 3/31/2026

New patients without dental insurance

NEW PATIENT SPECIAL

$99

Includes exam, x-rays and healthy mouth cleaning (D0150, D0210, D1110)

With this coupon. Not valid with other offers or prior services. Expires 3/31/2026

Proudly accepting the following dental insurance providers:

- Aetna
- Ameritas
- Assurant PPO
- Cigna
- Connection Dental
- Blue Cross Blue Shield
- GEHA
- Delta Dental
- Guardian
- MetLife
- Principal
- Premier

The patient and any other person responsible for payment has a right to refuse to pay, cancel payment, or be reimbused for payment for any other service, examination, or treatment that is performed as a result of and within 72 hours of responding to the advertisement for the free, discounted fee, or reduced fee service, examination, or treatment.

Happy New Year!

REED & REED

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

813.438.5960

NEEDREED.COM

101 E. Lumsden Road
Brandon, FL 33511

Personal Injury Cases
FREE CONSULTATIONS
Auto Accidents * Slip and Fall
Boating Accidents * Dog Bites
Wrongful Death * Motorcycles

LIKE

Having a Lawyer in the

FAMILY

Proud Supporters of ECHO * Board of Directors



BUCHANAN ANNOUNCES 2025 FIRE AND RESCUE/EMS AWARD WINNERS

Staff Report





Sun City Center Emergency Squad received the Dedication and Professionalism Award

Congressman Vern Buchanan announced the recipients of the 16th Congressional District Fire and Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Awards. Buchanan established the awards to give special recognition to fire and rescue and EMS personnel who have provided distinguished service to his constituents in 2025.

"As first responders, fire departments and EMS teams are summoned on short notice to serve their communities," said Buchanan.

"Oftentimes, they arrive at scenes of great adversity and trauma, to which they reliably bring strength and composure. I believe these awards are a fitting tribute to our first responders and a reminder of the important role they play in our communities."

This year's award recipients were selected by an independent committee comprised of a cross section of current and retired fire and rescue personnel living in the district.

Buchanan presented awards to the following Hillsborough County fire and rescue and EMS personnel:

Dedication and Professionalism Award: Hillsborough County Fire Rescue: Company Fire Captain Ralph Mascaro Sun City Center Emergency Squad

Preservation of Life Award: Hillsborough County Fire Rescue: Firefighter/Paramedic Jacob Campbell, Fire Captain Clifford Davis, Firefighter/Paramedic Anna Inman, and Firefighter Maurice Swan

Unit Citation: Tampa General Hospital Aeromed: Pilot Stu O'Shannon, Flight Nurse Alisha Burnett, Flight Paramedic Chuck Nelson, Flight Paramedic Orientee Luis Vazquez, Pilot Mark Boudreau, Flight Nurse Rob Freas, and Flight Paramedic Kelly Curren

Career Service Award: Hillsborough County Fire Rescue: Battalion Chief Jeff Martin

In total, 125 Area First Responders and 4 Civilians Recognized for Distinguished Service. Visit https://buchanan.house.gov/.

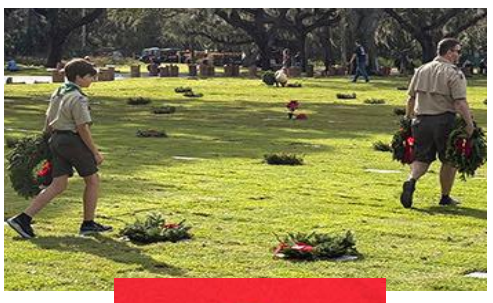
LITHIA BOY SCOUT TROOP 665 HONORS VETERANS AT BAY PINES CEMETERY

By Olivia Clark

Troop 665 of Lithia participated in the annual Wreaths Across America observance at Bay Pines National Cemetery on Saturday, December 13. Rising before sun,the Boy Scouts dedicated their morning to a powerful ceremony of service and remembrance.



Boy Scouts from Troop 665 of Lithia place wreaths at veterans' gravesites during the Wreaths Across America observance.



Upon arriving, the Scouts assisted with unloading wreaths from Wreaths Across America trucks and arranging boxes throughout the cemetery for volunteers.

Once the event commenced, Troop 665 members spread out across the grounds, placing wreaths at the gravesites of veterans. Each Scout paused to read the veteran's name aloud before standing at attention and rendering a hand salute as a sign of respect.

Participation in the observance has become a longstanding tradition for the troop.

"It is a yearly tradition that the troop does," said Robert Teagle, Scoutmaster, Troop 665. "We sell wreaths as a fundraiser, and it reminds the boys of the service members."

Following the wreath placement, a ceremony was held to honor members of the United States Armed Forces. The Scouts joined members of the Civil Air Patrol in escorting both active duty and retired veterans as wreaths were placed to represent each military branch. The final wreath was laid by the troop's Senior Patrol Leader in honor of prisoners of war and those missing in action.

Bay Pines National Cemetery holds special significance due to its multi-generational history.

"There are veterans buried here from World War I, World War II, Vietnam, and Korea," Teagle stated. "It helps the Scouts understand not only the contributions of our current service members and veterans but also the sacrifices made by their families. This is a multi-generational cemetery."

Troop 665 has been participating in Wreaths Across America for about five years. Teagle mentioned that the experience leaves a lasting impression on the Scouts.

Teagle said. "This experience reinforces the importance of remembering and honoring those who served."



WE'RE HERE TO HELP

PAINT CORPS

- Untouchable **5-Year** Touch Up Warranty
- Written **10 Year** Paint Warranty
- 1300+ 5 Star Reviews within the brand
- **FREE** Color Consultations
- Skilled Team & Dedicated PMs
- Veteran-Owned & Operated



INTERIOR PAINTING



EXTERIOR PAINTING



CABINET PAINTING



EPOXY COATINGS



DRYWALL & WOOD REPAIRS



PARKING LOT MAINTENANCE

CALL FOR YOUR FREE ESTIMATE: 813-520-6096

A clean barbecue is a healthy barbecue

Bar-B-Clean

THE BARBECUE CLEANING COMPANY

Would you cook in a dirty oven?

Then don't grill on one.



Dirty grills harbor:

- Grease
- Bacteria
- Carcinogens

- Veteran-owned & locally trusted
- ★★★★★ Google reviews
- Advanced sanitizing technology
- GrillWell+™ Membership plans for additional savings & stress-free maintenance
- Diagnose, repair, & install

Text or call: 813.295.6300
www.bar-b-clean.com/TampaBay

BRANDON PARADE OF LIGHTS CAPS SECOND YEAR WITH AWARDS, COMMUNITY GIVING AND 10,000 SPECTATORS

By Brian Bokor









The Brandon Parade of Lights wrapped up its second year with a celebration and awards ceremony at The Regent.

The Brandon Parade of Lights wrapped up its second year with a celebration and awards ceremony held on December 18 at The Regent in Riverview, recognizing parade participants, volunteers and community partners following another successful holiday event.

The annual parade drew an estimated 10,000 spectators along its route and featured 2,861 participants representing 115 floats, underscoring the rapid growth of the event in just its second year.

Melissa Canfield, parade chairperson, used the ceremony to put those numbers into perspective.

"2,861. What is that? That is the amount of participants that we had this year in the parade," Canfield said. "What does that consist of? 115 floats."

"Those entries included the parade's grand marshal, 10 Tampa Bay News anchor Caitlin Lockerbie, along with five local high school marching bands, five local Gasparilla krewes, 38 local businesses and 24 local nonprofit organizations. Participation also extended to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, Hillsborough County Fire Department, county commissioners, school board members — including the superintendent — as well as local officials, beauty queens, dance studios and youth teams. The parade also featured holiday favorites, including, of course, Santa and Mrs. Claus," she said.

Reflecting on the scope of the event, Canfield added, "It's absolutely amazing how many people were involved in this."

Led by grand marshal Lockerbie, the parade traveled from South Lakewood Drive along Oakfield Drive, crossing Kings Avenue and ending at Vonderburg Drive. High school marching bands from Armwood, Bloomingdale, Brandon, Newsome and Riverview helped set the tone, while thousands of spectators lined the route to watch floats from businesses, nonprofits, performance groups and community organizations.

Awards were a major focus of the evening, recognizing creativity and community spirit among parade participants.

"So, the first category we will present is the most festive floats," said award presenter Dawn Myers. "We considered how unique of a theme this group had, and how wonderfully and beautifully lighting their float was."

Amani Med Spa received the Most Festive award.

The Most Original award was presented to Krewe of Girls and Pearls. In presenting the honor, Myers praised the group's creativity and execution.

"We felt like we had never really even thought about this theme being a Christmas parade, or a Parade of Lights parade. The outfits that their people wore were on point and on theme. And they had almost what looked like a live volcano on their float. So, the most original goes to the Krewe of the Girls 'n Pearls," Myers said.

The Crowd Choice award was presented to the Krewe of the Rising Phoenix.

In announcing the winner, Myers said, "The judges were all very, very impressed with not only the costumes but also the music."

Dance Quest earned the Judges' Choice award.

"This group had a fantastic float. It was beautifully decorated. They had amazing costumes. And they had a fantastic performance," Myers said. "Because they checked all the boxes, we had to give this to the Judges' Choice for Dance Quest."

Additional award winners included DeSoto Masonic Lodge for Most Community Spirit, Newsome High School for Best Band and TC Drums for Best Performance.

Charitable giving was also a central focus of the evening. Organizers presented $5,000 checks to Hope for Her and PCAT (Parents and Children Advancing Together Literacy Ministries), recognizing both organizations as beneficiaries of this year's parade proceeds.

The charities were selected in partnership with the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce and the newly merged Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce, continuing the Brandon Parade of Lights' commitment to supporting local nonprofits alongside celebrating the holiday season.

Canfield thanked the many volunteers, sponsors and participants who made both the event and its charitable impact possible. She noted that an estimated 50 volunteers helped support parade operations, adding, "Thank you for allowing me to be a small part of this parade."

The celebration also marked a transition in leadership, as Canfield formally passed the Brandon Parade of Lights chairperson duties to Erica Jourdain of Flower Me Tampa, who was announced as the 2026 parade chairperson. Organizers thanked Canfield for her leadership during the parade's second year and welcomed Jourdain as planning begins for the next chapter of the event. Organizers confirmed that the next Brandon Parade of Lights will be held on December 12, 2026.

Now entering its third year, the Brandon Parade of Lights continues to establish itself as a signature holiday tradition — celebrating creativity, community spirit and meaningful local impact while bringing families, businesses and neighbors together during the holiday season.

TGH SENIOR CENTER
powered by greenbrook medical

★ Rated 4.9 Stars on Google ★

SEEING PATIENTS NOW.
NOT SOMEDAY.

Welcome to a New Standard in Senior Care—Backed by Tampa General Hospital



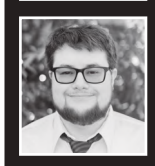
★★★★★
"I've just started with the TGH Senior Center and I must say that I am thoroughly satisfied with Dr. Berdasco! EVERYONE is pleasant, thoughtful, concerned about my health, and knowledgeable about their profession...always smiling and just making the entire visit comfortable and pleasant. I don't feel rushed when I'm there and any questions I have are answered and explained in a way that I can understand...Glad I found them! — Danita M. (September 2025)

Call (727) 877-8051 to schedule your Welcome Visit! Se habla español!

Osprey OBSERVER
YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS THROUGHOUT
Bloomingdale/FishHawk • Riverview • Brandon • Valrico
and NEW Apollo Beach/Ruskin/Wimauma


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


BILLING MANAGER
Terry Vassalotti
813-657-2418
terry@ospreyobserver.com


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


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


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


CUSTOMER SERVICE
Jenny Bennett
813-657-2418
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

GRAPHICS MANAGER - Kathi Hayes - khayes@ospreyobserver.com

www.OspreyObserver.com
FOLLOW US:

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES


HOUSE ACCOUNTS & VALRICO ADVERTISING
Marie Gilmore
813-657-2418
editor@OspreyObserver.com


RIVERVIEW, APOLLO BEACH & WINTHROP ADVERTISING
Melissa Hartmann
813-833-7470
mhartmann@ospreyobserver.com


HOUSE ACCOUNTS ADVERTISING
Kerrie Hoening
813-625-1527
kerrie@ospreyobserver.com


BRANDON ADVERTISING
Jane Owen
541-405-5574
jowen@ospreyobserver.com


FISHHAWK ADVERTISING
Melody Gershkoff
813-300-5152
mgershkoff@ospreyobserver.com


SOUTHSHORE, RUSKIN & WIMAUMA ADVERTISING
Denise Sansosti
412-638-5658
dsansosti@OspreyObserver.com

2109 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., Valrico 33596 • (office) 813-657-2418 • (fax) 813-657-4469

HILLSBOROUGH CO. SCHOOLS:
STAYING FOCUSED ON STUDENT SUCCESS

By Superintendent Van Ayres



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

As we begin a new semester and a new year, I'm reminded of what makes Hillsborough County Public Schools strong: the determination of our students, the unwavering dedication of our employees and a community that believes every child deserves an exceptional education.

Across the nation, public education is transforming to open doors to new opportunities for today's students and tomorrow's leaders. Here in Hillsborough County, we see this moment as a chance to innovate, grow and strengthen what we do best, empowering every student to succeed. Through every change, one thing remains unwavering: our commitment to keeping students at the center of all we do.

When I visit campuses, I see so much to be excited about. Classrooms buzzing with creativity. Labs full of handson learning. Career training spaces where students are gaining realworld skills and earning industry credentials. Everywhere I go, students are pushing themselves, lifting one another up and discovering talents they didn't even know they had. And behind them are the incredible teachers, principals and staff who encourage, inspire and support them every single day.

In this school district, we stay grounded in what matters: great instruction, welcoming schools and the supports students need to thrive. We're committed to high expectations and to creating pathways that prepare students for bright futures — whether that's college, a career or military service.

And we're not alone in doing this work. Families, volunteers, mentors, business partners and neighbors across Hillsborough County are stepping up to help students succeed. Their energy and generosity make our schools stronger, and we're grateful for every bit of support they give.

As we look ahead to the new year, I want to thank every student, family and employee for the hard work and heart you have brought to this school year. Together, we will continue moving forward — focused, determined and united around what matters most: student success.

On behalf of Hillsborough County Public Schools, I wish you a happy, healthy and successful new year.

To learn more about the programs, resources and pathways we offer all students, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org.

P.F. Auto Glass, Inc.
Repair. Replace. Recalibrate.
A Complete Auto Glass Service Company
813-741-3633 • WWW.PFAUTOGLASS.COM
Serving Our Community Since 1994!
FL Reg #MV-24096
Preferred by your insurance company.



LeAnne's OLD FASHIONED COOKIES
"A Delicious Way to Show You Care"
Call (813)651-0045
Text (813)748-7041
We Ship Nationwide!
www.LeAnnesCookies.com

Dine Local
OSPREYOBSERVER.COM

1/2 Off
Appetizer with any dinner entree.
Friday & Saturday 6pm-Close
Dine In ONLY
Note Available For To Go
STRANDHILL PUBLIC
10288 Causeway Blvd

Voodoo Valrico FL ESTD 2024
Teacher's Happy Hour
Every Friday, 3-6 p.m.
All Teachers Receive the Founder's Family Discount
10% OFF ENTIRE Purchase

10% OFF
ENTIRE Purchase
J.F. Kicks Restaurant & Patio Bar
813-643-7777
Only valid with regular menu.
With this coupon. Must present before submitting payment. Before tax. One coupon per visit. Not valid with other offers.

LUNCH SPECIALS EVERY DAY
FAMILY MEAL SPECIALS
$49.95
Take Out & Delivery
La Septima Cafe
702 W Lumsden Rd. Brandon
Not Valid with any other discounts, promotions or coupons. No Cash Value.

10% OFF
ENTIRE Purchase
Sunflower Cafe
813-65-SUSHI
Only valid with regular menu. With this coupon. Must present before submitting payment. Before tax. One coupon per visit. Not valid with other offers.

Happy Hour
Thursdays 4 - 6 pm
$5 Classic Shakes
MilkShake EST FACTORY 1914
10446 Stelling Dr.
Riverview
(in the Mission BBQ plaza)

TACO DIRTY
Bowls. Tacos. Mexican Things
FREE TACO
with any purchase
10460 Stelling Dr.
Riverview
(in the Mission BBQ plaza)
Must present coupon. Not valid with any other discounts. No cash value.

SECOND CHANCES: PET RESOURCES FOUNDATION GIVES EVERY ANIMAL HOPE

By Logan Walz



Kilo, a 3-year-old American Staffordshire, was neutered and is ready to go as he waits for his forever home.

The Hillsborough County Pet Resources Foundation, an open-admission shelter, continues its mission to care for animals in need through adoption services, volunteer programs and community support initiatives. Board secretary Chelsea Waldeck, CVA, explained, "As an open-admission shelter, we take in every animal that needs help, no matter the breed, age or condition. Our goal is always to give each pet the best chance at a safe and healthy life."

The foundation requires adopters to be at least 18 years old and present identification. Upon entering the shelter, visitors speak with customer service staff before touring the kennels. Those interested in a specific dog or cat bring the animal's kennel card to staff, who then provide information and arrange a meet and greet. Animals already spayed or neutered, vaccinated and microchipped are considered ready to go and may be adopted the same day. Pets still awaiting procedures may be preadopted and picked up once their medical care is complete. Stray animals have a required hold period that varies based on whether they arrived with identification.

The Hillsborough Pet Resources Foundation offers a wide range of volunteer opportunities for individuals 16 years or older. Volunteers assist with dog and cat care, customer service, laundry, dishes and the veterinary services department. The shelter's foster program provides additional support options, including daytime outings, weekend sleepovers and longer-term fostering for pets experiencing kennel stress or medical issues. Applications and training are available online.

During the holiday season, donations of blankets help keep animals warm during colder nights, while soft treats, catnip, harnesses, leashes and toys are always useful. Food donations support the shelter's pet food pantry, which assists owners experiencing financial hardship and helps keep pets in their homes. In preparation for kitten season, the shelter collects kitten formula, warming discs, playpens and mother and kitten food.

As an open-admission shelter, the Hillsborough Pet Resources Foundation faces ongoing challenges related to space and capacity. Despite this, it maintains a 94 percent live outcome rate and does not euthanize for space. The shelter's veterinary team provides on-site care, and rescue partners assist with cases needing specialized support. Enrichment programs, playgroups and individualized care plans help animals experiencing stress or behavioral concerns.

One memorable adoption involved Max, a dogo Argentino who struggled medically and behaviorally but ultimately found a successful placement after months of care. Stories like Max's reflect the foundation's dedication to every animal in need.

For more information, visit https://hcprfoundation.org/ or call 813-586-1988.

HOW HUSTLE HARD RUNNING CO HELPS ATHLETES THRIVE

By McKenzie Brown



The Hustle Hard Running Co athletes are showing us what they are made of, day in and day out.

Hustle Hard Running Co was created based on a simple belief: When athletes are coached the right way, they are capable of doing more than they could ever imagine. For Sarah Sexton, founder and head coach, she believes, "Coaching is what God called me to do. I love helping athletes realize they're capable of more than they think, especially through running, which has a way of building confidence quickly when it's taught well."

Running plays a central role in that mission. When taught accurately, it builds confidence quickly, offering athletes clear proof of growth through strength, speed and consistency. Hustle Hard Running Co was designed to meet athletes exactly where they are, whether they're brand-new to running or ready to compete. The goal has always been to create a youth-centered environment with multiple entry points: beginner run clubs, competitive track teams, small-group speed training and individualized coaching.

With 19 years of experience in coaching youth and high school athletes, Sexton brings a broad background in track and field, cross country, multisport speed development and youth soccer. Her coaching philosophy is grounded in long-term athlete development, healthy movement patterns and age-appropriate training that prioritizes both performance and well-being. Supported by certifications through USATF, RRCA, NFHS, CPR/AED and yoga, her approach blends science, experience and care. She loves what she does and does it with passion.

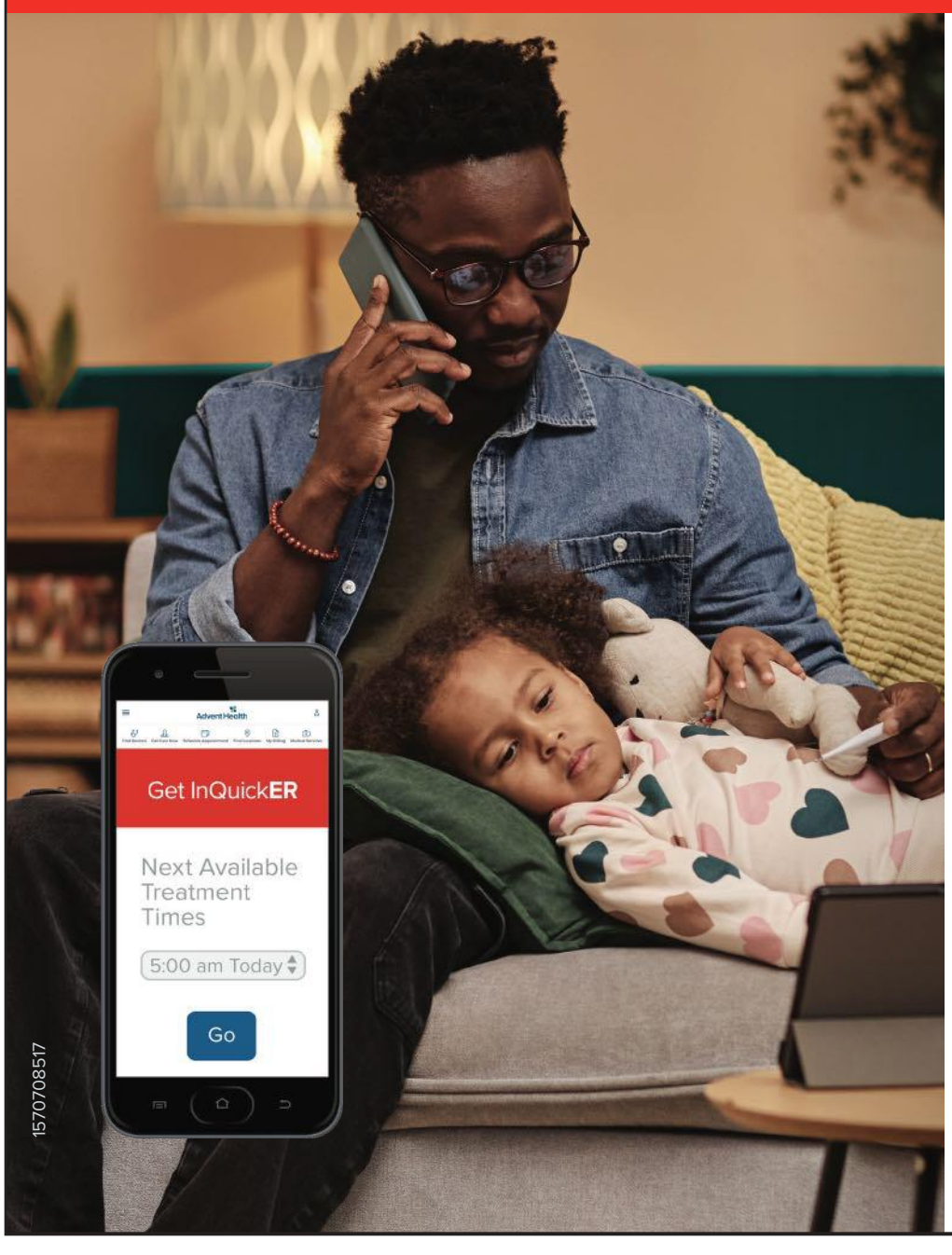
Sexton said, "I started Hustle Hard Running Co to create a youth-centered running environment where athletes could find the right entry point for them, whether that's a beginner run club, a competitive track team, small-group speed training or individualized coaching. Our track program begins in January, and watching athletes discover their strengths, commit to the process and grow into confident runners and competitors is what makes me stay."

What sets Hustle Hard Running Co apart is its commitment to proven systems. Training is intentional and purposeful, focused on helping athletes become stronger, faster and more confident — without shortcuts, gimmicks or unnecessary hype. Every program emphasizes sound mechanics, smart progression and consistency over time.

Athletes train through three core formats. Private one-on-one coaching offers fully customized sessions for targeted development. Small-group speed and agility training combines individualized feedback with a motivating, competitive atmosphere. The track and field program, which begins each January, provides both competitive and beginner pathways, allowing athletes to grow into confident runners and teammates at their own pace.

For more information, contact the Sexton at 744-571-0093 or email hustlehardrunningco@gmail.com.

OVERNIGHT FEVER | DAD'S INTUITION | CONVENIENT SCHEDULING



Get InQuickER to feel better faster.

Injuries and illnesses are never planned, but your emergency room visit can be. At AdventHealth, we make it easy to reserve a treatment time online — so you can wait in the comfort of home and arrive at a time convenient for you.

Select your preferred treatment time at GetInQuickER.com.

In case of a life-threatening medical emergency, call 911.

AdventHealth

RIVERVIEW ARTIST BRINGS CANVASES TO LIFE THROUGH LIVE PAINTING

By Olivia Clark

Riverview-based artist Alexis King has built a name for herself by turning blank canvases into works of art in real time. Specializing in realism, King is known for live painting at charity events and community fundraisers, where her finished pieces are often auctioned to benefit nonprofit organizations. She also offers live painting services for weddings, creating commissioned keepsakes for couples and clients.



Riverview artist Alexis King holds an owl painting, showcasing her realism style and attention to fine detail.

King describes herself as an artist drawn to people and animals, using realism and detail to tell a story through her work.

"I enjoy capturing the essence of a subject," said King, owner of Alexis King Artworks. "My work is very detailed. My work is as color-accurate as possible."

King did not grow up believing art was a natural talent she possessed. Her journey began in 2014 while homeschooling her children.

"My kids and I got into this mindset that 'I can teach myself anything,'" King said. "My kids asked me to search drawing tutorials, and something just clicked. Once someone explains it in a way you can understand, your brain connects the dots."

Primarily self-taught, King learned through online portrait classes and YouTube tutorials, practicing consistently while raising her children. She credits the experience with shaping her career and showing her children the value of pursuing passions.

"I think it was great for my kids to see that you can pick up something new," King said. "If they see that Mommy can do it, they can do whatever they put their mind to."

King's interest in live painting grew as audiences responded to watching her creative process on social media. She later began offering live painting services for weddings and charity events, combining her love of art with community involvement.

"To see something I created bring joy to people and then be auctioned to support a cause is such an honor," King said. "It's a very humbling experience."

Her work has been featured on HGTV and at red-carpet fundraising events, including the Lions Eye Institute annual gala. She is expanding into large-scale murals across Tampa and St. Petersburg, while four of her original paintings were recently selected for display in Hudson's Furniture locations.

King will also be live painting at a charity event benefiting families experiencing trauma on January 3, 2026, at 7 p.m. at the New Tampa Performing Arts Center, located at 8550 Hunters Village Rd. in Tampa.

For more information, visit https://alexiskingartworks.pro/ or follow Alexis King Artworks on Facebook and Instagram.

NEW YEAR'S SPECIAL: GET ONE MONTH FREE!

TWIN CREEKS
ASSISTED LIVING & MEMORY CARE



We treasure every resident and provide personalized, enriching experiences that brighten each day. Live as independently as you like in assisted living or benefit from our specially designed memory care services. Take possession by 1.31.26 to receive your FREE month!

Call 813.278.5802 today to schedule a tour or request more information.
TwinCreeksRetire.com
13470 Boyette Rd.
Riverview, FL 33569

Your FREE MONTH will be your 2nd full month at our community!

Assisted Living Facility License #13122

DOG DAYCARE • LODGING • TRAINING • SPA SERVICES

CanineCabana
your dog's oasis away from home



50% off 1st 3 Nights For New Lodging Guests
Local, Family Owned and Operated
Celebrating 17 Years
Offering a Safe, Fun, Expert Care
7 Days a Week / 365 Days a Year

CALL TODAY FOR PUPPY TRAINING!

9708 Carr Road, Riverview 33569 • (just off Boyette Rd., 1 mile West of Bell Shoals Rd)
(813)672-WOOF (9663) • www.CanineCabana.BIZ
info@canineCabana.biz #CanineCabanaFlorida

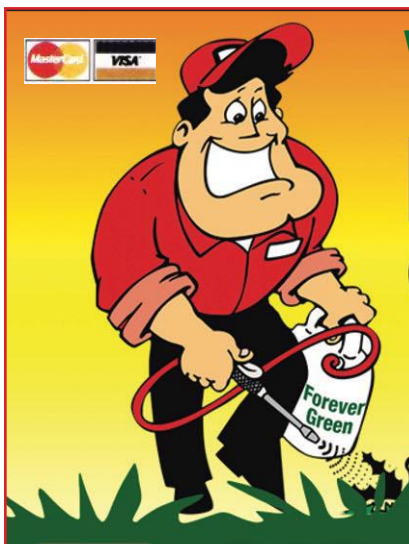
Breakfast Served All Day!
A REAL GOOD DAY STARTS WITH
REAL. GOOD. BREAKFAST.™



Village Inn

Now Locally Owned and Operated!
10293 Big Bend Road, Riverview
813-741-3200

With a Healthy lawn less water is required!
FREE ESTIMATES!



FOREVER GREEN
Lawn & Pest Control, LLC
"WE MAKE YOU PROUD!"
Commercial & Residential - Fungicide - Fertilizing
Insecticide - Weed Control Tree & Shrub Treatment

$10 OFF ANY TREATMENT DRY OR LIQUID
For Pre Pay Customers Only

Free WEED & CRAB GRASS CONTROL
New Customers Only

Up to 5000 sq ft $57 per month

Now $57 per month
You Get Protection
Ticks, Fleas, Fire Ants, Chinch Bugs, Mole Crickets, Sod Weed Worms, Grubs and much more.
Plus Fungus & Weeds and Premium Fertilizer

813-324-1004 • www.FGLAWN.com
Family Owned & Operated State Certified Licensed & Insured

BAYOU BASH CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUNITY BAYOU PASS IN RUSKIN

By Brian Bokor



Hillsborough County and Florida Home Partnership hosted a community block party in December to celebrate the completion of Bayou Pass Village, a long-running affordable housing community in Ruskin.

The event, known as the Bayou Bash Block Party, was held at the Pfeiffer Pavilion Clubhouse within Bayou Pass Village and brought together homeowners, local leaders, nonprofit partners and residents for a day of family-friendly activities, live entertainment, food trucks, vendor booths and community resources.

The celebration marked the completion of the final phase of the development, Sunset at Bayou Pass Village, which includes 11 newly built homes with three, four or five bedrooms. The homes are designed for families earning 80 percent or less of the area median income. As part of Florida Home Partnership's USDA Mutual Self-Help Housing Program, participating families commit a minimum of 600 hours of sweat equity, working alongside neighbors and volunteers to help build their own homes and the homes of others in the community.

Hillsborough County contributed $700,000 toward the final phase and has invested more than $6 million over several years across the six phases of Bayou Pass Village.

Founded in 1993, Florida Home Partnership is the largest nonprofit affordable housing builder in Hillsborough County and one of only two nonprofit organizations in Florida utilizing the USDA Rural Self-Help Mortgage Program.

Beyond home construction, the organization emphasizes long-term community sustainability. Families participate in homeowner education classes; assist in planning neighborhood amenities, such as clubhouses and playgrounds; and are encouraged to serve on homeowners association boards. Leadership training is also provided to support resident-led governance.

More than 480,000 hours of sweat equity have been logged by over 800 homeowners through the organization's programs, helping families build energy-efficient, environmentally friendly homes while strengthening neighborhood connections.

The event highlighted Florida Home Partnership's 30 years of service and the impact of Bayou Pass Village, which has helped more than 2,000 families achieve affordable homeownership in South Hillsborough County.

For more information about Florida Home Partnership and its programs, visit www.flhome.org or follow the organization on social media.

CENTER 4LIFE LEARNING PROVIDES ENGAGING EDUCATION FOR SENIOR LEARNERS

By Olivia Clark



Students participate in a Conversational Spanish class during the Winter Semester at Center 4Life Learning, held at the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center.

Center 4Life Learning has served as a valued educational resource for senior learners in Sun City Center and the surrounding SouthShore area for years. Established in 1976 as the Community Church College by the United Community Church, the program was created to offer noncredit adult education courses designed to encourage fellowship and support lifelong learning for older adults in the community. The program was founded on the belief that learning should remain accessible and engaging throughout every stage of life.

In 2019, the program relocated to the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center and changed its name to Center 4Life Learning. In 2021, it became a ministry of the church. Today, Center 4Life Learning operates as a nonaccredited adult education school offering in-person courses, lectures, discussions and educational day trips for older adults seeking enrichment in a welcoming and relaxed environment that values both education and community.

Classes are held on the campus of the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center, located at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center. Courses are open to all adults and are taught by highly qualified instructors drawn from the local and regional community. Instructors range from retired priests, college professors and high school teachers, many of whom bring decades of professional teaching experience into the classroom. Center 4Life wants its students to attend for personal enrichment rather than grades or exams.

The school offers three semesters each year, allowing participants to continue learning year-round. The Winter 2026 Semester begins on the week of Monday, January 26. Classes are typically offered during daytime hours and are structured to encourage discussion and participation. The curriculum reflects the interests and life experiences of its senior-focused student population, with subjects spanning art, history, health, finance, language, discussion and live theater.

Most courses cost $50 for six 90-minute classes, with some courses offering walk-in options for $14. Attendance for certain classes is limited. Registration may be completed online at www.lovethelight.org/4life-learning or in person at the Center 4Life Learning office. Office hours are Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Daley & Associates
PrimeMed of Tampa Bay



- Branded Weight Loss
- Compounded Weight Loss
- Skin Health & Wellness
- Energy Rejuvenation
- Hair Loss Solutions
- Sexual Health & Wellness

Andrew Daley, MD
Internal Medicine

813-530-0903
631 W. Lumsden Rd, Brandon, FL 33511
Careglp.carevalidate.com/Partner/daley-life-wellness

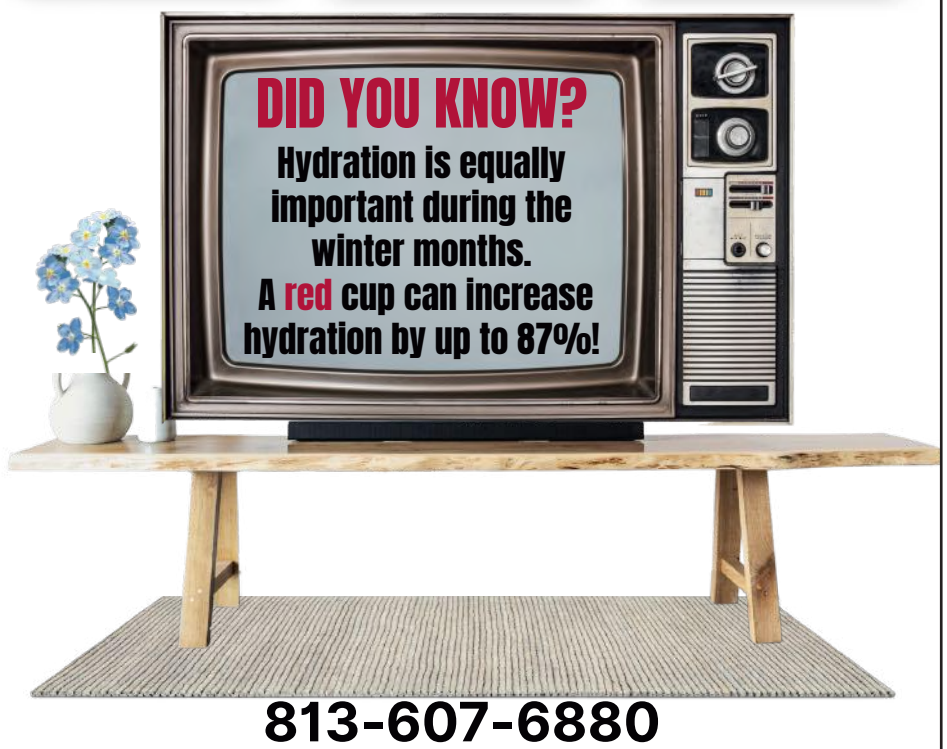
TESSERA BRANDON
Assisted Living Facility #AL13150
ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION

Hybrid Dementia and Alzheimer's Support Groups
for Care Partners of those with any type of Memory Loss

Third Tuesday
of Every Month
at 6:30 pm
Meeting in Person & Via Zoom

Zoom Meeting ID:
993 4701 6039
Passcode:
459148
Join by phone:
833.928.4608

Fourth Wednesday
of Every Month
at 2:00 pm
Meeting in Person & Via Zoom



813-607-6880
Come a little early for refreshments!
TesseraBrandon.com | 1320 Oakfield Dr. Brandon, FL 33511

EAGLE AUDUBON SOCIETY IS NOT JUST FOR THE BIRDS

By Denise Sansosti



Eagle Audubon January 1 State Park Hike at Little Manatee River State Park.

The National Audubon Society (NAS) has a long history of helping Florida wildlife. By 1900, more than 5 million birds were being killed every year, including 95 percent of Florida's shorebirds, primarily for women's decorative hats. Some birds, such as the snowy egret, were nearing extinction. In 1905, the NAS was formed to protect birds and their habitat. It has become one of the oldest and most influential environmental organizations in the Americas.

Since 1984, the Eagle Audubon Society chapter has been serving South Hillsborough County. Its mission is to foster interest and involvement in the local environment, wildlife and conservation issues. The Eagle Audubon Society holds monthly meetings featuring guest speakers on topics such as bird identification, avian evolution and environmental issues. These meetings are open to everyone, including nonmembers.

Past President Dr. Julie Stocksdale, who has been a member for 10 years, said, "I learn something from every speaker and strongly support what the NAS does. The mission is conservation. Some focus on birds, but it's not exclusive."

She proudly shared that the chapter has earned an Outstanding Conservation Project award for its stormwater pond native plant installation.

There are frequent field trips to nearby birding hotspots and natural areas, such as Celery Fields and Little Manatee River State Park. Florida is one of the premier states for birding due to its diverse wetlands, prairies, woodlands, coasts and scrublands. Each unique habitat has its own species of local and migratory birds.

The Eagle Audubon Society undertakes several hands-on community projects, including maintenance of the Window in the Woods bird sanctuary in Sun City Center and the delightful butterfly habitat at the Ruskin Camp Bayou Nature Preserve. Both are open to the public.

Dr. Stocksdale wants the community to know "all are welcome to participate in any capacity. You do not have to be a member." Monthly speakers and nature walks offer the perfect learning experiences for everyone, from homeschooled children to retirees.

Meetings are held from October through April on the third Monday of each month from 1-3 p.m. at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, located at 1239 W. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. For more information, visit https://eagleaudubonflorida.org/.

FREEDOM TO WALK HOSTS A MUSIC BINGO TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER WITH FOOT DROP

By Libby Hopkins



The Freedom to Walk Foundation will be hosting its Love Music Bingo event in February.

The Freedom to Walk Foundation is a local nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting patients and their families by providing financial assistance for the purchase of WalkAide or Bioness devices for children and adults experiencing foot drop. Its goal is to help individuals regain their independence and mobility by providing them with the necessary technology to walk again. It believes that every individual should have the freedom to walk and live their life to the fullest.

Daisy Vega founded the Freedom to Walk Foundation in January of 2013. For the past 45 years, she has been experiencing multiple sclerosis. Additionally, she experienced foot drop in 2012. After two and a half years of wearing the electrical stimulation device, she walked out of her device and no longer needed it to walk. "Foot drop is a weakness or paralysis of the muscles involved in lifting the front part of the foot necessary to walk," Vega said. "It causes a person to drag the foot and toes or engage in a high-stepping walk called steppage gait. The Bioness L300 Go device, when worn on the calf, sends electric impulses to the affected foot, causing the foot and leg to lift and follow through with a natural, unimpaired gait."

The Freedom to Walk Foundation will be hosting its Love Music Bingo event on Saturday, February 7, from 2-5 p.m. at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, located at 1239 W. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. Tickets are $20 per person.

"Guests can bring their own beverages and snacks," Vega said. "No musical expertise is required, just a love for music, fun and a giving heart."

Guests will enjoy a high-energy fundraising event bringing people together through music and fun.

"There will be raffle prizes and giveaways throughout the event," Vega said. "Guests will also experience community connection with supporters, businesses and local partners."

Over the last year, the Freedom to Walk Foundation has helped 11 individuals take steps toward independence by obtaining their Bioness L300 Go devices.

"With an out-of-pocket cost of $5,800, the device is prohibitive for many who see it as an invaluable opportunity to improve their quality of life," Vega said. "The Freedom to Walk Foundation welcomes support from individuals and businesses who want to make an impact through sponsorship, donations of raffle items, gift cards, merchandise or services."

Every ticket purchased, raffle item donated and sponsorship helps move the Freedom to Walk Foundation closer to its goal of restoring independence, dignity and hope for those who need it most. For tickets, sponsorships, or more information, contact Vega at daisy.vega@freedomtowalkfoundation.org, call 813-546-2329 or visit thewebsite at www.freedomtowalkfoundation.org.



KTTB INVITES RESIDENTS TO PROTECT PARKS, ROADS AND WATERWAYS

By Olivia Clark



Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful offers opportunities such as Adopt-A-Road, hosted clean-ups and educational outreach to support local environmental stewardship.

Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful is a Tampa-based nonprofit that has worked since 1989 to reduce litter, improve public spaces and inspire environmental stewardship across Hillsborough County. Founded by community members concerned about pollution and neighborhood cleanliness, the organization promotes a culture of environmental protection through volunteer service and education, offering residents opportunities to make a direct and lasting impact.

Throughout the year, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful organizes community cleanups and beautification projects across beaches, parks, roadways and waterways. Signature events include the After Gasparilla Cleanup, Great Port Cleanup, Hillsborough River Coastal Cleanup and World Oceans Day activities. In addition to large-scale events, individuals, families and small groups can plan self-led cleanups. Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful assists by coordinating locations, providing free cleanup supplies and managing trash disposal so volunteers can focus on service.

For those interested in a long-term commitment, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful administers the Adopt-A-Road Program for Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa. The program allows individuals, businesses and community organizations to adopt roadways, parks, beaches or shorelines and maintain them through regular cleanups. Tree and bench dedication options are also available to honor loved ones while contributing to public spaces.

The organization supports greener neighborhoods through tree planting and landscaping initiatives that encourage sustainability and environmental awareness. Its education program offers free presentations and an age-appropriate curriculum for schools, community groups and businesses, covering topics such as litter prevention, conservation and responsible environmental practices. Students can earn service hours by volunteering and may qualify for leadership opportunities, internships and scholarships offered through the organization.

Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful is funded through community support, including individual donations, event sponsorships, partnerships and fundraising efforts. These resources allow the nonprofit to keep programs accessible while ensuring that support remains local and focused on Tampa Bay communities.

Residents interested in volunteering, sponsoring a cleanup or learning more about available programs can visit www.keeptampabaybeautiful.org.

TWO LENNARD HIGH SCHOOL JROTC CADETS RECOGNIZED IN VFW'S ANNUAL ESSAY CONTEST

By Madeline Gardner

"How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?"

Two Lennard High School JROTC cadets, Chlorie Leandre and Matthew Gillett, tackled this important question by participating in the Veterans of Foreign Wars's (VFW) annual 'Voice of Democracy' audio-essay contest. The scholarship initiative asks high school applicants how they embody American patriotism in their daily lives. On December 6, 2025, the VFW Post 6287 (Ruskin) invited both Lennard cadets to its award luncheon, recognizing Leandre and Gillett as the post's first and second-place winners, respectively.



Lennard JROTC cadets Chlorie Leandre and Matthew Gillett were awarded first and second place, respectively, for their 'Voice of Democracy' essay submissions.

Leandre joined the Lennard JROTC program last year and currently serves as the cadet battalion communications officer. Although she is only a junior, she intends to graduate early in May and pursue ROTC in college, and then enlist in the United States Air Force. Leandre framed her essay around her experience volunteering in the local community, such as helping her church hand out turkeys for Thanksgiving and visiting local neighborhoods to assist in home cleanup projects.

"Something that stood out in the beginning was how patriotism isn't, like, just about the national anthem or a flag. It's about the love and honor that you have for your country," said Leandre. "... And when it comes to leadership, how it's not just about telling people what to do and being in charge but being an inspiration and showing, like, what's the right thing to do and how to act."

Gillett is a junior and currently serves as the cadet command sergeant major, having served as a lieutenant in staff last year. Like Leandre, he plans to graduate early in May and enlist in the United States Army. Gillett cited that his family's military background influenced his essay, as well as his own thoughts on the future of the United States.

"Patriotism is shown in many different ways," said Gillett. "Patriotism is showing respect to veterans. Patriotism is setting time aside for service members. Patriotism is being respectful when the national anthem or the Pledge of Allegiance is playing."

Citing his respect for his fellow cadet and friend, Gillett showed support for Leandre when she was invited to read her essay aloud for the luncheon audience.

STEP INTO EXCELLENCE
FALL IN LOVE WITH YOUR SPACE









HARDWOOD • CARPET • TILE
LUXURY VINYL • CUSTOM CABINETRY

FLOORING USA and more
step|into|excellence

@FLOORINGUSAFL

SHOPFLOORINGUSA.COM
VALRICO | 3654 LITHIA PINECREST RD | 813-359-9566
LAKELAND | 805 E PALMETTO ST | 863-273-2308
LICENSED & INSURED | OWNERS DANNY BATTERBEE & JAY SPADOLA | OVER 40+ YEARS COMBINED EXPERIENCE

2025 Year In Review



The Tony Baroni Team wishes YOU and your family a prosperous 2026!

$111,680,267 Volume

A number we're proud of — because every dollar represents a family, a story, and a community we're honored to serve.
No one sells more in Tampa Bay, and we're grateful for the trust behind every closing.



2,800+ Five-Star Reviews

Trusted Across Tampa Bay. We are proud to serve our community with 5-star service.

#1

Tampa Bay Business Journal and Tampa Bay Real Producers listed Tony Baroni Team as Number 1 in units SOLD for the TAMPA BAY area.





9,880+ Sky Miles

Four national training trips this year — because growth never stops.
Pictured with author Phil M. Jones

1,000s of Candy

Trunk or Treat event! We loved celebrating with our community and hope you'll join us again next year for all the fun.



1 RED DAY

Every year in May, our team steps away from real estate and steps into service. This year's RED Day brought us to Feeding Tampa Bay—a mission especially meaningful to our team.



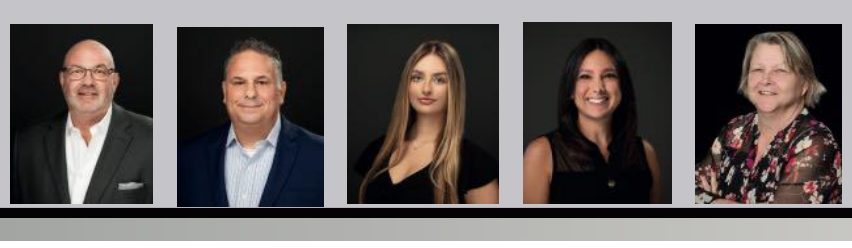
$20,000+

For every family we help, we donate to KW Cares, a non profit and local charities. Plus we are honored to donate thousands to local charities through our TBT GIVEAWAY contests!

ECHO bridging the gap between crisis and stability
feeding TAMPA BAY
Humane Society Tampa Bay Since 1912
SEEDS OF HOPE NOURISHING HOPE THROUGH community service

TBT is Growing AND Hiring in 2026!

Our family is getting bigger! We've added incredible talent to our agent roster to serve you better.
We also welcomed two new babies to the TBT family—the future of real estate looks bright (and adorable)!





120 PIES

We love our annual PIE DAY to give away pies and express our gratitude in person!

Property Management Pros

This year, we launched property management services! If you need help managing your rental long-term, our trusted team is ready to handle the details—so you don't have to.

TB PROPERTY MANAGEMENT PROS

the PROMISE The Tony Baroni Team

The Promise means that we will deliver the best service you could ever imagine receiving. That everyone on our team will be focused and care about your needs as if you were our only client. That we will anticipate challenges and get ahead of it so we can stop any surprises. The Tony Baroni Team is focused on making this a ★★★★★ experience that exceeds all your expectations.

Tony Baroni Team | kw KELLERWILLIAMS

3,200+ Homes Sold | 2,800+ 5 Star Reviews

(866) 695 - 9747

TonyBaroni.com | @tonybaroniteam



FLORIDA ORCHESTRA RECEIVES LARGEST DONATION EVER WITH $10 MILLION GIFT

Staff Report



The Florida Orchestra is proud to announce a milestone $10 million gift – the largest single donation given at one time in the orchestra's 58-year history. The donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, has made an extraordinary investment in the orchestra as a cultural cornerstone of the Tampa Bay community.

"This transformative gift reflects the deep commitment and passion within our community for The Florida Orchestra. We are profoundly grateful," said TFO President & CEO Ignacio Barrón Viela. "The donor's immense generosity amplifies a powerful message of confidence and trust in the impact we have on lives every day throughout Tampa Bay. We invite everyone to be part of this meaningful journey. Every gift, every concert ticket, every moment of support helps TFO grow and serve our community in the way that it deserves — in the concert hall, classroom and beyond."

The gift is intended to help grow the non-profit orchestra's endowment and provide year-over-year support. The endowment helps to sustain TFO's financial future and ensures it can continue to serve generations to come.

"On behalf of myself and the musicians of The Florida Orchestra, we are immensely grateful to our anonymous donor," said Music Director Michael Francis. "A gift of this magnitude sends an indelible message — not only affirming the orchestra's exceptional quality, but also demonstrating confidence in our vibrant vision to transform lives across Tampa Bay through the power of music. Thank you for this powerful affirmation of the orchestra's unique value to our beloved community."

Each season, The Florida Orchestra performs more than 100 concerts, bringing world-class music to audiences in a wide range of styles, from classical masterpieces and film scores to popular music, family-friendly programs and performances with global stars. Through concerts and innovative education/community programs combined, TFO serves more than 150,000 residents annually, nearly half through free or low-cost programs.

The Florida Orchestra's mission is to Inspire | Educate | Unite through the power of music. Deeply rooted in Tampa Bay for 58 years, The Florida Orchestra is the largest professional orchestra in the state, with 70 full-time musicians and conductors, under the artistic leadership of Maestro Francis.

"We're excited to celebrate this milestone gift with our community," said Barrón Viela, who took over as orchestra CEO in August 2023. "The Florida Orchestra belongs to everyone in Tampa Bay. Every concert is a celebration of how music brings us together. We invite you to join us."

TFO is a non-profit 501(c)3, visit www.FloridaOrchestra.org for more information and upcoming concert dates.

COUNTY CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS SAFETY OF COUNTY DRINKING WATER

By Brian Bokor

Hillsborough County Water Resources is encouraging residents to learn more about their local drinking water through its ongoing 'Quality on Tap' public awareness effort, which spotlights the science and infrastructure behind every gallon delivered to homes across the county.



Each day, the department provides more than 73 million gallons of drinking water to over 725,000 residents in unincorporated Hillsborough County. All water is treated and monitored to meet or exceed state and federal standards, with extensive year-round testing to ensure safety and reliability.

In 2024, county staff collected more than 7,600 water samples and conducted over 33,500 laboratory tests, with thousands more performed by the county's certified environmental laboratory as part of ongoing quality control. According to the department, tap water remains one of the most affordable options for residents at approximately $4.10 per 1,000 gallons, a fraction of the cost of bottled water and a more environmentally responsible choice.

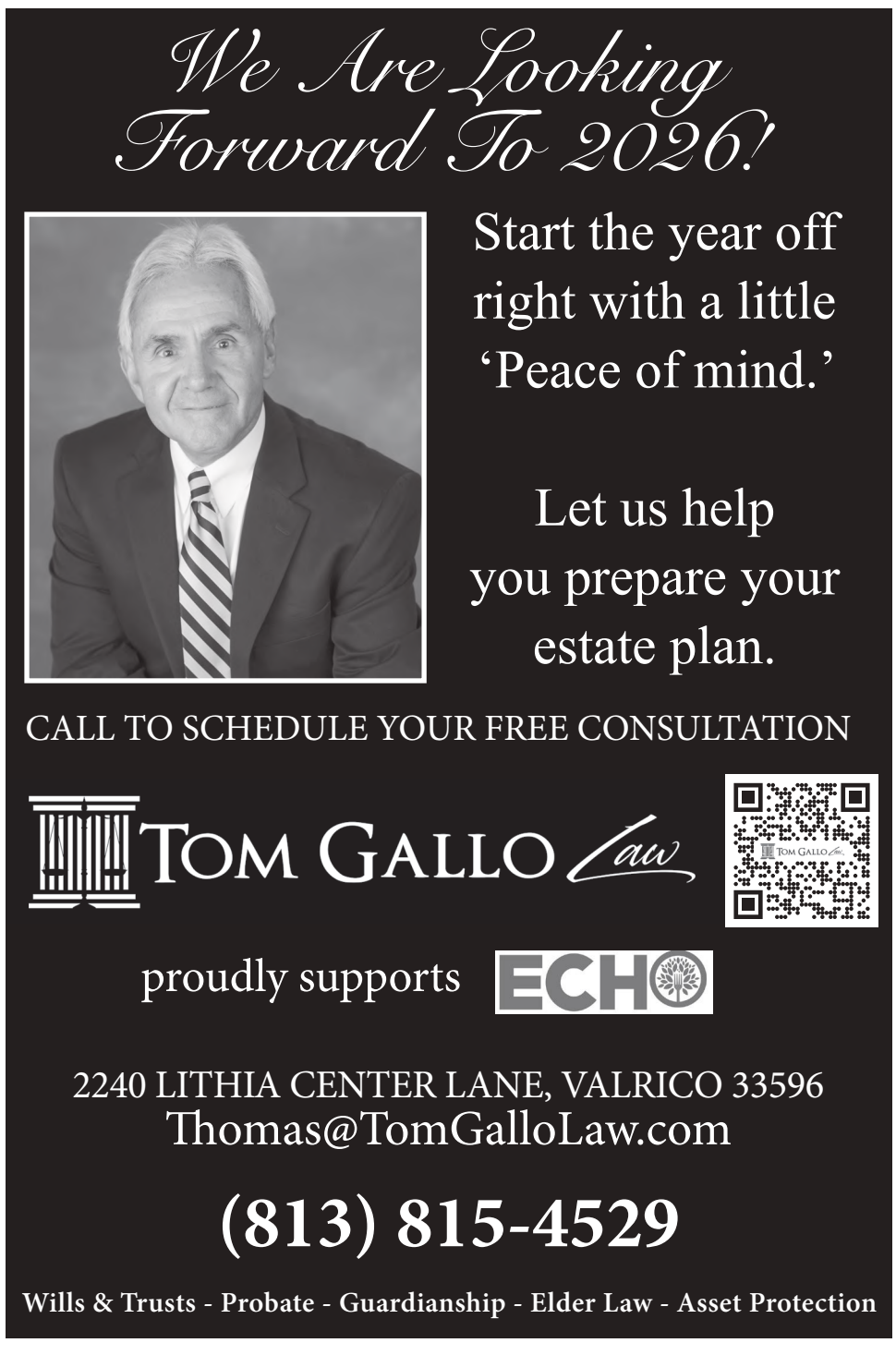
Hillsborough County Water Resources operates four water treatment plants, five wastewater treatment plants, a bio-solids facility and multiple field support locations. Trained water professionals oversee the system 24 hours a day, maintaining infrastructure, protecting public health and supporting long-term water reliability for a fast-growing region.

While Tampa Bay Water serves as the regional wholesale supplier for Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Pasco counties, Hillsborough County Water Resources is responsible for treating, testing and delivering drinking water directly to residents. Tampa Bay Water is also advancing a major Southern Hillsborough County pipeline expansion that will move up to 65 million gallons of drinking water per day to support projected population growth. Construction activity related to this regional project is already creating local traffic impacts and is expected to continue through its anticipated completion in 2028.

Most *Osprey Observer* readers are served by the county's south-central community public water system, which covers large portions of Central and Southeastern unincorporated Hillsborough County, including Brandon, Riverview, Apollo Beach and surrounding communities.

The county operates 11 community public water systems, each with its own annual water quality report. The 2024 reports, published in 2025, are the most current and include testing results and information required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which mandates monitoring for more than 80 regulated contaminants. Residents can identify their specific water system using the lookup tool on the county's website. Printed reports may be requested by calling 813-246-3146.

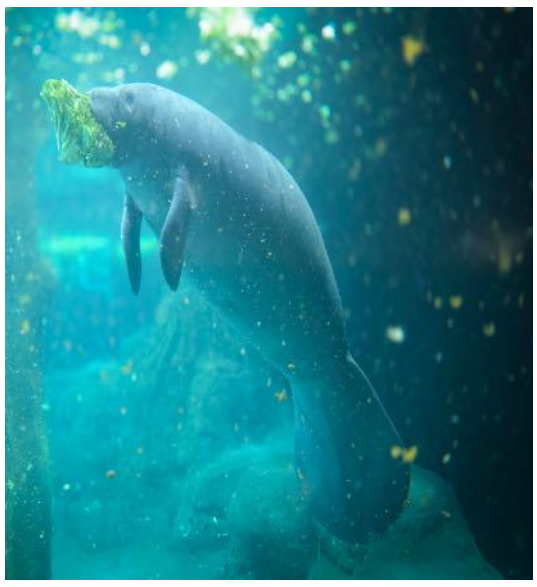




WEIGHING 600 POUNDS IS A GOAL WHEN YOU ARE A MANATEE AT THE PARKER REHABILITATION HABITAT

By Denise Sansosti

The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature is not only the largest natural history museum on Florida's Gulf Coast, but it also boasts a planetarium with a 50-foot, full-dome theater and hands-on programs for all ages. Among its most popular attractions are the manatees residing at the Parker Manatee Rehabilitation Habitat. This 60,000-gallon water exhibit mimics a cypress spring, allowing the manatees to live in a more natural environment before returning to the wild. Since 1988, The Bishop has been actively involved in the rehabilitation of 45 manatees and has achieved a 95 percent release success rate.



A juvenile manatee enjoying lettuce at The Parker Manatee Rehabilitation Habitat.

The Parker provides stage-two care, meaning manatees arrive there after receiving primary care at facilities such as ZooTampa or SeaWorld Orlando. The most common reasons for rehabilitation include cold stress, boat strikes and orphaned calves. Manatees are cared for until they reach a minimum weight of 600 pounds before being released back into the wild. Depending on the severity of their condition, the mammals may stay anywhere from a few months to more than a year and consume 10-15 percent of their body weight daily. Currently, the cost to feed the three manatees on-site is approximately $5,000 per week. This figure does not include medication, staffing or facility upkeep.

Andrew Sandall, CEO of The Bishop Museum, stressed, "I wish people knew how to coexist safely with manatees. They are the gentle giants of our waterways."

Sadly, there were over 600 Florida manatee deaths in 2025.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Wildlife Assistance Hotline is the first line of help if you encounter a manatee in distress and can be reached at 888-404-3922 (FWCC). Additionally, the public is reminded not to remove satellite trackers from manatees. While the device may resemble an oversized bobber, it is used to monitor the animal's progress and ensure it is adapting and thriving in its environment after release.

Educating future generations is one of the most effective ways to protect the manatee and their environment. Sandall praised the animal care team, stating, "I have never met a group of people who take such time and care to protect and save these animals. They are always available to answer questions from the public."

The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature is located at 201 10th St. W. in Bradenton. Visit https://BishopScience.org/.

MOSHER SELECTED TO BE A COHORT FOR MILESTONE CIRCLES PROGRAM WITH NASDAQ ENTREPRENEURIAL CENTER

By Libby Hopkins

Michelle Mosher is the president of Southshore Insurance Professionals LLC in Riverview. Mosher recently had the honor of becoming a cohort for the Milestone Circles program with the Nasdaq Entrepreneurial Center.



Michelle Mosher is the president of Southshore Insurance Professionals LLC in Riverview.

"I learned about it on LinkedIn and applied," Mosher said. "I'm thrilled that I've been selected for the Milestone Circles program. I'm stepping into this experience with one goal: grow smarter, lead stronger and build bigger impact. I'm excited to learn from a powerful network of entrepreneurs and gain new tools that will help me elevate what I'm building."

Mosher is grateful for the opportunity and is ready to get to work.

"I can't wait to share what I learn along the way," she said. "I hope this program will help me strategically grow the business this year, not just locally but statewide for most insurance and countrywide for our travel insurance niche."

The Milestone Circles program with the Nasdaq Entrepreneurial Center is a competitive, free, 12-week program designed to help early-to-mid-stage entrepreneurs achieve key business milestones. Milestone Makers selects a small cohort of impact entrepreneurs to receive individualized business mentoring, executive coaching, customized training and resources, all at no cost. The goal is to help entrepreneurs set, hit and celebrate milestones critical to their company's growth. The program's 295 graduates have raised more than $822 million in capital. Fifty-four percent of its graduates are women, 72 percent are underrepresented and under-resourced founders and 40 percent are international founders.

"My 2026 business goal is to be more intentional working on my business vs. in my business," Mosher said. "I'm not getting any younger, and someday we'll be looking at retirement now that our daughter is graduating from college. I hope this gives me more knowledge about the bigger pictures of business and not just insurance."

"My hope is that the education I receive in this program not only makes me a better business owner, employee and community member but also helps me pass along information to my commercial clients to help them in their business as well," Mosher said.

Mosher owns and operates Southshore Insurance Professionals™ LLC, servicing the Riverview and surrounding Southshore community with the ability to help residents in all of Florida.

Located in Riverview, contact https://southshoreins.com/ For more about the Milestone program, visit https://nasdaqcenter.org/milestone-circles.







AUDUBON HELPS INSTALL BIRD-SAFE WINDOW FILM AT LETTUCE LAKE NATURE CENTER

Staff Report

Visitors to Lettuce Lake Conservation Park may notice something new at the nature center: dotted window film on the windows. The window film has an important purpose — to prevent birds from flying into the windows and getting injured or killed.

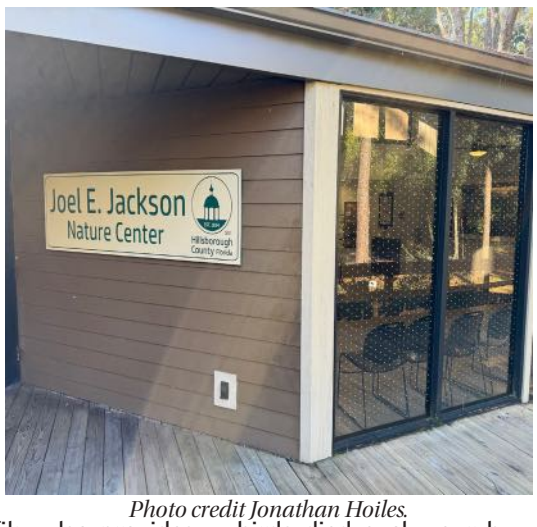


Photo credit Jonathan Hoiles.

With the addition of the window film, the glass is now visible to birds. The film also provides a one-way mirror effect so viewers in the nature center can see birds at close range without movement on the inside frightening the birds. Lettuce Lake, one of Hillsborough County's most popular parks, also features a boardwalk along the Hillsborough River. It is located at 6920 E. Fletcher Ave. in Tampa.

The Tampa Audubon Society (www.tampaaudubon.org) purchased the window film at a cost of $2,600 for the Joel E. Jackson Nature Center, and the Hillsborough County Parks & Recreation Department installed the film. The large windows overlook the park's fountain and bird feeders, an area that attracts numerous birds.

Glen Murley, park supervisor, and his staff contributed numerous hours of labor to install the window film, which was purchased from Feather Friendly, a Canadian company that provides bird collision deterrent technologies.

"People often don't think about the danger windows present to the wild bird population," said Ann Paul, Tampa Audubon Society president. "Birds often fail to recognize glass as a barrier, which creates a risk of impact."

"Before the film installation, an average of eight birds died each year by window strikes at the nature center," she said. "An even larger number of birds were found stunned in the garden area below the windows. We needed to find a solution without degrading the view from inside the building."

The wild bird populations in the continental U.S. and Canada have declined by almost 30 percent (2.9 billion breeding adult birds) since 1970, according to the journal Science at www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313.

It's estimated that more than 1 billion birds a year die from window strikes in the United States.

The good news is that anyone can install bird collision deterrent technology to the windows of their home or business.

More information, along with excellent tips, is provided by the National Audubon Society at www.audubon.org/news/reducing-collisions-glass.

To get involved, visit www.tampaaudubon.org/post/how-donate-to-tampa-audubon.

MEDED SENIOR SOLUTIONS HELPS PEOPLE GET THE BEST COVERAGE PLAN FOR THEM

By Lily Belcher

Understanding Medicare can be difficult for seniors, especially when they have expectations for what will or won't be covered.

Elaine Johnson is helping people figure out how to get the most out of their Medicare coverage through MedEd Senior Solutions.

"We help seniors navigate through the trenches of Medicare and select the best plan that will work for them," Johnson said.


Elaine and J Johnson are helping seniors understand their options for Medicare through MedEd Senior Solutions.

Johnson worked as a registered nurse and is now focusing on advocating for seniors after working with a major insurance company for years. Her husband, J Johnson, is a certified financial planner and had several clients asking for help with this. And MedEd Senior Solutions was born.

Johnson is helping clients on the front end pick out the right plan for them and find healthcare that isn't going to break the bank.

Education is at the heart of helping seniors figure out what plan meets both their medical needs and their budget constraints, protecting their health and their wealth.

"It was just hearing what the frustrations were with so many people," Johnson said. "People are coming into Medicare thinking 'I paid in and there's no other costs here.' And we're totally disillusioned that we have to pay for this and I have a copay for this."

MedEd Senior Solutions takes the confusion out of using Medicare before and during its coverage, especially with specific healthcare needs seniors face.

"I can see, as being a very seasoned nurse, ways that I could direct them into a plan that could address these chronic health care needs," she said.

While there is a lot to navigate, MedEd Senior Solutions brings extensive experience in navigating and breaking down the maze of Medicare.

Before talking with MedEd Senior Solutions, Johnson said all clients need to be prepared to do is have an honest conversation about their needs.

MedEd Senior Solutions is an organization within Johnson Brothers & Kurios, Inc, which is owned by J Johnson.

For more information on MedEd Senior Solutions and how it can help you, visit www.mededseniorsolutions.com or call 813-450-6473.

Great Golf! Family Friendly! Welcoming Atmosphere!



Experience the difference!

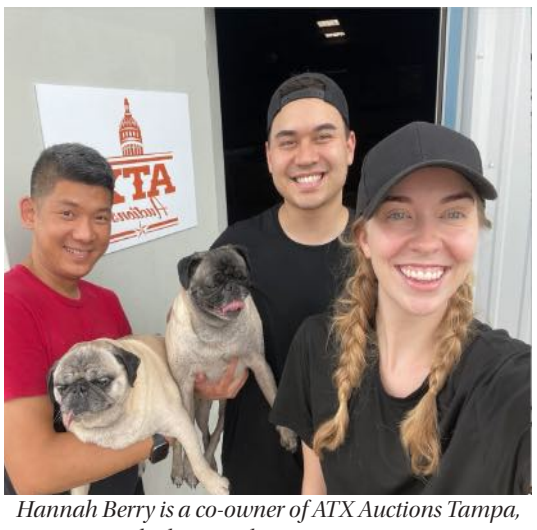
RIVER HILLS COUNTRY CLUB
offers championship golf, newly renovated fitness center, great dining, year-round Adult & Junior programming!
TEXT/CALL to schedule a tour or a tee time!
(813) 693-1531 OR
email mmartin@riverhillscountryclub.com



Contact us to learn more on our 2026 Special Offers!

ATX AUCTIONS TAMPA BRINGS BRAND-NAME BARGAINS TO LOCAL DISCOUNT SHOPPERS

By Olivia Clark



Hannah Berry is a co-owner of ATX Auctions Tampa, which opened in January 2023.

What started as a creative way to furnish an apartment on a tight budget has grown into a local business helping Tampa Bay residents score brand-name merchandise at a fraction of the price.

ATX Auctions Tampa, located at 5401 E. Henry Ave., Unit B, offers weekly online auctions featuring box-damaged merchandise from major retailers such as Amazon and Costco. Each auction begins at $5 and runs entirely online, with items available for local pickup only.

"We were customers ourselves before becoming owners," said Hannah Berry, co-owner of ATX Auctions Tampa. "We furnished our apartment on a low budget, and it was a fun way to shop."

The Tampa location opened in January 2023 after Berry and co-owner Justys Keckler decided to relocate from Utah and open a business of their own. With no prior ties to the area, they moved to Tampa to launch the operation.

"ATX Corporate told us we could pick a spot, and they would put us there," Berry said. "We sold everything, made the three day trip and lived in the warehouse for the first couple of months while we got things going."

Keckler's brothers are also involved in running the Tampa operation, helping manage day-to-day responsibilities as the business continues to grow.

ATX Auctions Tampa features a rotating inventory of household goods, furniture, bedding and home décor. Many items are brand new, with the only issue being damaged packaging.

"The only thing wrong with most items is the condition of the box," Berry said. "It may have been dinged by a forklift or the packaging isn't pretty anymore, so customers won't pay full price. That's where we come in."

Each item is inspected before being listed online, with condition details clearly shown in listing photos. Berry said transparency and customer trust are central to the business model.

"If something isn't listed correctly and we made a mistake, we will make it right," Berry said.

ATX Auctions Tampa does not offer shipping, a choice Berry said helps the business maintain its local focus.

"We wanted to give back to the community that has given us this business," Berry said. "The face-to-face interactions remind us what's important."

For more information, visit www.atxauctionstampa.com or follow ATX Auctions Tampa on Facebook.



Edward Jones > edwardjones.com | Member SIPC

The power of systematic investing

Systematic investing allows you to build your portfolio incrementally by investing a set dollar amount at regular intervals, helping you stay focused on your long-term goals. Here's what you should know about systematic investing.

It's all about the Cs

Convenience
Once you decide on a fixed dollar amount to invest systematically, you've taken procrastination out of the equation. And since you don't have to think about it from month to month, you can cross several savings goals off your to-do list.

Consistency
Each month, regardless of market movements, you accumulate shares continuously and consistently, which helps take the emotion out of investing and eliminates the worry of trying to time the market.

Choice
You can systematically invest in mutual funds, exchange-traded funds (ETFs), annuities and even individual stocks.

Control
Dollar cost averaging can help you focus on what you can control — investing a set dollar amount on a regular basis — rather than what you can't — volatility in the market.

We make it easy

- Just give your financial advisor written authorization to enroll — and remember, you can change or stop the program with just a phone call.
- We do all the recordkeeping for you.
- We offer a convenient and complimentary service that allows you to transfer funds electronically among your eligible Edward Jones accounts, as well as to and from your accounts at other financial institutions.

Systematic investing does not guarantee a profit or protect against loss. Such a strategy involves continual investment in securities regardless of fluctuating price levels of such securities. The investor should consider the financial ability to continue the purchases through periods of low price levels.

HAPPY NEW YEAR



Adam M benAbram
Financial Advisor
10312 W Bloomingdale Ave
Suite 105
Riverview, FL 33578
813-626-3052

SYS-7627G-A EXP 30 APR 2026 © 2025 EDWARD D. JONES & CO., L.P. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. AECSPAD 27230701

www.edwardjones.com/adam-benabram



INSURANCE WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH: CELEBRATING 26 YEARS IN BUSINESS

By Denise Sansosti



Tanya Johnson, Independent Insurance Broker

Navigating insurance in Florida can be stressful, but it doesn't have to be. According to Tanya Johnson, owner of Reliable Insurance, the key is education. "Insurance is not fun," she says. "I try to make it simple and let people know they have choices. They control more than they think. My job is to ask the right questions and help them understand their options."

Ms. Johnson is a licensed insurance broker, meaning she is an independent agent who works with over 40 carriers to find the best coverage at competitive prices. "With so many options, I work on behalf of the client, not the company," she explains. Tanya offers home, life, commercial, mobile, auto, and recreational vehicle insurance, and personally provides guidance while assisting clients through the claims process.

A Tampa Bay resident for more than 40 years, Tanya holds a bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida, an MBA from Saint Leo University, and has earned the prestigious Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriter designation. She began her career in health insurance before transitioning into property and casualty. A defining moment came after Hurricane Andrew, when she traveled to Miami to deliver supplies to family members. "I was shocked by how many people didn't have insurance," she recalls. "Hearing their stories and seeing the devastation left a lasting impression on me."

She also speaks regularly at Tampa Bay Neighborhood Housing Services and Real Estate and R.E.A.C.H., where educating new homeowners is a priority. "Buying a home in America is a big deal," she notes. "Once you are in your home, your insurance provider will still be there for you after the transaction."

RELIABLE INSURANCE
HONESTY INTEGRITY RELIABILITY
THE JOHNSON AGENCY

Having a trusted insurance agent on your side can make the difference between staying in your home or having to sell, which is exactly what happened to one of her neighbors. Tanya stepped in and saved the single mother over $500 a month on homeowners insurance after the original carrier dropped coverage and the mortgage company assigned a new, more expensive policy.

Top tips: Call your agent before filing a claim. Photograph receipts for major purchases and email them to a designated household account. Consider an umbrella policy. Don't underestimate risks associated with pets or pools. Water damage can happen anywhere. You can reach Tanya at: 941-313-4932, TJohnson@MyReliableAgent.com or TanyaInsures.com

CARDINAL ROOFING: 30 YEARS OF HONEST, FAMILY-RUN LOCAL COMPANY

By Libby Hopkins



Cardinal Roofing is a third-generation roofing contractor company built on customer referrals and an honest work ethic. It has been a part of the Brandon community for 30 years.

Cardinal Roofing is a roofing contractor company built on customer referrals and an honest work ethic. Its quality craftsmanship and small-town service are at the core of its business, which it has been providing for 30 years.

"We are here to stay, heavily involved in our community and provide our customers with honest, affordable roofing services," said co-owner Bridget Wilson.



Cardinal roofing was started by Wilson's father, Roger, in 1995. He grew up learning roofing from his father, James Harrison Jenkins.

"He learned with his five brothers, who all had at least one son," Wilson said. "My father only had two daughters, and the story goes. When I was born, my mother was worried my dad would be disappointed that as I wasn't a boy. My father's response was, 'There is nothing I can't do with my daughters that my brothers can do with their sons.' My sister and I both proved the point. I am the president of Cardinal Roofing, and my sister has her own medical clinic, Trinity Wellness on Lithia Pinecrest."

Cardinal Roofing started as a second-generation contractor company and is now third generation.

"It's available for my own children, if they wish, but first they have to pursue their own dreams before making the decision if this is the future they want for themselves," Wilson said. "It's the same courtesy my parents gave to me and my sister.

What makes Cardinal Roofing different from other roofing companies in the area is that it is completely transparent with its customers.

"Our price is our price," Wilson said. "We don't do add on pricing to make our prices seem lower than they are."

Cardinal Roofing has been a part of the Brandon community for 30 years.

"We are proud of our business and honest to a fault," Wilson said. "We support our community and invest in our veterans and students of our area. We treat everyone as if they were family and give real advice, and we don't take advantage of anyone. We educate our customers and take the fear out of roofing, which is not common knowledge for most people."

Keeping things local is especially important to Wilson and the team at Cardinal Roofing.

"Our community is the center of my heart," Wilson said. "I do most of my shopping and purchases with local businesses just like mine. Going to The Green Boutique, using JF Kicks for events and just keeping our money within the local area is very important to me."

If you would like to learn more about Cardinal Roofing or its services, you can visit its website at www.cardinalroofingfl.com or call 813-689-7663. Its office is located at 1312 Orangewalk Dr. in Brandon.



Your Goodbye, Your Way
Share your story by planning the final chapter.

At Sun City Center Funeral Home, our experienced team of preplanning advisors will help you craft plans for a vibrant celebration of life, memorial, funeral, or other event in seamless coordination with local cemeteries and houses of worship.

Sun City Center Funeral Home
Give us a call or stop by today.
(813) 634-9900
1851 Rickenbacker Drive
Sun City Center, FL 33573
suncitycenterfuneralhome.com

KnowledgePoints
Affordable Tutoring Proven Results
Riverview 671-1919 Plant City 754-7788
• Reading • Writing • Math
• SAT/ACT • Homework Edge
preK -12th Grade
Ask about our Monthly Budget Plan
"Creating Success by Changing Lives"




QUALITY PRODUCE AND MORE AT A PRICE YOU WILL LOVE!
(813)751-7757
2619 14th Ave SE, Ruskin, FL 33570
(Big grey & red warehouse located two doors down from weather station)
Monday: Closed
Tuesday, Wednesday & Saturday: 9:00am-5:00pm
Thursday & Friday: 9:00am-6:30pm
Sunday 11:00am - 6:00pm

RENT. LEARN. GROW. OWN.

Spa Pop Up
LAUNCH YOUR AESTHETICS EMPIRE HERE
FLEXIBLE RENTALS
Daily, Weekly, or Monthly
ALL THE TOOLS YOU NEED
Devices, supplies & products accounts included.
TRAINING AVAILABLE
Break into the industry with hands-on guidance.
MENTORSHIP & SUPPORT
Grow your skills and your business with confidence.
Call or text us at 813-946-6454
WWW.SPAPOPUP.COM

LAZYDAYS EMPLOYEE FOUNDATION GIVES $300,000 GIFT TO A KID'S PLACE ACTIVITY CENTER

Staff Report



Representatives from the Lazydays Employee Foundation present $300,000 to A Kid's Place.

A partnership built on compassion, commitment and community reached a milestone this week as A Kid's Place announced a final gift of $300,000 from the Lazydays Employee Foundation, bringing the employees' total support over 16 years to an extraordinary $1.4 million.

A Kid's Place, which opened in 2009 as a unique residential foster care community designed to keep siblings together, has been supported by Lazydays since the project's earliest days. Even before the first home was built, employees of Lazydays RV pledged to sponsor one of the five houses on the campus.

Through voluntary payroll deductions and internal fundraisers, they raised $350,000 to build the Lazydays House, a warm, family-style home that has since sheltered hundreds of brothers and sisters during some of the hardest moments of their young lives.

In November, A Kid's Place leaders gathered with members of the Lazydays Employee Foundation to accept the foundation's final donation — funds that will help complete a new activity center where children will be able to play, learn, gather and heal together. Staff said the gift will help ensure the space becomes a joyful centerpiece on the nonprofit's 5-acre, cul-de-sac-style campus.

In addition to their financial support over the years, Lazydays employees have also delivered snacks, essentials and gifts for the children — another example of the hands-on generosity that has defined the partnership.

During the presentation, Dana Philp, inaugural president of the Lazydays Employee Foundation, shared a quote from Lazydays RV co-founder Don Wallace that captured the emotion of the moment: "To make a rope, it takes a lot of individual strings."

Though Wallace could not attend, his words reflected the spirit of a foundation built entirely by employees — run by volunteers, funded by staff payroll deductions and fueled by a shared desire to change children's lives. Since forming their nonprofit in 2005, Lazydays employees have worked to ensure every dollar raised goes directly toward helping at-risk youth.

Since opening, A Kid's Place has cared for more than 150 abused, neglected and underprivileged children.

For more information about A Kid's Place, visit https://akidsplacetb.org/.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT SHINES IN BRENDA WADE TEAM'S DAYS OF GRATEFULNESS TRADITION

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Brenda Wade
SIGNATURE REALTY ASSOCIATES

The Brenda Wade Real Estate Team successfully celebrated its annual Days of Gratefulness campaign, a tradition that has grown into a community-wide event highlighting gratitude, generosity and local partnerships.

Brenda Wade is a top-producing real estate agent and the team leader of the Brenda Wade Real Estate Team based in Valrico. According to Wade, the campaign began modestly, partnering with a handful of local businesses. Over the past 12 years, more sponsors joined in, eager to show appreciation to the same community they serve.

"We started small with a few local businesses and found others who reached out to join us in showing gratitude to this great community," said Wade. "It's easy because we have a tightly focused market and our customers are their customers."

The giveaways have become a hallmark of the campaign.

"We have given away so many prizes through the years," said Wade. "We have had schoolteachers, new moms, families and others that are struggling get a boost at Christmas."

To further the excitement, the team added a final day with a larger prize.

"We added the last day as a way to build the anticipation for the final giveaway," said Wade. "It keeps everyone cheering for each other as winners are announced, as they know there is a pot of gold at the end. So fun to be a part of the excitement."

Sponsors play a central role in the campaign, with local businesses: Rumble Boxing FishHawk, Karma Yoga & Fitness, Keel Farms, Burn Boot Camp Brandon, The Stein & Vine, Cold Stone Creamery Valrico, Bullfrog Creek Brewing Co., Toffee to Go, BIN + BOARD, Rick's Custom Meats, The Green Boutique, AR Workshop Brandon, All American Title, Complete Choice Insurance, United Mutual Funding Corp, In The Pink, the Osprey Observer, Raining Berries Brandon, Nothing Bundt Cakes Riverview, Orangetheory Fitness Lithia, Zach's Pressure Washing, RobZFitness and Paradise Parties Co.

"We love all of our sponsors. We are grateful to spotlight them as we give back to our customers and share businesses we love with clients that we appreciate," said Wade. "It's a win all the way around."

"To live, work and play in a community is a blessing. Our business includes my entire family and many close friends. I am so thrilled to have the life that I have and to be able to give back in a community that means so much to me and my entire team," said Wade.

For more information about the Brenda Wade Team, visit https://brendawade.com/ or follow on Facebook @BrendaWadeTeam.

LUCKY LAUREN
CHARTERS
813-924-9250

smileLYNN
PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY
CASEY LYNN, DMD. MS.
Home of the TAMPA Tongue-tie Center
Maximize Your Yearly Benefits By Scheduling Today!
2026 In Network Plans!
Anthem | GEHA | UMR
United Healthcare
Humana | Ameritas
Guardian | UNUM
smileLYNNdental.com
Dr. Stewart, DMD
Dr. Lynn, DMD, MS
(813) 591-3052 | 122 Harbor Village Lane, Apollo Beach

Guided Kayak Tours ~ Eco Tours
Sunset Dinner Cruises
Reserve Your Five Star Tour
Latitudes Tours
latitudestours.com or 813-641-1311
Tripadvisor 2024 Travelers' Choice Awards

TIME FOR ANOTHER
SUPER FAST
OIL CHANGE
EXPRESS OIL CHANGE 10 MINUTE SERVICE
TIRE ENGINEERS FULL SERVICE AUTO CARE
10-MINUTE FULL SERVICE OIL CHANGE
25% OFF
Valid for conventional and full synthetic oil changes.
Not to be combined with any other offer.
Only valid at Riverview, FL - Boyette location.
Exp: 1/31/2026
$40 OFF BRAKES
Includes Free Brake Inspection
Not to be combined with any other offer.
Only valid at Riverview, FL - Boyette location.
Exp: 1/31/2026
Lowest Pricing on
TIRES, MAINTENANCE & AUTOMOTIVE REPAIRS
11690 Boyette Rd., Riverview | 813-499-9606
M-F: 8am - 6pm, Sat: 8am - 5pm, Sun: Closed

ZOOTAMPA IS 'FUREVER' HOME FOR TWO RESCUED RED FOXES

Staff Report

ZooTampa at Lowry Park is a little fuzzier now as two rescued red foxes settle into their new forever home at the zoo.

The foxes, named Sadie and Seth, were among over 250 animals saved from deplorable conditions at the Grand River Fur Exchange in Ashtabula County, Ohio, earlier in 2025. The Humane Society of the United States led the rescue operation after the facility's owner passed away, leaving the animals in dire circumstances.



Sadie



Seth

Upon arrival in November, Sadie and Seth underwent comprehensive health evaluations and a quarantine period under the supervision of the zoo's Animal Health and Animal Care teams. The zoo's Florida team spent time daily with the duo, establishing a relationship with both. Seth, the male, exhibits a classic reddish coat, while Sadie, the female, has a pearl-colored coat, giving her a striking black appearance.

The playful pair have since been introduced to their new habitat in the Florida Wilds area of the zoo, adjacent to the Roaring Springs ride. They have been observed actively exploring their surroundings and engaging playfully with each other.

"Both Sadie and Seth are healthy and adjusting well to their new environment," said Chris Massaro, senior vice president and chief zoological officer at ZooTampa. "We are committed to providing a safe and enriching home for these animals, especially after the traumatic experiences they endured."

Red foxes are known for their acute hearing, capable of detecting high-frequency sounds even underground, which aids in hunting small prey, such as rabbits and rodents. They employ a hunting technique that involves crouching low to blend with their surroundings before leaping to capture their target.

SHINE BRIGHT GALA LAUNCHES NEW CHAPTER FOR CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

By McKenzie Brown





The Confidence & Leadership Foundation, a local 501(c)(3) nonprofit located in Lithia that is dedicated to empowering young people through self-confidence and leadership programs, hosted its first annual Shine Bright Gala at River Hills Country Club in November. Nearly 100 guests attended, and the evening exceeded fundraising expectations, ensuring more programs for local youth in the coming year.

Founded under the Girls & Boys With Confidence umbrella, the foundation offers free confidence-building workshops, scholarships and leadership programs to students in Title I schools and underserved communities.

"Our goal has always been to make confidence and leadership training accessible to every child — no matter their circumstances," said Nancy Lemon, founder of the Confidence & Leadership Foundation.

Susan Giffin, president of the foundation, added, "Seeing our community show up and give so generously was incredibly moving. It proves that people believe in investing in the next generation of leaders."

The gala featured dinner, music, live auctions and meaningful conversations between guests, board members and young participants whose lives have been touched by the foundation's programs. The event's success will directly support expanding free programming in local schools, helping even more children discover their potential.

Plans are already underway for next year's Shine Bright Gala, promising an even larger and more inspiring evening. Meanwhile, the foundation's next community event, 'Ladies Giving Back,' is scheduled for April 23, 2026, at their camp location (10540 Browning Rd. in Lithia), inviting local women to connect, give back and celebrate community. Registration details are available on their website.

At its heart, the Confidence & Leadership Foundation is on a simple mission: to help every young person build self-confidence, cultivate positive character and uncover their leadership potential.

For more information, to volunteer or to support the Foundation's programs, visit www.girlswithconfidence.com/confidence_leadership_foundation.

RELAY FOR LIFE RETURNS WITH OVERNIGHT TRIBUTE ON MARCH 7

Staff Report



The American Cancer Society (ACS) has announced that the 2026 Relay For Life of Greater Tampa Bay will return to Raymond James Stadium on Saturday, March 7, from 4 p.m. to 5 a.m., continuing one of the region's most meaningful annual traditions. Ultimate Medical Academy (UMA) has been named the presenting sponsor for the overnight event, which brings together survivors, caregivers, families, schools and businesses in the fight against cancer.

Relay For Life is known as a family-centered, community-driven experience that celebrates cancer survivors, honors caregivers, remembers loved ones and rallies the community to fight back against every cancer. Tampa Bay has emerged as a national leader in the movement, finishing third in the nation last year and earning recognition as the 2025 ACS Southeast Region's Relay For Life Event of the Year for its community impact, volunteer engagement and fundraising success.

The 2025 event demonstrated the strength of local support, with 206 teams, 3,265 participants and more than 100 Tampa Bay-area schools taking part. Together, they raised $632,040 to support survivors, families and lifesaving cancer research. Organizers are now building on that momentum for 2026, with 121 teams already registered, more than 1,000 participants committed and more than $150,000 raised toward a $650,000 goal.

"Relay For Life is where Tampa Bay comes together for hope," said Shelly Hollingsworth, Relay For Life of Greater Tampa Bay Executive Ambassador Chair. "It's not just an event - it's families camping out overnight, students showing up in huge numbers, survivors taking a victory lap, caregivers receiving the recognition they deserve, and an entire community lighting the stadium with luminarias for love and remembrance. We're grateful to Ultimate Medical Academy for stepping forward to help elevate this lifesaving movement across Tampa Bay."

The overnight event will once again feature Relay For Life's four signature elements: a Survivor Celebration, Caregiver Celebration, Luminaria Ceremony and the Fight Back Together call to action.

Ultimate Medical Academy, an accredited nonprofit educational institution focused on training healthcare professionals, said its sponsorship reflects a shared commitment to compassion and service. "We are honored to serve as the Presenting Sponsor for the 2026 Relay For Life of Greater Tampa Bay," said April Neumann, EVP of Workforce Transformation at UMA. "Our learners enter the healthcare field to make a difference in people's lives, and Relay represents that same spirit of compassion and service. We're proud to stand with the American Cancer Society and with every family touched by cancer."

Community members are encouraged to participate by forming teams or registering at relayforlife.org/tampabayfl.

HARTMANN CELEBRATES 60TH WITH FIVE GENERATIONS OF WOMEN AND A LEGACY OF GIVING

By Jane Owen



Five generations: Alice Katherine, 6 months with mother Gabrielle, grandmother Whitney, great-grandmother Melissa and great-great-grandmother Barbara.

Osprey Observer advertising representative Melissa Hartmann, who has been part of the Osprey family for nine years, celebrated a milestone this October — her 60th birthday. Clients, friends and loved ones honored her for her dedication, kindness and steadfast friendship.

One moment stood out above all others: a special breakfast shared by Hartmann, her mom, daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter. Few families are blessed with five living generations, and even fewer can gather together at one table. For Hartmann, sitting side by side with five decades of women in her family was a reminder of the strength and continuity that have carried them through so many changes over the years.

The tradition began several years ago when Hartmann's daughter, Whitney Laurion, organized their first multigenerational birthday breakfast. This year held extra meaning — it was baby Alice Katherine's first time joining the circle of women who came before her.

"I always love breakfast with our family, but this one was super special with Alice there," Hartmann said. "She was the perfect angel and was happily passed around to each of us to get some love."

Although life keeps each branch of the family busy — living in different towns, juggling work and responsibilities — they remain devoted to showing up for one another.

"Family is very important to me," Hartmann said. "My family is the kind that is always there for you — whether it's a soccer game or you're in the hospital, we will always show up."

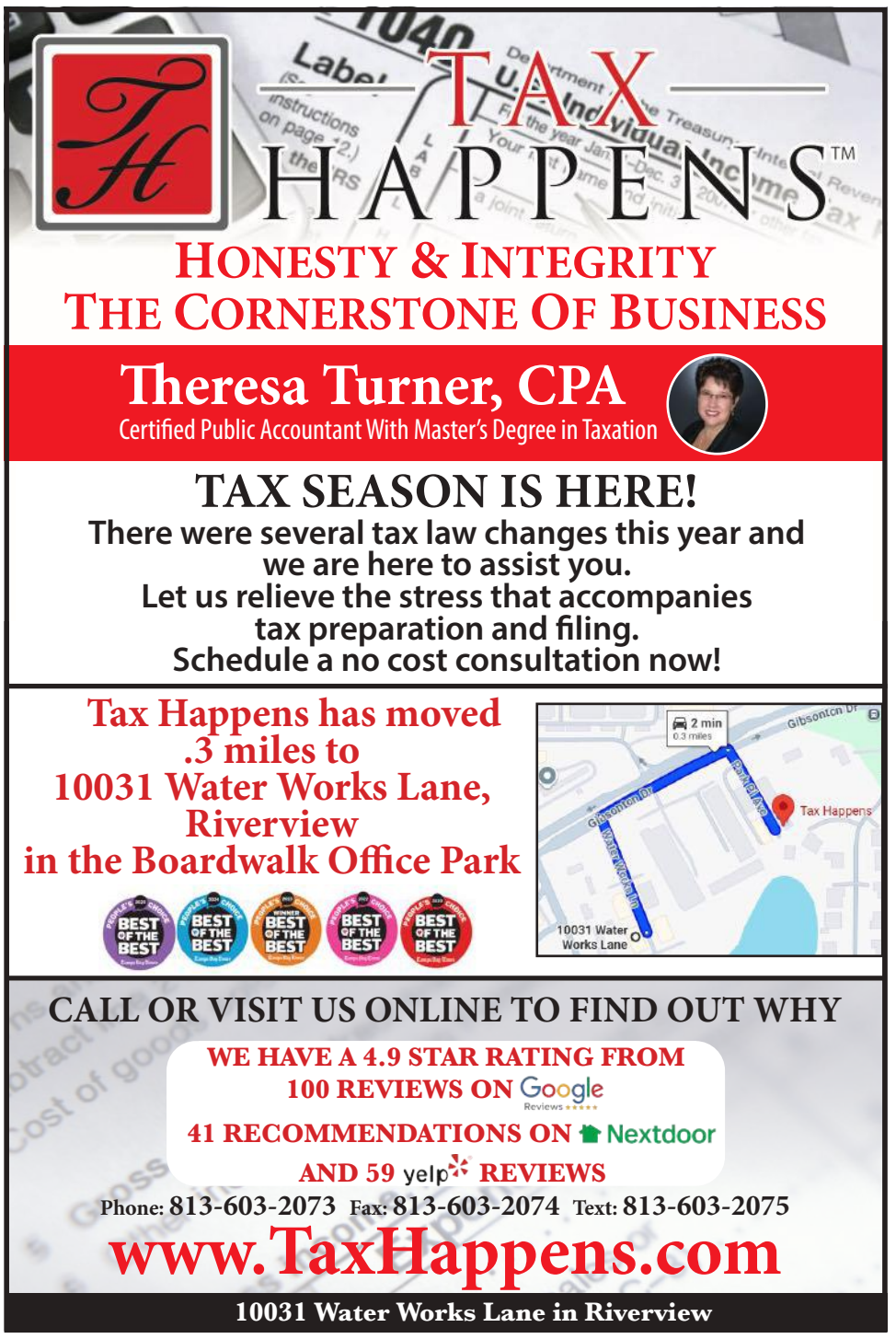
The roots of this closeness run deep. Five-generation photos began in 1985 when Hartmann's grandmother, Barbara Repko, was still living, and the tradition has endured through decades of change, celebrations and challenges. What has never changed is their shared belief that family comes first.

Just as meaningful is the family's shared spirit of giving. Hartmann's mom is a devoted supporter of veterans and shops all year long so children in need can receive Christmas gifts. Hartmann is a board member at Mary & Martha House. Whitney shops for teens at A Kid's Place at Christmas.. And Gabrielle, before welcoming Alice, spent her free time singing for seniors rather than hanging out with friends.

These acts of service reflect a defining thread woven through all five generations — each one carries a giving heart.

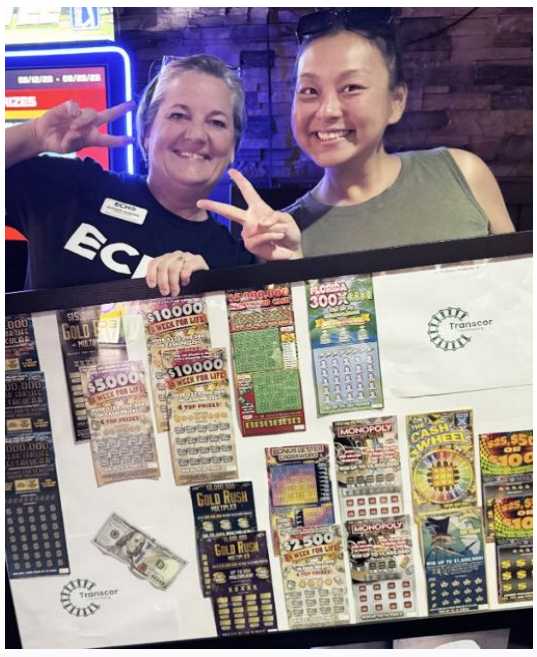
The commitment extends to the men in the family as well, including Hartmann's son, Mark, and to every way Hartmann continues to support and uplift the local community.





MUSIC BINGO FUNDRAISER WILL SUPPORT EMERGENCY SUPPORT PROGRAMS THROUGH ECHO

By Lily Belcher



Voodoo Brewing Co. is hosting a music bingo night fundraiser for a good cause: to help ECHO support the community.

On February 10, the Valrico brewery will open its doors to customers, bingo fans and generous community members to help drum up support for the Emergency Care Help Organization, or ECHO.

ECHO, which was founded in 1987, helps neighbors going through food insecurity or those who need clothing or are looking for a new job. The organization is planning to open its third resource center in Thonotosassa at the end of 2026 or early 2027.

Kayla Vincent is the marketing coordinator with ECHO. She said the goal is to raise as much money as possible and get support from the community for the non profit's programs.

"[The money raised] will be distributed between our food, clothing and job coaches for our back to work program," Vincent said. "So it'll get distributed a little bit everywhere."

ECHO's food pantry and clothing rooms service the Brandon and Riverview areas. People who are in a crisis situation can get temporary help from the locations. The one-on-one job coaching is another opportunity for the community to access local resources, including assessing skills, resume help and learning interview skills.

All of ECHO's services are offered to members of the community who are in need for free and the group aims to reach people across Eastern Hillsborough County.

This is the organization's second time hosting a music bingo fundraiser at Voodoo Brewing Co. They had their first music bingo event in November 2025 and hope to host the fundraiser twice a year.

"We have a lot of need in our community and we need to rile the troops and help our neighbors in this time of need," Vincent said.

Music bingo will span across genres and decades and include some live tunes.

Tickets can be bought in advance.

The doors will open at 6 pm for music bingo and the first game will start at 7 pm.

Voodoo Brewing Co. is located off Highway 60 in Valrico.

For more information about ECHO or its music bingo fundraiser, call 813-856-7232.

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL: MARDI GRAS 2026 SET FOR BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY

Staff Report



Busch Gardens Tampa Bay will once again transform into a slice of New Orleans as its popular Mardi Gras celebration returns in 2026, running on select dates from January 24 through March 1.

Included with regular park admission, the seasonal event invites guests to let the good times roll with Cajun-inspired cuisine, festive parades, live music and family-friendly entertainment woven throughout the park. The celebration is part of Busch Gardens' broader 2026 lineup of special events, offering visitors another reason to plan a winter or early spring visit.

Food takes center stage during Mardi Gras, with themed culinary offerings inspired by the flavors of the French Quarter. Guests can enjoy classic favorites such as Po' Boys, Étouffée and King Cake Beignets, along with specialty cocktails crafted exclusively for the event. Food and beverage sampler lanyards are typically available for purchase, allowing visitors to sample multiple dishes and drinks throughout the day.

Entertainment adds to the festive atmosphere, featuring Mardi Gras-style parades with colorful floats, lively characters and strings of beads tossed to cheering crowds. Live bands and musicians perform throughout the event dates, bringing authentic sounds that capture the spirit of the celebration.

Families visiting during the early weeks of the festival can also take advantage of Kids' Weekends, scheduled from January 24 through February 8. These weekends include additional family-focused activities and appearances by popular Sesame Street characters, making the event accessible and engaging for guests of all ages.

Busch Gardens encourages visitors to check the park's official website as the event approaches to confirm specific dates, hours and entertainment schedules, as offerings may vary by day.

Beyond Mardi Gras, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay continues to stand out as one of Florida's premier theme parks, combining world-class thrill rides, award-winning roller coasters and one of North America's largest zoos, home to more than 200 animal species. From adrenaline-pumping attractions like Iron Gwazi and Cheetah Hunt® to immersive animal encounters and seasonal favorites such as Howl-O-Scream® and Christmas Town™, the park offers something new with every visit.

With food, music and celebration included with admission, Mardi Gras 2026 promises to be a highlight of the season at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay.



BUILD NOW

Design Today, Dive In by Spring!

Call today to schedule your complimentary consultation on a new custom swimming pool, backyard renovation, or weekly maintenance!



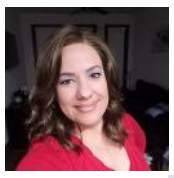
Apollo POOLS .net
CPC 1457589

Call Your Local Pool Experts!
Proudly Serving All Of Hillsborough County!

TRANSFORM YOUR POOL!
We Specialize In Remodeling & Resurfacing Existing Pools, Landscapes & Hardscapes!

APOLLOPOOLS.NET

813-689-5197



WHY UPDATING YOUR ESTATE PLAN AFTER A DIVORCE IS ESSENTIAL

By Laurie E. Ohall, Florida Board-certified Elder Law Attorney

After divorce, most people want to avoid going back to a lawyer. And many think their divorce automatically fixes all their estate planning issues. It doesn't. If you don't update your documents, you may leave behind confusion, legal fights and results you never wanted. Here are a few simple steps to help protect you and your family.



How Florida Law Treats Estate Planning After a Divorce

Florida law does provide some automatic protections, but not everything is covered. It is important to understand what the law does, and does not, do to avoid mistakes.

Under Florida law, once the divorce is final, your ex-spouse is treated as if they died before you when it comes to your last will and testament, revocable trust, durable power of attorney and health care surrogate designation. This means they are removed from roles such as personal representative, trustee or agent.

Beneficiary designations also need to be addressed. Although Florida's automatic revocation applies to some assets, such as life insurance, investments and retirement accounts, if an account is controlled by federal law (such as retirement accounts governed by ERISA laws), your ex-spouse may continue to be the beneficiary. So, it is very important that you update all beneficiary designations regardless.

If you have recently gone through a divorce, make sure to check in with a local estate planning lawyer, even just for your own peace of mind. We are here to help review your old documents and help you create a plan that better aligns with this new stage of your life, including:

- Correct beneficiary designations Florida law may not fix.
- Create an updated will or trust to reflect your wishes.
- Prepare new health care directives or powers of attorney.

Your Post-divorce Reset

Divorce is a major turning point. Updating your estate plan ensures your wishes are honored and your loved ones are protected. If you have questions or you are ready to take the next step, please feel free to reach out to Laurie Ohall to schedule an appointment.

Laurie Ohall is a Florida board-certified elder law attorney practicing in Brandon, Florida. She has been practicing law for 30 years and her practice is focused on estate planning, elder law planning and probate. Ohall is licensed to practice law in Florida and Ohio.

DAMON C. GLISSON, ATTORNEY-AT-LAW

Probate and Estate Planning
Home Visits • Wills • Medicaid Planning



5908 FORTUNE PLACE
APOLLO BEACH, FL 33572
www.Glisson1.com

(813) 645-6796

The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely on advertisement. Before you decide, ask us to send you FREE written information about our qualifications and experience.

PRESERVATION 1ST FINANCIAL GROUP, LLC
FINANCIAL PLANNING & INSURANCE SERVICES



Let us help take the burden of retirement and estate planning off your mind.

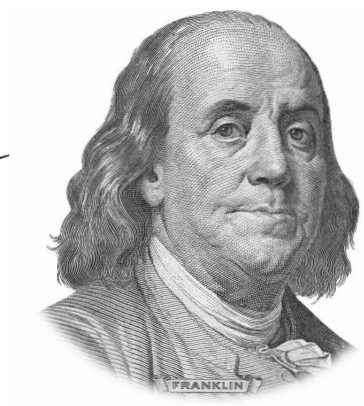
Call Today for your Free Consultation.
813-627-0872

912 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., Brandon, FL 33511
www.Preservation1st.com

Securities offered through J.W. Cole Financial, Inc. (JWC), Member FINRA/SIPC. Advisory services offered through J.W. Cole Advisors, Inc. (JWCA). Preservation 1st Financial Group, LLC and JWC & JWCA are unaffiliated entities. Non-security products are not offered by J.W. Cole.

Magruder Agency, Inc.

Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man.
-Benjamin Franklin





Contact us Today for a FREE Quote!
Email: Stephanie@MagruderAgency.com
Phone: (813)654-3100
655 W. Lumsden Rd. Brandon
magruderagency.com

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS IN BUSINESS!

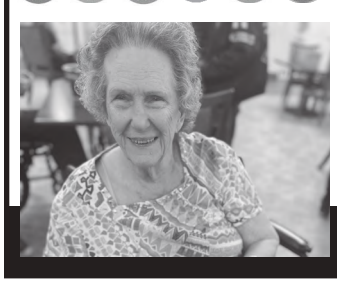
INSURANCE: CAR • HOME • LIFE • BUSINESS
MOTORCYCLE • RV • BOAT

Ballistic Dynamics

-Riverview
-Fish Hawk
-Apollo Beach

(941) 545-2158
www.ballistic-consulting.com

Firearms Training | Gunsmithing | Appraisals | Consulting



TESSERA
BRANDON
AN EMBASSY HEALTHCARE ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY

1320 Oakfield Dr., Brandon, FL 33511
(813) 607-6880
tesserabrandon.com

Independent, Assisted Living and Memory Care

Assisted Living Facility #AL13150

"Tessera Brandon...Living Your Lifestyle."

TRUE LIES FISHING CHARTERS

EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME..
Book Your Charter Today!



Captain Brandeán McCorkle

Fishing Charters • Sunset Cruises and ECO Tours
Ask about group, military, law enforcement, fire fighter, and corporate discounts!
Gift Certificates Available.
(813) 480-5111
www.trueliesfishingcompany.com

Angel GIFT SHOP
Sponsored by Angel Foundation FL
AngelFoundationFL.com
HCA Florida Brandon Hospital
813-910-0021

Open Monday-Saturday
Hours Vary

Flowers
Baby Items
Toys
Blankets
Inspirational Gifts



LIVE WITH PEACE OF MIND

For our brave veterans and every senior who deserves the very best! At Freedom Plaza, located on 140 acres in the heart of beautiful
Sun City Center, Florida; we believe in more than just retirement –
we believe in living worry-free!





STAY INDEPENDENT.STAY ACTIVE. STAY FREE.

- Maintenance-Free Living
- A Full Continuum of Healthcare
- A Strong Community of Patriots
- Top-Rated in Sun City Center, Florida

READY TO EXPERIENCE THE FREEDOM YOU DESERVE?

A community of seniors who are living their best lives. Visit us today at Freedom Plaza – where your future is secure and your lifestyle is full of possibilities!

Peace of mind starts here!



SCHEDULE A TOUR & LEARN MORE ABOUT LIFE CARE

(813) 634-1824

1010 American Eagle Blvd,
Sun City Center, FL 33573

FreedomPlazaFL.com

Freedom Plaza

FROM VALRICO ROOTS TO TRUSTED POOL CARE: SWEERS POOL SERVICE DELIVERS QUALITY & DEPENDABILITY

By McKenzie Brown

Sweers Pool Service is a locally owned business dedicated to keeping pools safe, clean, and enjoyable for families throughout Hillsborough County. Founded by Valrico native Alan Sweers, the company is built on the belief that every pool is different—and deserves individualized care based on its specific needs.



Sweers owner Alan Sweers

Serving communities including Lithia, Valrico, Brandon, Riverview, Bloomingdale, and FishHawk, Sweers Pool Service offers reliable weekday service with a strong focus on water safety, consistency, and customer education. Alan and his team work closely with pool owners to help them understand proper pool care, ensuring long-term health of both the pool and the people who use it.

Sweers Pool Service provides a full range of professional maintenance services, including comprehensive water testing to balance pH, chlorine, and alkalinity levels. Regular skimming and vacuuming remove surface debris and clean the pool floor, while brushing walls and steps helps prevent algae buildup and keeps pools looking their best. The team also cleans and inspects filters to maintain optimal circulation, along with routine equipment inspections of pumps and heaters to ensure everything runs efficiently.

Alan Sweers' passion for pool care started early. He began cleaning pools in his early 20s, working in the industry for five years. Pool service was his first job, and it laid the foundation for a strong work ethic and hands-on expertise. After later working as a bartender and server, Alan found himself at a crossroads during the 2020 shutdowns. Looking for a new direction, he returned to what he knew best—pool service—with a renewed purpose.

Determined to serve his community, Alan attended "pool school," earned his certification as a Certified Pool Operator, and officially launched Sweers Pool Service in 2021. Today, his business continues to grow, driven by experience, integrity, and a genuine commitment to quality service. Sweers likes to go by the slogan, "I'm not the cheapest, I'm not the most expensive, but I am the best."

For dependable, knowledgeable pool care, Sweers Pool Service stands by its promise to deliver the best—every pool, every visit. They serve Hillsborough County, Florida with weekday service available. To schedule an appointment, call 813-293-6236 or email them at sweerspoolservice@gmail.com.

ONE HOPE UNITED OPENS FIRST HOPE HOUSE IN RIVERVIEW FOR FLORIDA FOSTER YOUTH

Staff Report

One Hope United proudly announced the opening of its first Hope House in Riverview yesterday, marking the organization's 10th Hope House in Florida and furthering its commitment to providing youth in foster care with the stability and support they deserve. Each home serves four teens aged 13-17, many of whom are high acuity, in a family-like setting that focuses on healing and personal growth.



Representatives of One Hope United celebrate the opening of its 10th house for foster youth in Riverview.

Community members, local partners, and media attended today's open house celebration to tour the new Hope House and meet the team behind this transformative model of care. The event also drew support from Michele Rayner of the Florida House of Representatives; Terri Balliet, CEO of Children's Network of Hillsborough County; and Michael Rogenmoser from Representative Alvarez's office, who were present to recognize the significance of expanding this model of care in Hillsborough County.

"I've worked a lot in the foster care system. My mother was also a social worker, and this was what she cared most about: making sure kids were protected. She believed that even if a child started off with a hand that wasn't so great, they deserved the resources and support to build a better one. When I learned there was a Hope House in Pinellas Park and now in Riverview, I knew I wanted to do anything I could to be helpful," said Michele Rayner, Florida House of Representatives.

Hope Houses stand apart by focusing on:

A true home environment: Caring Hope House foster parents live with the youth, providing the structure and stability of a family setting. Youth care workers—who are closer in age—offer mentorship, academic support, and life skills training.

Therapeutic healing: On-site therapists help youth understand their trauma, identify triggers, and develop healthy coping mechanisms through creative outlets like music, art, and gardening.

Empowerment and future preparation: Teens make meaningful choices about their personal space, goals, and daily lives. They also receive hands-on support in essential skills such as resume building, job applications, and financial literacy.

About One Hope United

One Hope United (OHU) is a nonprofit providing early childhood education, child and family services, behavioral and mental health resources, and residential programs for 130 years. OHU proudly serves over 10,000 children and families each year across Illinois and Florida. Through evidence-based and trauma-informed practices, OHU empowers children and families to see and create a future where, regardless of their past, they can reach their full potential. Learn more at onehopeunited.org





LOCAL SCOUT ATTEMPTS TO ACHIEVE GOAL OF ALL 141 MERIT BADGES

By Jane Owen

Bloomingdale High School senior Jacob Townes is working to achieve all 141 merit badges from Scouting America (formerly called Boy Scouts of America). Scouting America was founded in 1910. In the last 115 years, only 1 percent of Scouts (less than 1,000) have earned all of the badges. What makes that statistic even more impressive is that the organization started with only 14 badges and continues to add badges every year.



Jacob Townes with his dad and Scout master, Scott Townes.



Approximately 6 percent of all Scouts earn the Eagle Scout rank, the highest rank attainable. To be an Eagle Scout, a Scout must earn a minimum of 21 merit badges. Townes will achieve the Eagle Scout rank in January 2026.

Townes started in scouts when he was 11 and began focusing on merit badges in high school. His goal of earning all of the merit badges must be completed by July 2026, when he turns 18 and ages out of the program. He has 21 more to earn. His favorite badges have been water-based badges. He believes the hardest left are the snow badge, because it doesn't snow in Florida, and the bugle badge, because of the difficulty to master playing a bugle.

"I don't have doubts that I can do it. I just need to focus and get it done," Townes said.

Townes is inspired by his dad, who is his current Scout master, and a little bit of bragging rights.

"My dad influenced me to do more. I started doing more and I started loving it. Then, I realized I had the most merit badges in the troop. So, I kept pushing," Townes said.

To other Scouts working on badges, Townes' best advice is to stay focused and work on them regularly.

"Certain badges are going to be easier than others because some of them have time restraints. Work on it for an hour every so often. It doesn't have to be every day, but you have to be focused," Townes said.

Townes loves the leadership skills he has gained from Scouts. Not surprisingly, Townes is a stand-out student, finishing high school while taking multiple Advanced Placement (AP) classes. He intends to earn a psychology degree in college.

Townes is part of Boys Troop 610, which meets at St. Stephen Catholic Church, located at 10118 St. Stephen Circle in Riverview. For more information about Scouting America, visit www.scouting.org.

VOODOO BREWING VALRICO RAISES $10,000 FOR SMALL BUT MIGHTY HEROES

By Brian Bokor



Voodoo Brewing Co. Valrico's 2026 featured charity partner, Cindy Tilley of Forgotten Angels, with Chris Ciulla and the Clauses.

Voodoo Brewing Co. Valrico marked its one-year anniversary by presenting a $10,000 donation to its 2025 charity partner, Small But Mighty Heroes, during a celebration held on December 7.

The donation capped a weekend of anniversary events held from December 5-7 at the brewery's Valrico location at 3434 E. SR 60.

Owner Chris Ciulla announced the donation during the event, noting that the funds were raised through multiple fundraising events with support from the brewery's Founders Club and the chamber of commerce.

"We managed to raise a little over $9,000 for the year that we rounded up to $10,000 to give to Small But Mighty, and it comes from our Voodoo Valrico Founders Club fund. Our Founders Club helped us out with this, and we've had a lot of support from the chamber of commerce, so I'd like to say thank you, our community, for supporting us and supporting Small But Mighty Heroes," he said.

"Overall, we've done about $20,000 for various charities. We support Durant High School, we've donated a lot of food this year and we've done a lot of events for the community as well," Ciulla said.

Small But Mighty Heroes founder Tina Downing addressed attendees and highlighted the organization's mission.

"All of you guys have helped to make this possible for organizations, and the community is a huge part of what we do. We provide tailored support for children battling cancer, siblings and their parents," Downing said.

She also referenced holiday-related initiatives supported through the organization.

"The toy drive that we are having here as well, those toys will go to help make their Christmas special," she said. The toy drive will be held on December 20 and was sponsored by several local area businesses.

Santa and Mrs. Claus were also on-site during the celebration, posing for photos with attendees.

Ciulla was then joined by Cindy Tilley of Forgotten Angels to announce the organization as Voodoo Brewing Co. Valrico's charity partner for 2026.

"I chose [Forgotten Angels] because they're really giving people and because they also give a lot back to the community. We're going to host a lot of events here for them this year, so follow the Facebook page. If you want to be part of the giving, come show up at these events," he said.



BABE'S PIZZA REOPENS IN BRANDON, CONTINUING A 47-YEAR FAMILY DINING & DOUBLE DECKER LEGACY

By Brad Stager





Driving east on State Road 60, a colorful sight of a 2-story building painted a hue akin to a ripened Ruskin tomato — at 107 N. Kings Ave., just north of the thoroughfare also known as Brandon Boulevard, emerges from the cluttered signage.

It is the home of Babe's Pizza, a Brandon family dining fixture since 1978, and now in the 21st century it continues not as merely a spot one plugs into a contraption for directions to fetch food, but as a neighborhood treasure seasoned with the flavor of a double-decker pizza.

The fact that the doors are still open after 47 years, reopening on October 7 after a hiatus, is a testament to a determination to fulfill appetites of neighbors with tasty food and an enjoyable atmosphere. The responsibility of keeping Babe's doors open now rests with Naitik and Shivangi Patel, who recently bought the business from their friends Craig and Sonal Patel, who had operated the restaurant since 2019 after purchasing it from longtime owners Pat and Rich Paddock.

Naitik, who is also known by associates as Nick, said he recognizes the place Babe's Pizza has in the community and is keeping the core elements in place, like background music that's a spectral echo of a vintage Q105 playlist, the train circling above the dining area and of course the popular double-decker pizza. Other pizza offerings honor local sports tribes, such as the Lightning Strikes and Buccaneer pies.

The ingredients are fresh, but Babe's is not some artisanal, farm-to-table fantasy; it is the real deal with food that is meant to satisfy the senses completely, from the aroma of cheese and sauce upon entering to the fulfillment experienced after dining.

Golden, crisp fries offer a satisfying counterpoint to the menu offerings, which include subs made of varying combinations of meat, cheese, herbs and dressings. The pastas offer a deep dive into Italian flavor, such as the baked spaghetti a la DeSantis or the baked spaghetti a la Brady. Desserts like cannoli round out a meal.

"I'm super excited that people are coming back," he stated.

Naitik added that he wants to grow Babe's legacy by possibly expanding hours to include lunch and offering pizza slices., "It has to be Babe's."

Visit https://babespizzafl.com/.

FISHHAWK SPARTANS YOUTH PROGRAM CONTINUES TO GROW ON AND OFF THE FIELD

By Olivia Clark



Phil Wallace, FishHawk Spartans track and field coach, with an athlete after a successful meet.

FishHawk Spartans continues to grow as a youth sports organization serving boys in FishHawk, Lithia and surrounding communities through tackle football, '300 Boyz' 7v7 football and a track and field club. The program is based at the FishHawk Sports Complex and draws athletes from across Central Florida, according to Danielle Plumstead, operations manager.

Plumstead said 290 athletes registered for Sunday tryouts, reflecting continued interest in the program and its development-focused approach. FishHawk Spartans was founded by Christian Beiter, who started the organization to create opportunities for local youth. Program leaders also work to ensure a family's financial situation does not prevent a child from participating, and the organization continues seeking community sponsors to support athletes.

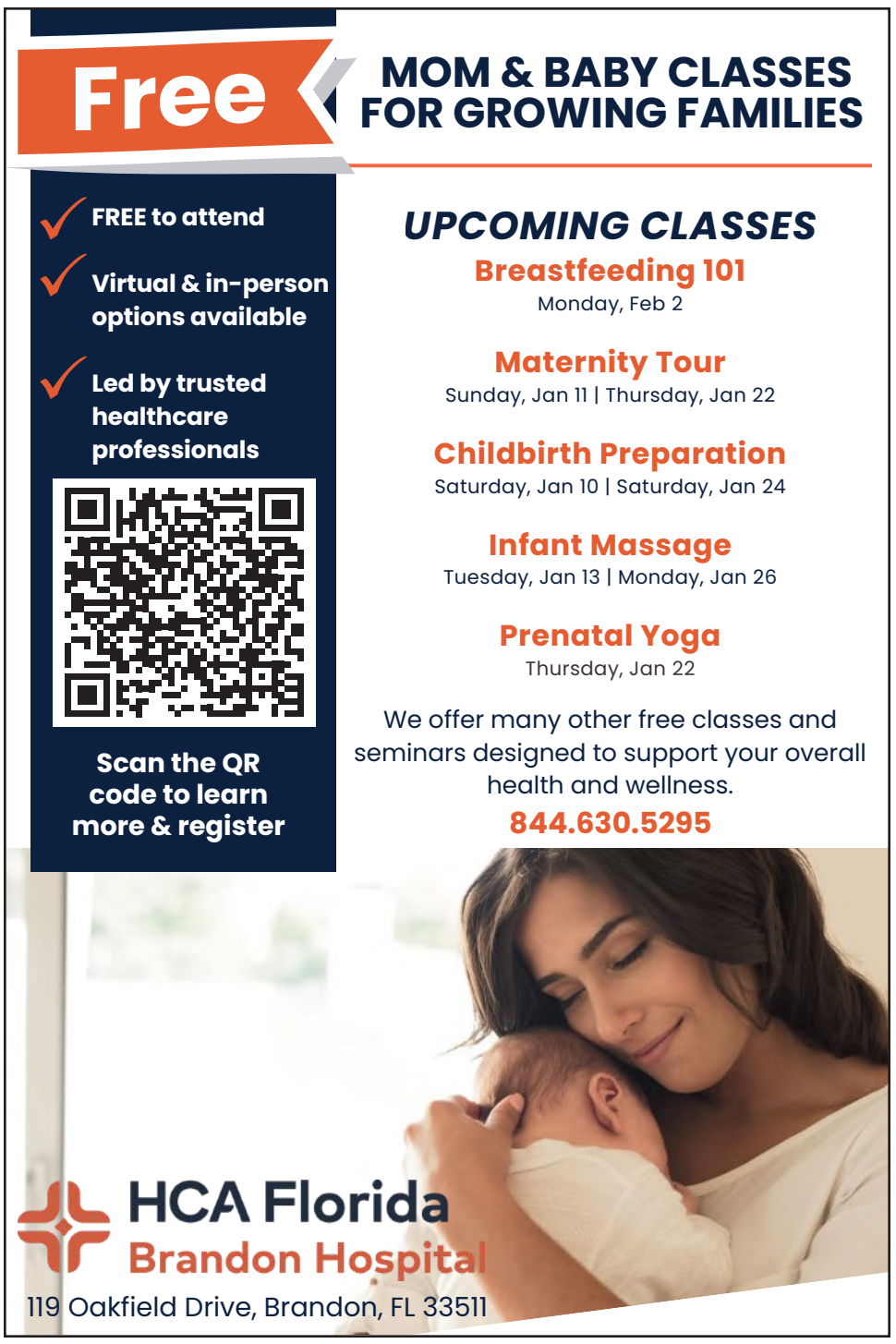
For football and 7v7, FishHawk Spartans primarily serves boys in age divisions from 8U through 18U. The 300 Boyz 7v7 program is a competitive option with tryouts and tournament play, with an estimated 140-150 athletes participating. Practices are held at the FishHawk Sports Complex on Monday and Wednesday, beginning on January 5, 2026.

FishHawk Spartans' track and field club, coached by Phil Wallace, provides training and competition for athletes, including younger participants. Plumstead said the track program had 35 athletes in 2025 and is expected to double that this season. Conditioning begins in November 2026 and is offered at no cost for athletes who want to try it before the official season begins in January. The first meet is scheduled for March 2026. Wallace also offers a $100 conditioning option for athletes who want training support for other sports without competing in meets.

The organization has also celebrated on-field success. During the tackle season, five teams reached the playoffs, four advanced to Super Bowls and two won championships. In track, six athletes qualified for the Junior Olympics in Houston, Texas, with two finishing in the top eight to earn All-American honors.

For additional information about FishHawk Spartans programs, contact Plumstead by email at 08dmmoss@gmail.com, visit www.fishhawkspartans.com or follow FishHawk Spartans on Facebook and Instagram.





FLORIDA STATE FAIR TO MARK AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY WITH PATRIOTIC 2026 THEME

Staff Report

The Florida State Fair is preparing to shine brighter than ever in 2026 as it celebrates America's 250th birthday with a patriotic theme, festive entertainment and a limited-time advance ticket deal.

Fair officials announced this week that the 2026 Florida State Fair will be themed "America's Sunniest Celebration," a tribute to 250 years of American history infused with Florida flair. The annual 12-day event will take place Feb. 5–16, 2026, at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa, running through Presidents Day.



Crowds enjoy the sights and attractions at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa. The 2026 Florida State Fair will run Feb. 5–16 and feature the patriotic theme "America's Sunniest Celebration" in honor of the nation's 250th birthday.

Billed as part of the nationwide America250 celebration, the 2026 fair is being promoted as a milestone event filled with classic fair traditions, deep-fried favorites, dazzling fireworks, live entertainment and agricultural showcases, alongside special nods to the nation's past.

"Celebrating 250 years of America is something truly special, and we're excited to mark the occasion with a fair that honors both our nation's history and Florida's unique roots," said Cheryl Flood, chief executive officer of the Florida State Fair. ""America's Sunniest Celebration' is more than just a theme, it's a chance to bring people together, shine a light on our state's rich agricultural traditions and create new memories with family and friends. We can't wait to welcome everyone back to the fairgrounds for a celebration that's as bright as Florida itself."

In addition to unveiling the theme, fair officials announced a one-day-only advance ticket flash sale scheduled for Oct. 1. During the sale, admission tickets will be available for $5 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., or while supplies last, with no additional fees. Officials say the discounted tickets represent the lowest admission price available for the 2026 fair and offer savings of up to $11 compared to gate prices.

Parking will also be offered at a flash sale price of $5, limited to one per transaction.

Looking ahead, officials said the 2026 fair will feature agricultural events and exhibits, a journey through time at the fair's living history museum, and a mix of classic and new fan-favorite foods.

Tickets can only be purchased online through the Florida State Fair website www.floridastatefair.

HIGH 5 HOLIDAY TALENT SHOW CELEBRATES CREATIVITY AND INCLUSION

By Logan Walz





The High 5 Holiday Talent Show took place this December, offering an evening focused on creativity, confidence, and community. The event provided members in the TRIDENT special needs program and clients from Livingstone Academies Transition Program the opportunity to showcase their talents in a supportive and inclusive setting.

This year marked the first time the talent show was held offsite at The Regent. Hosting the event at a public venue allowed for a larger audience and a stage setting for participants to perform in front of family, friends, and community members.

"This was the first year for the High 5 Holiday Talent Show, and it was also our first time hosting it offsite," Patrick Skidmore says.

The event was not structured as a competition, and no official winners were named. Instead, the focus remained on participation and celebration, emphasizing the talents and individuality of each performer.

Participants dressed in outfits inspired by various decades, adding a creative element to the evening. Performances included singing and stage acts that highlighted personal expression and confidence.

Guests also had the opportunity to browse crafts and handmade items created by program participants. Although the event was not intended as a fundraiser, a few hundred dollars were raised through craft sales and donations. The proceeds will help support future activities and programming.

Organizers said the success of the inaugural event has set the foundation for future talent shows. The High 5 Holiday Talent Show is planned to take place annually each December, and the åtails regarding next year's event.

T.R.I.D.E.N.T.-Training and Recreation for the Intellectually Disabled Enhancing their Natural Talents focuses on three main areas: active recreation, proper socialization / interpersonal skills, and independent life skills. We aim to provide an enriching environment where our members can continue to learn and perfect their interpersonal and life skills, create bonding social relationships with their peers and benefit from organized activities, games and sports to lead a more active lifestyle. The program is located at 405 Beverly Blvd. Brandon. Call (813) 689-0908 or visit https://high5inc.org/trident-2/.

4 BDRM/3 BATH IN MIRABAY!
$550,000
CALL TODAY FOR DETAILS!
Going beyond client expectations and delivering an industry leading experience that really wows clients.
623 Winterside Drive, Apollo Beach
Todd Dysle ®
Cell: 813.503.4356
t.dysle@att.net
Paula Dysle ®
Cell: 813.393.7015
PJOSU84@gmail.com
RE/MAX
The Dysle Team

StateFarm®
HERE FOR LIFE.
Call or visit us online today!
813-662-3622
www.melissayouragent.com
Your local Insurance Agency for Car, Life, Home, Business, Disability Income and more.
Melissa Snively, Agent
www.MelissaYourAgent.com

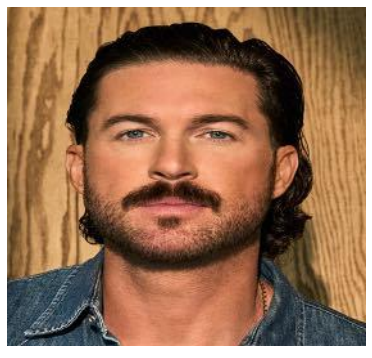
MYERS LAW
• Criminal Defense
• Family Law
Mediation
• Personal Injury
• Divorce
Dawn Myers
Attorney at Law
Former Prosecutor
Experience You Can Trust
Defense You Can Count On
(813)493-DAWN
www.myerslawpa.com
3419 Brook Crossing Drive, Brandon, Fl 33511
dawn@myerslawpa.com
Would you like to learn more about our Judicial System?
Dawn Myers is Available to Present
13 Secrets of the 13th Circuit
& all are public knowledge
Please contact the office to schedule this presentation.

JOAN JETT, ALABAMA AND DIERKS BENTLEY HEADLINE A 'STILL GROWING' FLORIDA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL IN 2026

Staff Report









The Florida Strawberry Festival® is turning up the volume for its 91st year, unveiling a star-studded entertainment lineup that reflects the event's 2026 theme, "Still Growing." From country legends and rock icons to chart-topping Christian artists and R&B superstars, BerryFest26 promises one of the most dynamic musical offerings in Festival history.

Headlining the Wish Farms Soundstage are major crowd favorites including Alabama, Dierks Bentley, Brantley Gilbert, Riley Green, The Offspring, Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, and the powerhouse R&B collaboration Legends of Love featuring Brian McKnight, Ginuwine and Ruben Studdard. These popular acts highlight how the Festival continues to grow in scale, reach and entertainment appeal while staying rooted in its deep agricultural and community traditions.

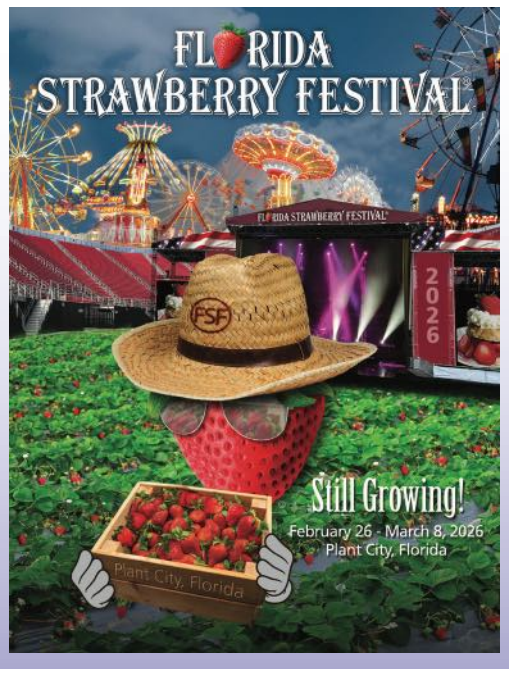
The theme "Still Growing" reflects the Festival's ongoing evolution — from record-setting attendance and expanding attractions to continued celebration of Plant City's iconic strawberry industry. That growth is evident in both the diversity and caliber of this year's performers, offering something for every generation of Festival-goers.

"As we unveil our headline entertainment for BerryFest26, I am beyond excited to say this year's theme perfectly captures the energy and anticipation surrounding our incredible lineup," said Florida Strawberry Festival® President Kyle Robinson.

"With such amazing performances in store, this year's Festival is sure to be one for the books.

We've worked hard to create an event that celebrates not just our community's love for strawberries, but also our shared passion for music, fun, and tradition. Get ready- 'The Stage Is Set!,' and we can't wait to see you there!"





Among the most anticipated performances is Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, who will deliver the Festival's closing-night concert on March 8, 2026. Known for timeless hits including "I Love Rock 'n' Roll," "Bad Reputation," and "Crimson and Clover," Jett will cap off BerryFest26 with a high-energy finale.

Another standout is Legends of Love, bringing together the smooth vocals and chart-topping careers of Brian McKnight, Ginuwine and Ruben Studdard for a soulful R&B showcase that adds fresh range and star power to the lineup.

"Announcing both Legends of Love and Joan Jett is truly special for us," said Florida Strawberry Festival President Kyle Robinson. "These artists bring two distinct musical experiences, yet both deliver the kind of talent and excitement our guests love. Legends of Love adds a soulful new dimension to the lineup, and Joan Jett closing out the Festival ensures an unforgettable finale. We're thrilled to welcome them both to BerryFest26."

Advance tickets for gate admission and headline entertainment are available online, through the Festival's mobile app, by phone at 813-754-1996, or in person at the Amscot Main Ticket Office located at 2209 W. Oak Avenue in Plant City. Tickets can also be purchased at www.flstrawberryfestival.com

The 2026 Florida Strawberry Festival will take place February 26 through March 8 in Plant City. The 11-day community celebration draws more than 600,000 visitors annually, featuring headline entertainment, youth livestock shows, commercial exhibits and its famous strawberry shortcake — a tradition more than nine decades strong and, true to its theme, still growing.

New Year, New Possibilities—
And Maybe A New Address!
Fresh beginnings can start with the right move.
Buying or selling in the year ahead?
We've got you covered.
Ask us about our Credit Repair options:
If YOU have income, WE can get you into a home!
Happy New Year!



CHRISTINA ADAMS
BROKER ASSOCIATE
813-480-2071
Christinaadams.remax.com
www.SuburbanTampaBay.com

#1 RE/MAX



ALEX PERRY MORTGAGE LENDER
NMLS LICENSE #2611 | NMLS LICENSE #177874
Rate 727-362-6890
www.YourTampaBayLender.com

TRACE ADKINS, JUSTIN MOORE TO HEADLINE TAMPA BAY RODEO'S BULL BASH & COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Staff Report

Country music stars Trace Adkins and Justin Moore will headline the Tampa Bay Rodeo's Bull Bash & Country Music Festival, bringing two nights of music, bull riding and patriotic celebration to the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds on January 16 and 17, 2026.

The event, which coincides with America's 250th birthday, will also feature country music legend Lee Greenwood as a special guest each night. Organizers say the festival is designed to honor the men and women of the U.S. military, with special recognition given to the Wounded Warrior Project, which will host members of its community during the event.

Each evening begins with a high-energy bull riding competition, as some of the region's top riders compete in a single-event showdown for cash prizes and bragging rights. Once the dust settles, the stage lights up with performances from some of country music's biggest names.

Multiplatinum hitmaker Justin Moore headlines Friday, January 16, with general admission tickets offering fans close-up views of both the bull riding action and the concert. Moore recently earned his 13th No. 1 hit with "This Is MY Dirt," following the platinum-certified duet "You, Me, and Whiskey" with Priscilla Block. His career highlights include chart-toppers such as "Small Town USA," "Point at You," "Lettin' the Night Roll" and "If Heaven Wasn't So Far Away," along with multiple award nominations and an ACM Award win.

On Saturday, January 17, Trace Adkins takes the spotlight. Over his career, Adkins has sold more than 11 million albums, charted 40 singles on Billboard's Country Airplay chart and amassed more than 3.5 billion streams. A Grand Ole Opry member for 20 years, the Louisiana native is known for his powerful baritone and memorable hits including "This Ain't (No Thinkin' Thing)," "Every Light in the House," "Honky Tonk Badonkadonk" and "Hillbilly Bone" with Blake Shelton. Greenwood will deliver a patriotic tribute performance both nights.

Gates open at 4:30 p.m., giving fans time to enjoy food, drinks and activities, including a mechanical bull, before the main events begin.

The mission of the Greater Hillsborough County Fair is to hold an annual County Fair that serves as a venue for events, experiences, entertainment and education for families and children of all ages. The grounds are located at 215 Sydney Washer Road Dover. Tickets are on sale now at tamparodeo.com.

A SECOND CHANCE AT MEDICARE EXCELLENCE

IMAGINE paying for car insurance from the day you were born… but not being allowed to drive until you turned 16. You'd expect that coverage to be pretty darn good, wouldn't you? And affordable!

Well, you've been paying into Medicare since you started working but couldn't use it until you turned 65. So yes—you have every right to expect it to be pretty darn good. And affordable. You're not being unreasonable. In fact, you may have lowered your expectations too much. Maybe even settled. I want you to consider that you deserve better.

If you're unsure whether you're in the best position—or if you simply got worn out from the barrage of calls during the recently concluded Annual Enrollment Period—take a breath. Truly.

From Jan 1 to March 31, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) gives you another chance. A quieter chance. A chance to make changes with less pressure. Think of it as a "mulligan." This time, YOU do the reaching out. You shouldn't be getting a hundred calls with fake names and spoofed local numbers (not that it should've been happening anyway, but we both know it does).

During this period, you stay in control. Use this lesser-known but incredibly valuable window to calmly get it right—or confirm you already did. Hint: We believe we may have cracked the Medicare code for many. It's not about one carrier or another—it's an approach. A rethink. And it works. Let's talk… calmly, honestly, intelligently. You deserve that.

Call us to chat by phone, set up a one-on-one, meet face-to-face, connect via Zoom, or send an email—we'll make it easy. You won't be calling a massive, impersonal call center. You'll reach us. And if we're helping someone else, please leave a message. We will call you back personally, just as we did for the neighbor before you.

Just leave a simple "Hey, could you call me?" and we'll reach out. Promise.



Elaine Johnson, RN, BN
Medicare Specialized
813-450-6473
Elaine.RN.MedEd@outlook.com
J Johnson, MSFS, CFP®, CFS®

Password: medicareinfo



CUSTOM HAIR

For the hair you've always wanted!

Since 1969

Thin Hair?

- **FREE CONSULTATION!**
- EUROPEAN HUMAN HAIR TOPPERS, WIGS & BLENDS
- NON-SURGICAL BONDING options for active men & women
- Chemotherapy and Alopecia Specialists
- Largest **In-Stock Selection** in Tampa Bay
- Non-Surgical Hair Replacement for Men



56336-1

THE LOOK YOU WANT, WITHOUT THE SOUTH TAMPA PRICE!

CLEARWATER MALL 727-725-1052 | BRANDON 813-651-9484 | TAMPA 813-932-5327

customhairtampabay.com • APPOINTMENT ONLY PLEASE

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

PRESSURE WASHING AND SCREEN REPAIR
10% OFF *all work over* $100
COOPER
• Houses
• Pool Cages
• Decks
• Driveways
• Sidewalks
• Gutter Cleaning
• & More
FREE ESTIMATES
813-892-5283

BOOKKEEPING
We Got This Bookkeeping
So you can work your business, *not your books*!
• Monthly Bookkeeping
• QuickBooks Online Setup & Support
• Catch-Up & Cleanup Projects
• Financial Reporting
• QuickBooks ProAdvisor
(813)981-9008
grace@wegotthisbookkeeping.com
wegotthisbookkeeping.com

HEAT & AC
BROWN COMFORT SYSTEMS
HEATING & AIRCONDITIONING
SERVICE YOU CAN TRUST
Residential & Commercial
Installation & Repair
Commercial Refrigeration
(813) 671-2555

PEST CONTROL
TNT termite & pest control
Residential and Commercial
(813) 468-8574
TNTtermiteandpestcontrol.com
LOCAL & FAMILY OWNED
"DYNAMITE CUSTOMER SERVICE"

Osprey Observer — Your Community Newspaper

Advertise in this directory for just $50 per ad, or as low as $150 per month ... (INCLUDES ALL 4 EDITIONS)
Call Us Today! (813) 657-2418 or Visit OspreyObserver.com

MAGIC COMES TO THE FARM: WIZARDFEST SET FOR LIMITED RUN AT RAPRAGER FARMS

Staff Report

A new immersive festival celebrating magic, fantasy and family fun is coming to Raprager Farms this winter with the debut of its first-ever WizardFest.

The limited-time event begins on Friday, February 20, and will run on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays only, transforming the farm into a world of magic and mystery inspired by legendary wizards such as Gandalf, Harry and Merlin. Tickets for WizardFest are on sale now.



tive classes during WizardFest at Raprager Farms.

WizardFest is designed to appeal to both fantasy fans and visitors who simply want to enjoy a unique seasonal attraction. Guests who purchase Wizard tickets will be able to take part in themed wizard classes, including Defense Against the Dark Arts, Monsters Class, Herbology, Potions, Broom Flying, Magic Class, Magical Crafting and Divination. An interactive Escape from Dark Wizards experience will challenge participants to work together to solve magical puzzles.

Nonmagic guests, known as 'wuggles,' are also welcome and will have access to all farm activities, which will be specially themed for the festival.

In addition to the magical programming, the event features more than two acres of attractions, including a 300-animal petting zoo and farm animal experience. Visitors can explore a 17,000-square-foot maze; slide down a 40-foot, second-story hay chute; jump into a corn pit; or play inside Fort Merlin, a 2,000-square-foot kids fort.

Additional attractions include a bounce pillow with tormentors, battle-axe throwing, a mechanical bull and a variety of games such as cornhole, Connect 4 and field chess. Entertainment and photo opportunities are located throughout the property, including a chance to take pictures with a full-sized dragon.

WizardFest will also debut all-new menus and specialty offerings. The SweetShop will feature gourmet fudge, coffee and cider donuts, while other food stands will offer ice cream, kettle corn and additional treats. The Lemonade Stand will serve fresh-squeezed lemonade, cinnamon roasted nuts and sno cones. Adult guests can visit The Packing House Bar, which will offer beer, wine and batch cocktails, including special wizard-themed drinks.

Optional add-on activities include face painting, unicorn rides and gem mining, available for an additional fee.

Raprager Family Farms is located at 16907 Boy Scout Road in Odessa. Call (813) 922-2799 or visit https://rapragerfamilyfarms.com/for details.

LACE UP TO SUPPORT BLOOMINGDALE NINTH ANNUAL RUNNING OF THE BULLS

By Jane Owen

Now is the time to make plans to get a healthy start to 2026! Sign up to run or walk Bloomingdale High School's ninth annual Running of the Bulls 5K on January 17, 2026; you will not only start the year off well, but you will also support the school and students.



The start line. of the 2025 Running of the Bulls.

The Running of the Bulls benefits Bloomingdale High School's band and guard programs and provides two scholarships to Bloomingdale High School seniors.

The outpouring of support from the community, corporate sponsors, alumni, students and school staff is tremendous. Title sponsors for the 2026 event are Acropolis Greek Taverna, Riverview; The Jeep Depot; and Reed & Reed.

Bloomingdale High School counselor Amanda Raschke participates yearly and said the event is more than just a race. It is an unwavering community coming together to support the school and band program.

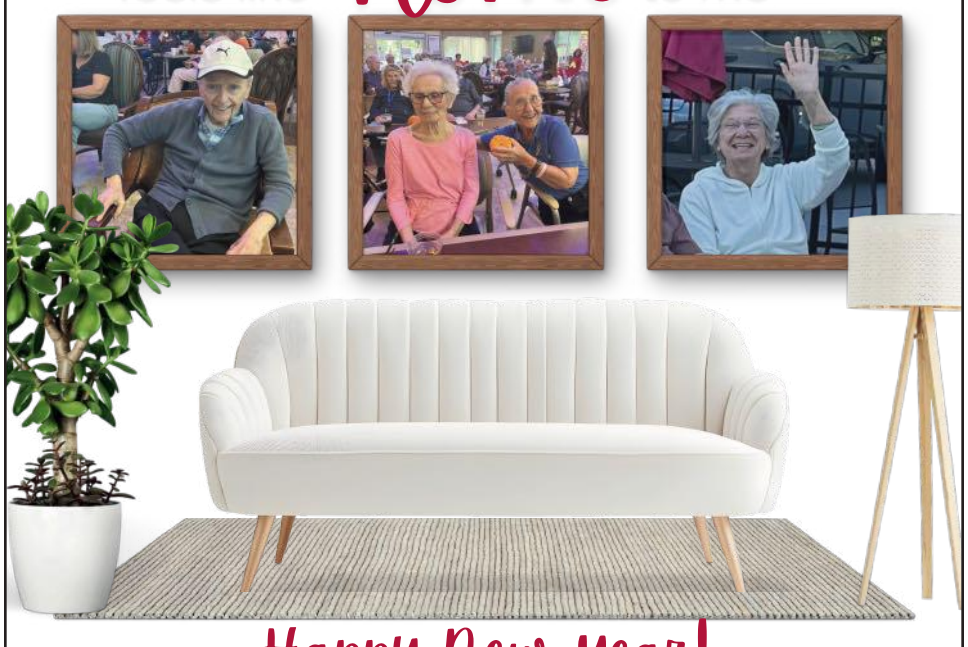
"The atmosphere is electric, filled with cheering students, our talented drumline and fellow runners who make the entire event exciting. I love that there are several opportunities to see my coworkers, students and friends along the course, where we can high-five, encourage or razz each other along the way," Raschke said.

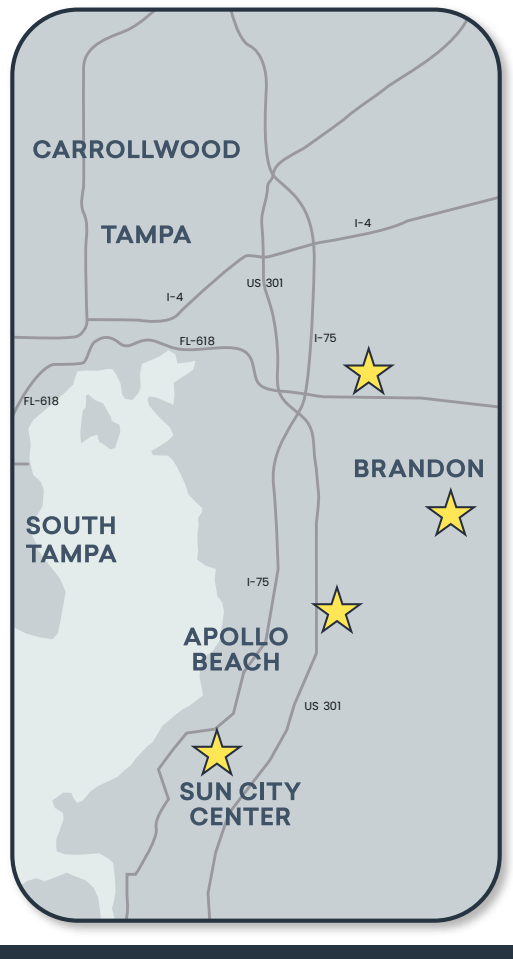
Band director Jordan Fraze runs the race and is grateful for the direct impact the 5K has on the program. The profit from the 2026 race will be used to replace brass instruments (mellophones and baritones), which can cost between $2,000-$3,000 per instrument.

"I run the 5K because I love the sense of community it brings. It's amazing to run alongside everyone and join those who support the band program at Bloomingdale High School," Fraze said.

Participants can run or walk a 5K or half-mile distance. The 5K starts at 8 a.m., finishes on the track and utilizes the sidewalks, road and parking lots on Bloomingdale's campus. The half-mile is two loops around the track. Bloomingdale's drumline performs. All finishers receive medals. The race is timed by Bay City Timing, and the winners of each age group receive placement medals.

To register, visit https://runsignup.com/race/fl/valrico/runningofthebulls5kfl. For more information, email bloomingdalebulls5k@gmail.com.

TESSERA BRANDON
Assisted Living Facility #AL13150
Independent Living
With Complimentary Services
Assisted Living
"Tessera Brandon...living your lifestyle."
Memory Care
"Living the present...cherishing the past."
feels like Home to me

Happy New Year!
Call for details and pricing!
813-607-6880
TesseraBrandon.com | 1320 Oakfield Dr. Brandon, FL 33511

TGH | IMAGING
30+ YEARS
30 YEARS OF EXPERTISE
TGH Imaging provides screening and diagnostic expertise in a wide range of technologically advanced imaging services to get you the answers you've been looking for. We offer convenient locations near you in Brandon, Riverview, and Sun City Center.
• 427 S. Parsons Ave, Ste. 100
• 3350 Bell Shoals Rd
• 10621 Big Bend Rd
• 3862 Sun City Center Blvd
Scan to Find More Locations Throughout Tampa Bay


(813) 489-5120
TGHimaging.com

Genealogical Society Meeting, Cheerleading Registration & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting

The South Bay Genealogical Society meeting will be at the South Hillsborough Elks Lodge No. 2672, located at 1630 S. U.S. 41 in Ruskin. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., there is an optional roundtable discussion, followed by a sit-down luncheon at 12 Noon. Following the luncheon at 1 p.m., the guest speaker will be Lori Coffey. Coffey's presentation is 'Three Fer!' Coffey will present three 20-minute programs: Ancestry Fixes, Revolution in the South and Tech Tips for Genealogy. The cost is $18 per person for the luncheon and presentation. For reservations and meal choices, call Vicki at 360-608-1647.

Bank OZK Makes Donation To Enterprising Latinas

Bank OZK is proud to announce a $5,000 donation was made to Enterprising Latinas, a nonprofit organization serving women entrepreneurs in Wimauma and surrounding communities. The contribution supports Enterprising Latinas' mission to create pathways of opportunity for Latinas in Tampa Bay.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our local economy, and organizations like Enterprising Latinas play a vital role in helping entrepreneurs turn ideas into thriving enterprises," said Michele Maynard, Bank OZK vice president and business development officer. "We are honored to support their work and the positive impact they make in the community."

Bank OZK is one of the top-performing financial institutions in the country, and this donation reflects the bank's ongoing commitment to community investment and economic development in the markets it serves. By partnering with local organizations, Bank OZK continues to support financial empowerment and opportunities for individuals and businesses throughout the region.



East Bay Bucs Youth Football And Cheerleader Registration

East Bay Buccaneers Youth Football and Cheerleading is looking for spirited, energetic athletes to join its Bucs football/cheer teams.

Whether you've cheered before or you're brand-new to the sport, this is your season to shine.

The East Bay Buccaneers Youth Football and Cheerleading League Inc. is a Florida nonprofit organization that sponsors youth cheerleading for ages 5-15 and full contact football teams for ages 5-14. Its goal is to give all children the opportunity to develop sportsmanship, skills and friendship.

For more information, visit www.eastbaybucs.org or follow on Facebook at 'East Bay Buccaneers Youth Football and Cheerleading' or Instagram @ebbucs.



First 2026 baby at Riverview's St. Joseph's Hospital-South

Congratulations to Riverview's Jennifer Tavarez Torres and Robbie Torres, parents of the first baby born at St. Joseph's Hospital-South in 2026. This is baby boy Enzo, who arrived in our world at 12:15 a.m. on New Year's Day, a mere 15 minutes after the New Year's ball dropped. Enzo weighed 6 pounds and 5 ounces.

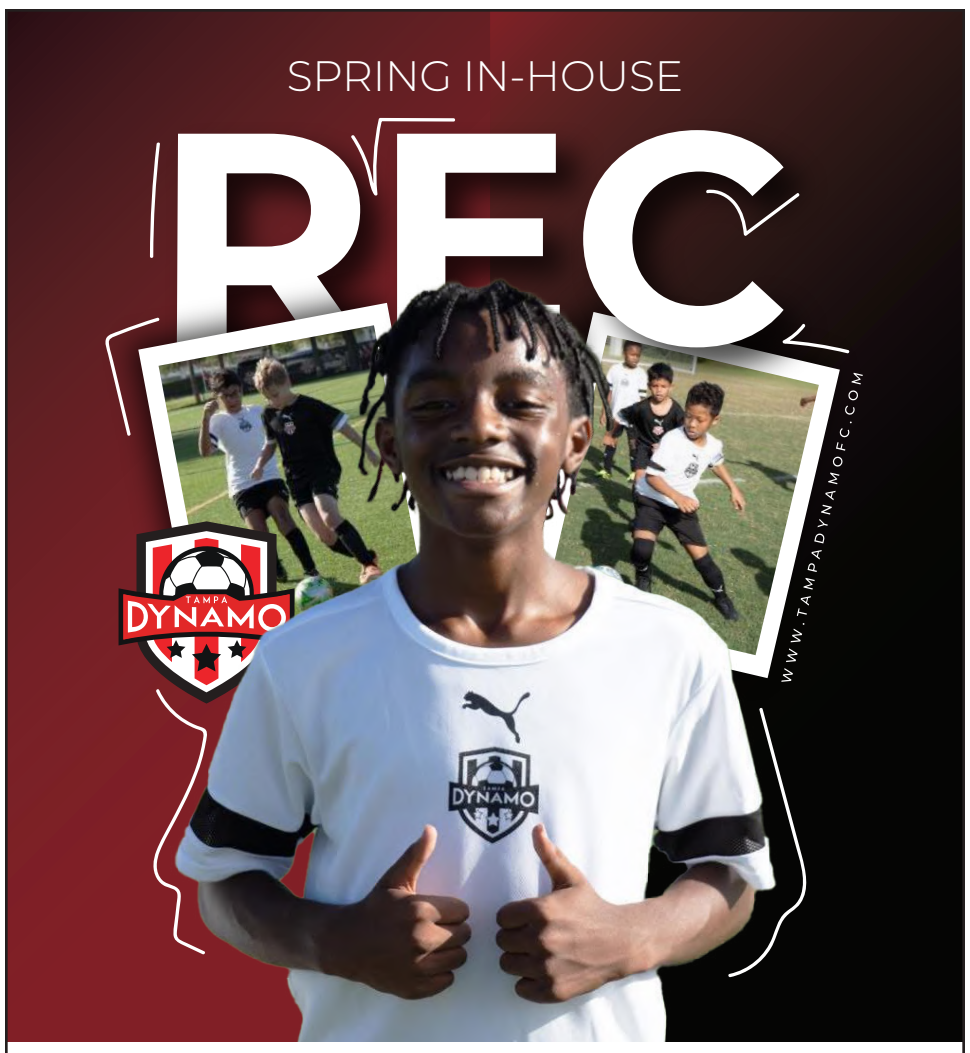
DELIGHT — Women Of Hope Conference

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

This one-day gathering brings women together from across the church and community for worship, encouragement and connection. Experience powerful teaching, heartfelt worship and inspiring breakout sessions designed to help you deepen your faith and rediscover joy in every season. Tickets include a conference T-shirt and lunch. New Hope Church is located at 213 N. Knights Ave. in Brandon. Register at https://delight-womensconference.rsvpify.com/.









Now is the time to list!

The #1 agent is Brenda Wade!

No one sells for more and no one takes better care of their customers than Brenda and her team!

Call us to sell in 2026! 813-924-8677



BRENDA WADE
Signature Realty Associates
Top Producer
2002-2025


501 LIVELY DR


733 SKY SHADE DR


916 EAGLE LN


1015 SEAGRAPE DR


1210 HARBOUR BLUE ST


2112 PURPLE ORCHID PL


2226 N CREEK CT


2440 E DEL WEBB BLVD


2934 WILDERNESS BLVD E


3280 MANGROVE POINT DR


3301 RIVER WOODS DR


3765 MAXWELL PARK DR


4720 POND RIDGE DR


5249 MOON SHELL DR


5342 98TH AVE E


5608 FREESTONE CIR


5732 STOCKPORT ST


6115 SHADOWLAKE DR


6727 SIMMONS LOOP


7136 COLONY POINTE DR


7885 BRISTOL PARK DR


8611 PARKWAY CIR


9141 MOONLIT MEADOWS LP


9511 LAUREL LEDGE DR


9931 BAY DR


10015 REMINGTON DR


10108 GOLDEN WONDER LN


10130 PADDOCK OAKS DR


10208 POPS CT


10212 HOLLAND RD


10222 EVENING TRAIL DR


10333 SUMMER AZURE DR


10414 WICKER PARK PL


10425 HALLMARK BLVD


10448 RIVER BREAM DR


10813 DIXON DR


10943 VERAWOOD DR


11025 WINTER CREST DR


11110 SWANSEA ST

11139 WINTHROP LAKE DR

11143 WINTHROP LAKE DR

11162 SPRING POINT CIR

11205 LARK LANDING CT

11229 HAWKS FERN DR

11308 GREAT NECK RD

11309 GRAND PARK AVE

11350 HAWKS FERN DR

11457 CAMBRAY CREEK LOOP

11512 RAULERSON RD

11521 LAKE LUCAYA DR

11524 RIVER COUNTRY DR

11531 CAMBIUM CROWN DR

11567 WESTON COURSE LOOP

11813 MILE MARSH DR

11882 FROST ASTER DR

11906 CLIMBING FERN AVE

11931 SAND MYRTLE RD

12004 CINNAMON FERN DR

12402 CREEK EDGE DR

12846 TALLOWOOD DR

12902 BROOKSIDE MOSS DR

13111 BAHIA GRASS LN

13121 EARLY RUN LN

13146 HOMESTEAD LN

13163 PASTURE VIEW LOOP

14208 CREEK RUN DR

16421 66TH LN E

Direct: 813.924.8677 | Office: 813.655.5333 | Brenda@BrendaWade.com | www.BrendaWade.com



NOW LEASING



EXPERIENCE REFINED LIVING IN A THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED COMMUNITY CREATED EXCLUSIVELY FOR ACTIVE ADULTS 55 AND BETTER.



ONE AND TWO BEDROOM RESIDENCES OFFER TIMELESS DESIGN, PREMIUM KITCHENS AND GRACIOUS LIVING SPACES. COMFORT WITHOUT COMPROMISE.

813-934-2204 | leasing@bridgewaterlandings.com

BRIDGEWATER LANDING

WELCOME TO BRIDGEWATER LANDING

5790 STOCKPORT ST, RIVERVIEW, FL 33578

ON BLOOMINGDALE AVENUE. ACROSS FROM THE WINTHROP TOWNE CENTRE.

January 2026 Vol. 24, Iss. 1

Sponsored by: Osprey Observer — Your Community Newspaper

Edited by: Jenny Bennett

Riverview/Apollo Beach EYE ON BUSINESS

Stretch Zone Apollo Beach Celebrates Wellness

Stretch Zone Apollo Beach, located at 6150 Paseo Al Mar Blvd. in Apollo Beach, is celebrating Wellness Wednesday on January 28 from 5-7 p.m. Stop in to visit with local vendors as well as enjoy raffles, snacks and drinks. Free mini stretches will also be available. Please RSVP your spot by emailing the studio director at szstudiodirector@gmail.com. This is a fun event, and everyone is welcome to attend.

South Shore Community Health Fair

The South Shore Community Health Fair will take place on Wednesday, February 4, at the Sun City Center Community Hall, located at 1910 S. Pebble Beach Blvd. in Sun City Center, from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. The fair is sponsored by HCA Florida South Shore Hospital and brought to you by the Sun City Center Rotary Club Foundation. It will include a new speaker every half an hour featuring doctors and other medical professionals. There will also be health screenings, food and giveaways. If you have questions, please call Steve Overton, president of the Rotary Club of Sun City Center, at 813 997 9638.

Freedom Plaza's Management Company Stays As J.D. Power's Most Awarded Senior Living Provider

J.D. Power announced the results of its 2025 U.S. Senior Living Satisfaction Study, and Freedom Plaza's management company, LCS, has been recognized for the seventh consecutive year as No. 1 in resident satisfaction among independent senior living communities. The J.D. Power 2025 U.S. Senior Living Satisfaction Study recognized LCS for excellence in independent living, which also included achieving No. 1 in all six factors of resident satisfaction: dining, community building/grounds, resident apartment/living unit, price paid for services received, community staff, and resident activities. The consecutive awards make LCS the most awarded independent senior living company in the history of the J.D. Power U.S. Senior Living Satisfaction Study.

A Children's Kastle Announces Accreditation

A Children's Kastle Early Learning Center Inc. is thrilled to announce its successful accreditation through Green Apple Accreditation of Children's Services (GAACS), a national, independent accrediting agency. Jeff Liebler and Jackie Sharp led the program to achieve this honor, with the inspection resulting in a perfect 100 percent score.



Local Assistant Helps Seniors Stay Independent

Kathy Bass, owner of Helping Hands Assistant LLC, is a personal assistant dedicated to helping individuals and businesses stay organized, efficient and stress-free. With years of experience in supporting private clients and companies of all sizes, she has built a reputation as the 'go-to gal' for making life run a little smoother.



Kathy Bass

Her specialty is supporting seniors, providing the extra set of hands they need to maintain independence and peace of mind. Whether it's accompanying clients to appointments, running errands, organizing their homes or assisting with day-to-day tasks that have become challenging, she offers dependable, personalized help with a warm, patient approach.

For more information or to schedule assistance, please contact Bass at 863-409-9890 or kathy-75cole05@verizon.net.

Elevate Gymnastics Launches New Programs

Elevate Gymnastics is excited to announce the launch of its new gymnastics and tumbling programs designed specifically for toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children in the Apollo Beach community. With a strong focus on confidence, movement and age-appropriate skill development, Elevate Gymnastics offers a fresh, nurturing approach to early childhood gymnastics. It features thoughtfully designed class levels, including parent-and-child options for younger toddlers and independent classes for children who are ready to participate on their own. Programs are developmentally progressive, allowing students to build skills at their own pace while gaining confidence and independence. Families interested in learning more or registering for classes can visit www.tumblewithelevate.com. Elevate Gymnastics is located at 6134 N. U.S. 41 in Apollo Beach.

David Weekley Opens New Model Home In Coaster Community

David Weekley Homes, one of the largest privately held national home builders, has opened a new model home, The Gilbert, in the Palmetto community of Coasterra. The 1-story model home showcases 3,031 square feet with four bedrooms, three full baths, a three-car garage, a study, a TV room and a super shower in the owner's retreat bath. Located at 7747 Ocean Spray Trail, the model home is open daily for tours.

Homeowners in Coasterra can enjoy access to an amenity center bordering the 60-acre lake, a resort-style pool, a cabana and splash pad, a fitness deck, a jogging trail, pickleball courts, nature trails, a lake with a dock and canoe launch, a lakeside pavilion and bar, a social lounge, a fire pit, a lake house, sports fields, a playground and a dog park. The community is also convenient to downtown Tampa, Sarasota and St. Petersburg. Students attend School District of Manatee County schools.

For more about David Weekley Homes in Coasterra, contact 941-306-4384 or visit the company's website at www.davidweekleyhomes.com.



CABIN CREEK HOMEMADE SOAPS: PURE INGREDIENTS, HONEST CRAFTSMANSHIP

By McKenzie Brown



Cabin Creek Homemade Soaps founder Brooke Krencik, age 14, and her mom, Jessica Foster, started making their own soaps.

Cabin Creek Homemade Soaps began with a goal that a lot of people can get behind — removing unnecessary chemicals from everyday routines and replacing them with something cleaner and more trustworthy. Founder Brooke Krencik, age 14, and her mom, Jessica Foster, started making their own soaps after realizing how many products were filled with ingredients they didn't feel great using. What started as a personal switch for her family turned into a genuine passion for creating simple, natural products that make a real difference. Once she saw the results at home, she felt inspired to offer that same level of purity and care to others.

Every Cabin Creek soap bar is 100 percent natural, handmade and made with organic ingredients. They're crafted to be gentle but effective, leaving skin feeling hydrated, balanced and soft instead of stripped or irritated. Because they're designed for both face and body, the soaps fit easily into any daily routine and turn basic cleansing into a small, refreshing moment of self-care.

The brand offers a variety of bars with different skin benefits, so there's something for almost every skin type. Options include acne-fighting, detoxifying, pore-tightening, moisturizing, cleansing, firming, blemish control and antiaging effects. Each bar is made with ingredients meant to support healthy skin without relying on harsh additives.

Cabin Creek has several customer favorites that stand out. The Cabin Creek Rustic Remedy Soap is known for its comforting, earthy feel and is great for everyday use. The Cabin Creek Clear Detox Soap focuses on drawing out impurities and leaving the skin feeling clean and refreshed. For something more soothing, the Cabin Creek Honey & Oat Rejuvenating Soap blends real honey and organic oats for a calming, lightly exfoliating and moisturizing experience.

Overall, Cabin Creek Homemade Soaps stays true to its origins — creating products that are simple, natural and made with genuine care. For anyone looking to upgrade their skincare routine with something clean, thoughtful and effective, these handmade bars offer a trustworthy option. For further questions, send Cabin Creek a message at oldcountrycottage28@gmail.com.

CONGREGATION DELIVERS 45 TURKEYS, LAUNCHES FUND IN MEMORY MEMBER

Staff Report



A truckload of turkeys from Congregation Beth Shalom arrives at the Brandon Christian Church food bank to support its Thanksgiving distribution.

Congregation Beth Shalom of Brandon will deliver 45 turkeys and 100 cans of cranberry sauce to the food bank at Brandon Christian Church on Friday morning, continuing a long tradition of helping feed local families during the Thanksgiving season. Volunteers will meet at the temple at 8:30 a.m. to load the donated food into pickup trucks before presenting it to food bank leaders for distribution.

The effort came together quickly after Meral Ginsburg, who has long coordinated partnerships between Beth Shalom, Brandon Christian Church and Our Faith Family Church, alerted the congregation that the food bank was facing a severe shortage.

"More people are needing help than ever before," she told Neil Spindel, who immediately put out a call for donations.

The project also carries a special meaning this year. The fundraiser brought in more money than needed for the Thanksgiving drive, prompting Beth Shalom to create a new charitable initiative honoring longtime congregant Stephen Michael Feldman, who passed away two years ago. Feldman was deeply committed to food relief and was a driving force behind the congregation's partnership with the Brandon Christian Church food bank.

The new Stephen Michael Feldman Hunger Relief Fund will convert the remaining Thanksgiving donations into an ongoing source of support for the food bank and other local hunger-relief efforts. The volunteer-run fund will direct 100 percent of contributions toward food and essential health and hygiene items for families in need.

"This first delivery of turkeys will be the inaugural activity of the new fund," Spindel said. "We're excited to continue raising money so that we can make regular donations throughout the year in Steve's memory."

The three congregations — Beth Shalom, Brandon Christian Church and Our Faith Family Church, which operates within Beth Shalom's facility — have worked closely together for years to support the food bank. With this year's expanded effort, Beth Shalom hopes to strengthen that partnership even further.

"After suffering a stroke, a gentleman came to us seeking help with daily meals. He was overwhelmed, uncertain about the holiday ahead. Today, he left with everything needed for a complete Thanksgiving dinner," said Pastor Edd Kostelnick of Our Faith Family Church.

For information on donating to the Stephen Michael Feldman Hunger Relief Fund, email admin@bethshalombrandon.org.

Congregation Beth Shalom of Brandon is a warm, inclusive Reform synagogue serving the Greater Brandon area. The temple is located at 706 Bryan Rd. in Brandon and can be reached at 813-681-6547 or https://bethshalombrandon.org/.









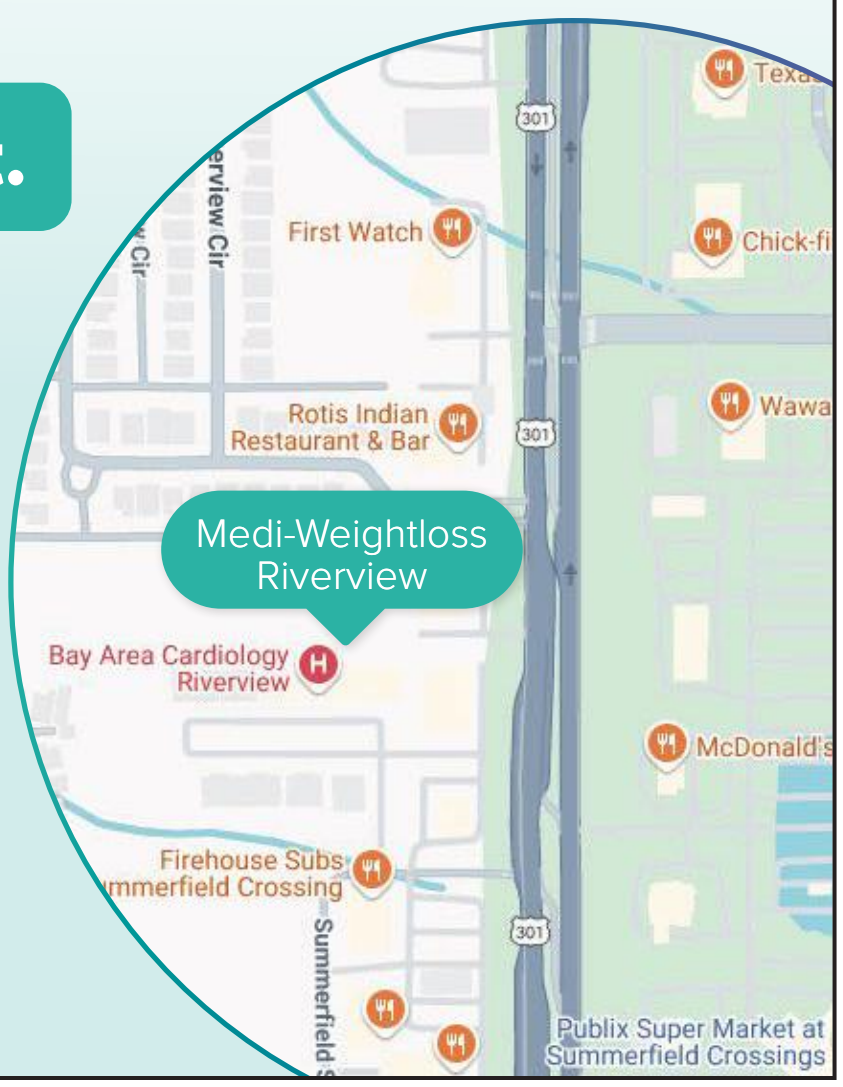
The nation's premier *weight loss clinic* is

Now Open

in your community!

Real Results. Real Support.

- Weight Loss Medications Including GLP-1s (Semaglutide & More)
- One-on-One Visits with Medical Professionals
- Personalized Plans



Book your FREE Assessment today!

MediWeightloss.com

Year In Review – Updates On Our Top Stories From 2025

FORMER NEWSOME ATHLETE MAKES NFL DEBUT, KICKS GAME-WINNING FIELD GOAL

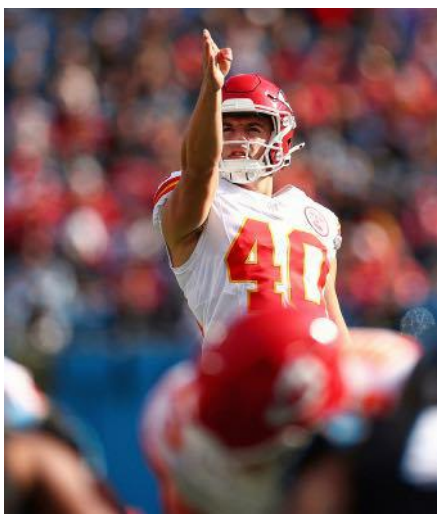
By Nick Nahas

Spencer Shrader signed with the Indianapolis Colts for the 2025 season. He was the starting kicker until he suffered a season-ending injury during a game against the Las Vegas Raiders in October. He tore two ligaments in his right knee — the ACL and MCL. Shrader is still on the Colts team, but he has not played since the injury.

"I'm just disappointed for him," Colts Head Coach Shane Steichen said. "He was having a hell of a season, so we'll be with him to support him through this time."

Original Story Printed In January 2025.

Former Newsome High School football player Spencer Shrader is living out many people's dreams of playing in the NFL.



Photos courtesy of the Kansas City Chiefs.

Spencer Schrader lines up to make a kick against the Buffalo Bills.



Kansas City Chiefs teammate Travis Kelce hugs Spencer Schrader after he makes the game-winning kick against the Carolina Panthers.

The Lithia resident played one year of football at Newsome High School, where he also starred in tennis and soccer. After graduation, he played a year of semipro soccer in Brazil and Canada in 2018. He was offered several soccer scholarships but decided to take a risk by walking on at the University of South Florida as a kicker. Shrader said Tim Tebow was one of his role models and wanted to have a platform like his to inspire others. He played for the Bulls for four years, earning a scholarship his junior and senior seasons, before transferring to play at Notre Dame as a grad student.

The NFL wasn't always his main dream. Shrader is an entrepreneur and has an investment property in South Bend, Indiana. But he found himself in a position that many people would envy.

"It's kind of a unique experience because the NFL wasn't always my dream," said Shrader. "I know that sounds crazy. I just really wanted to do my best at every level."

Shrader said he is grateful for the opportunity but doesn't need the NFL to feel fulfilled.

"When I did make it, it was a little bit of a surreal feeling, but honestly how I feel is more like I have a responsibility to perform because of all the blessings I've had and all the people who have supported me to get here."

Schrader injured his hamstring in practice and was put on injured reserve. With his injury and Butker's return, he said his future with the team may be in doubt.

"It's such a crazy industry that anything can happen at any time," he said. "In a sense, it's a blessing because tomorrow is not guaranteed, and you take that to heart. For me, as an undrafted free-agent rookie, it's very much unknown what the next steps will be."

Shrader went undrafted in the recent NFL draft but signed as a free agent with the Indianapolis Colts on their practice squad. He was elevated to the roster for the first game of the season, where he made all three extra-point attempts. Then he went to the New York Jets, where he played one game, making both field goal attempts. He was then offered a roster spot by the Kansas City Chiefs when their starting kicker, Harrison Butker, got injured.

The kicker played in two games with the Chiefs and converted all three field goal attempts, and six extra points. Shrader kicked the game-winning field goal for the Chiefs against the Carolina Panthers on November 24, 2024.

"In that situation, you just really have compartmentalize and keep yourself calm," said Shrader. "When you think about the game and the stage, it's a big deal and there is a lot going on. At the end of the day, my job is really simple. I just have to kick the ball through the uprights."

MAJOR INTERSECTION OVERHAUL BEGINS ON U.S. 301 AND GIBSONTON DRIVE, EXPECT DELAYS FOR 140 DAYS

By Brian Bokor



Crews have installed a new concrete roadway surface at U.S. 301 and Gibsonton Drive and have paved all travel lanes from Whitt Road to Rivercrest Drive in Riverview. The new intersection now provides two left-turn lanes from westbound Boyette Road onto southbound U.S. 301. Over the coming months, crews will finalize the installation of new highway lighting, traffic signals and pavement markings throughout the project limits. No major road closures or detours are planned for the duration of this project. Construction activities are expected to be completed by spring 2026.

Original Story Printed In April 2025.

The Florida Board of Governors, which oversees the State University System, has unanimously approved University of South Florida's planned Fletcher district. The first phase of the project is estimated to cost $268 million and span 908,000 square feet, according to Board of Governors documents. The first phase is planned to start this spring and be completed by July 2028.

Original Story Printed In October 2025.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) began a significant intersection improvement project on U.S. 301 last week, which is expected to take roughly 140 days to complete.

FDOT's contractor, Ajax Paving Industries of Florida, will be replacing the asphalt pavement at the U.S. 301 and Gibsonton Drive/Boyette Road intersection with concrete. Ajax will also repave U.S. 301 from Whitt Road to Rivercrest Drive.

Motorists will need to detour around the closure using Riverview Drive, U.S. 41 and Symmes Road. Those traveling east of the intersection can use Rhodine Road, Balm Riverview Road, McMullen Road or Boyette Road as alternate routes. Access to businesses, residents and emergency vehicles will be maintained.

When complete, the intersection improvements will have two left-turn lanes from westbound Boyette Road onto southbound U.S. 301, two through lanes from westbound Boyette Road across U.S. 301 and one right-turn lane from westbound Boyette Road onto northbound U.S. 301.

Motorists should anticipate "significant traffic delays and congestions" during the project and along all nearby roads during the closure, with FDOT urging drivers to plan ahead, allow extra travel time and expect congestion, especially during peak hours.

From Kris Carson, FDOT spokesperson, "The project is replacing asphalt with concrete due to the high volume of truck traffic. Concrete pavement will be more durable and will have a longer life than asphalt. This also reduces maintenance operations at the intersection due to the heavy volume of traffic."

"We're going to close Gibsonton Drive just west of U.S. 301, so if you're traveling off I-75, you can get off the exit, but you will not be able to cross over U.S. 301. We are also reducing some of the travel lanes on U.S. 301. There'll be only two northbound and two southbound open," said Carson.

Once the work on the western side of the U.S. 301 intersection and southbound U.S. 301 lanes is complete, the project will then shift to the eastern half of the U.S. 301 intersection — Boyette Road — and northbound U.S. 301 lanes, where a similar process will be followed. The estimated completion date for the project is near the end of July.

For more information on this project or to sign up for traffic alerts, visit www.fdottampabay.com or call 813-975-6204.





Year In Review – Updates On Our Top Stories From 2025

IMPORTANT PUBLIC MEETINGS COMING FOR SOUTH COUNTY PIPELINE PROJECT

By Brian Bokor





According to Brandon Moore, APR, public communications manager at Tampa Bay Water:

Construction for the South Hillsborough Pipeline started at FishHawk Creek and at the intersection of Kings and Bloomingdale avenues.

Construction will ramp up in 2026 and occur simultaneously in multiple locations over the next three years for the pipeline in service by 2028.

Seventeen tunneling locations will minimize traffic impacts, reduce utility conflicts and reduce environmental impacts.

Residents can receive project updates, including traffic impacts, by signing up for the email list at https://southhillsboroughpipeline.com/.

Original Story Printed In February 2025.

To meet the long-term water needs of this area, Tampa Bay Water is building a new South Hillsborough Pipeline that will carry up to 65 million gallons per day of additional drinking water to the fast-growing Southern Hillsborough County service area.

The project will run for 26 miles with the pipes installed up to 60 inches in diameter and carry a price tag of $505.7M, with up to $84M funded by Hillsborough County. Construction is expected to start as early as fall 2025, with an anticipated completion date in spring 2029 although the pipeline is expected to be in service late by 2028.

The pipeline will start at Tampa Bay Water's Tampa Bay Regional Surface Water Treatment Plant in Brandon, connect to Hillsborough County's Lithia Water Treatment Plant and end at the county's new connection point at Balm Riverview and Balm roads. The pipeline will provide redundancy between the Tampa Bay Regional Surface Water Treatment Plant in Brandon and Hillsborough County's Lithia Water Treatment Plant.

Tampa Bay Water is conducting several community meetings along the South Hillsborough Pipeline route. These community meetings will allow staff to share information and answer questions.

In order to hear information that is most relevant to you, please review the map and attend the meeting whose section is closest to your home or business. Residents along the route will receive an invitation postcard indicating which meeting they should attend.

Each meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. with an open house where attendees can peruse maps and informational boards and ask quåestions of project staff in attendance. Then at 7 p.m., Tampa Bay Water staff will make a formal presentation on the project, followed by a question-and-answer period.

When asked about the impact this project will have on residents, Brandon Moore, public communications manager of Tampa Bay Water, summed the project up perfectly with the simple statement "short-term pain for long-term gain," stating, "It's been 20 years since the Tampa Bay area has had a pipeline project of this scale."

It was apparent that the project team had spent a significant amount of time planning the project around minimizing the impact on those that live in the area.

Tampa Bay Water's engineering consultants analyzed 10 routes (five northern segments and five southern segments), resulting in a shortlist of three top-ranked consolidated routes. The routes were evaluated against 13 selection criteria, which included noncost factors, such as public inconvenience, safety, environmental impacts and permitting, as well as project cost.

Sam Flowers, construction manager of Garney Construction, added, "To expedite the project, crews are working Monday through Saturday, 7 a.m.-5 p.m. Crews will be able to lay up to 50 ft. of pipe per shift (2-25 ft. pipe segments), and we will employ multiple crews."

Some night work is planned to minimize impacts on local businesses.

Three-block (street) rolling closures will be used, with the process being: Forward Block (staging of equipment and dewatering), Center Block (open cut pipe installation) and Trailing Block (restoration). The dewatering

THE YARD AT WATERSET TO OFFER NEW HOUSING, RETAIL, AND DINING OPTIONS

By Brian Bokor



Jason and Jennifer Babinec, owner-operators of Planet Smoothie Apollo Beach and team.



The recently opened Planet Smoothie, welcome occupants of both complexes as well as folks using the gym, daycare, or pet sitting services to stop by and try what they have to offer. Building that kind of relationship between residents and local businesses is exactly what Owners in The Yard hope to achieve.

Hypocrites Row pulled out, with The Greyson taking part of its spot with a yet-unannounced tenant taking over the remaining portion of the space. The Greyson, a semi-upscale, casual, family-friendly sports restaurant and bar, has locations in Lakewood Ranch and Palmetto and will be making the Waterset location its first in Hillsborough County.

Some other new announcements for The Yard include: Pure Green Juice Bar, SoFresh Bowls Wraps Salads and a Swig Soda Shop, among others.

Original Story Printed In January 2025.

Growth in and around the Waterset community in Apollo Beach has exploded over the past decade, with much of this progress focused on residential neighborhoods, particularly locations south of Big Bend Road. The Yard at Waterset, located on Paseo Al Mar Blvd between US 41 and Waterset Blvd, focuses on bringing much needed new retail options to the area providing a gathering spot for locals as well as building a sense of community among Waterset businesses and residents. (photo The Yard at Waterset)

Currently, the blossoming development has five tenants open in Planet Smoothie, Wingstop, Crunch Fitness, The Learning Experience, and Pet Paradise with plans showing a variety of new options coming soon mixing a blend of dining options with health related and financial services. More additions coming with Phase 2 delivery advertised for 4th quarter 2025.

The Citizen at Waterset, with 236 units, and Ridley at Waterset, with 400, offer ample rental opportunies within walking distance of The Yard. Local businesses, like

Jason and Jennifer Babinec, Owner-operators of Planet Smoothie Apollo Beach and residents of Waterset since 2018, opted to open their business in The Yard for that specific reason, in order to give back to their community. Franchise opportunities were available in Bradenton, Clearwater and Tampa, but the couple passed, saying, "It was important to open here (Waterset), because we really wanted to be part of our community and support the area in which we chose to live". You get a sense that it is not all about profit with these Owners; it is about wanting to serve the community and offer people who live nearby more options without the need to travel miles.

The Babinec's informed me a majority of Owners they know in The Yard are local residents who share the same sense of shared responsibility in providing a wonderful experience to all future customers who visit. Most employees at Planet Smoothie attend or have attended East Bay High or Lennard High helping further promote the sense of community Jennifer and Jason hope to achieve.

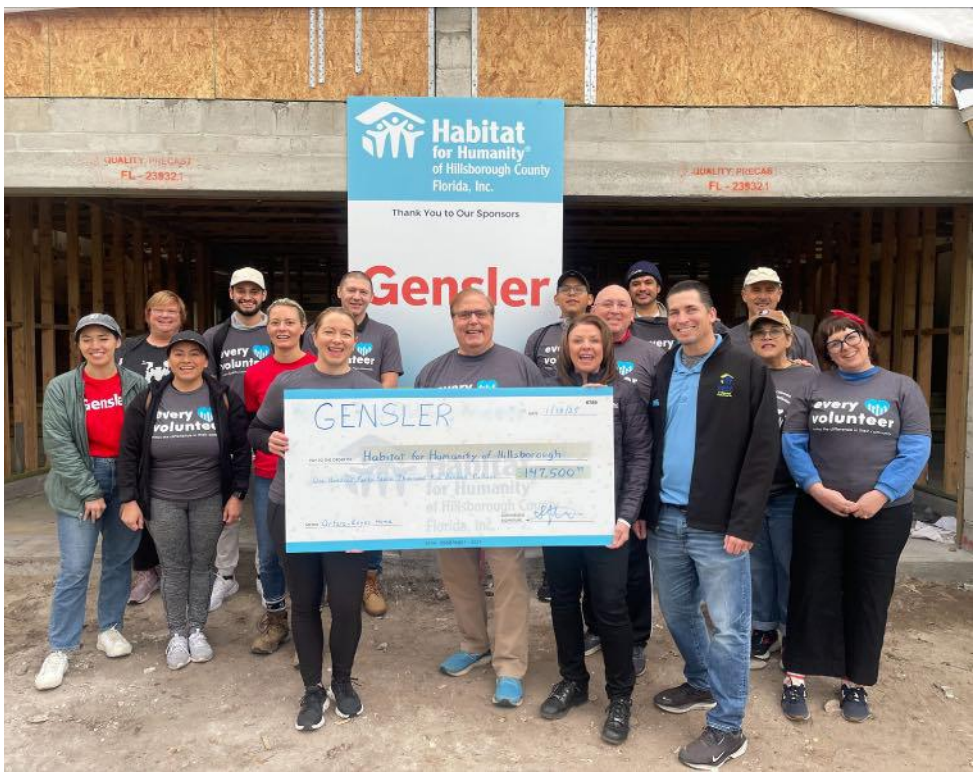
Opened less than a month, Jennifer was excited to announce they were "serving over 100 customers a day with several regulars already coming in to order their favorites!"





HABITAT HILLSBOROUGH RECEIVES $147,000 DONATION TOWARD AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Staff Report



Habitat for Humanity of Hillsborough County has confirmed that Hector Ortero-Reyes and his family are now living in their new home, and they were excited to spend their first holiday season in it. The Habitat home was completed in July, and a dedication ceremony was held for it on August 26.

Original Story Printed In March 2025.

With rising construction costs impacting the housing industry, Habitat for Humanity of Hillsborough County recently received a generous donation toward its mission of helping local residents achieve their homeownership dreams. Global architecture and design firm Gensler's Tampa office presented a check for $147,500 to the nonprofit that will go toward completing the Habitat home for local resident Hector Ortero-Reyes and his family.

"As we navigate a changing industry, our commitment to providing affordable housing has not wavered. We're grateful for community partners, like Gensler Tampa, who share in our commitment and donate their time, talent and treasure toward making homeownership a reality for so many," said Tina Forcier, CEO at Habitat Hillsborough.

Following the presentation, Gensler Tampa staff volunteered to help paint and install doors and trim on the three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath townhome and other Habitat townhomes adjacent to it. Candidates qualified to purchase affordable homes through Habitat Hillsborough's homeownership program, which includes contributing at least 300 hours in 'sweat equity' toward the builds alongside Habitat volunteers. Otero-Reyes, who will receive keys to his new home later this year, said he's thankful to the volunteers whose efforts are helping him achieve greater stability and a brighter financial future.

"It is amazing seeing people being generous with their time and money, and not expecting anything in return," said Otero-Reyes, who lives with his wife and two young children. "Owning a home is an investment in our future. I'm happy that my kids will have their own rooms and a safe place to play outdoors."

Gensler Tampa has been a longtime supporter of Habitat Hillsborough and recognizes the organization's impact on the community beyond building homes.

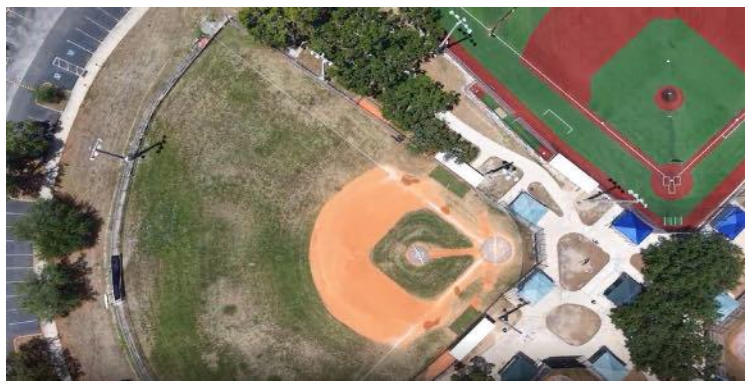
"We recognize that Habitat does more than build homes; it builds strong communities that foster a sense of belonging," said Sarah Joubert, principal and co-managing director of Gensler's Tampa office.

"We hope that this donation can support the individuals and families in need of affordable housing and offer hope and stability for the next generation of homeowners. We're excited and privileged to sponsor such a meaningful project where we can see our collaboration make a positive, indelible impact."

Habitat for Humanity of Hillsborough County is located at 8247 N. Florida Ave. in Tampa. For more information, visit www.habitathillsborough.org.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SEEKS TO IMPROVE FISHHAWK SPORTS COMPLEX

By Nick Nahas



Photos courtesy of Hillsborough County Parks & Recreation.

A $2.1 million expansion, which included a land swap with developer Newland Communities.



The complex originally featured 12 fields, eight dedicated to baseball and softball and four multipurpose fields for soccer, cheerleading, football and lacrosse.

According to Chris Kiddy, CYSA, athletics manager of the Parks and Recreation Department, Hillsborough County and its partners have made meaningful progress at the FishHawk Sports Complex. The batting cages at the softball fields have been fully rebuilt, and several field areas with heavy wear have been resodded to improve playability. The team has also worked closely with both the softball and baseball leagues to better coordinate schedules and maximize field use, ensuring all programs continue to have balanced access.

In addition, staff have worked diligently to repair storm-related damage and restore the facility to its prestorm condition.

The team is pleased with the progress and remains committed to maintaining and improving the complex.

Original Story Printed In May 2025.

Hillsborough County is seeking resident input with the help of a survey that will help shape the future of baseball and softball at the FishHawk Sports Complex. According to the county, feedback will help the county enhance facilities, improve services and meet the needs of the growing community.

"The survey was created to help us better understand the community's needs at FishHawk Sports Complex, one of our busiest athletic sites in Hillsborough County," said Chris Kiddy, athletics manager for Hillsborough County Parks & Recreation.

The FishHawk Sports Complex was established in May 2008 and is the only sports complex in the county where all sports operate under a single organization — the FishHawk Youth Sports Association.

The complex originally featured 12 fields, eight dedicated to baseball and softball and four multipurpose fields for soccer, cheerleading, football and lacrosse. Due to high demand, in 2011, FishHawk residents began advocating for more space and parking. As a result, a $2.1 million expansion, which included a land swap with developer Newland Communities, made this possible.

In 2017, the county added four new multipurpose fields, bringing the total to eight, along with 200 additional parking spaces. In 2022, two synthetic turf fields were installed, one for baseball and another for football, soccer and lacrosse games.

Today, more than 2,000 athletes, ages 5-19, participate at the FishHawk Sports Complex each year. It remains the largest sports complex in Southern Hillsborough County and the second largest in the county overall, following the Ed Radice Sports Complex.

"With a wide range of users on their diamond fields — including recreational leagues, travel organizations, trainers and families — conflicts over field space can occasionally arise," said Kiddy. "The goal of the survey is to gain insight into the community's needs so we can make informed decisions that help us improve access."

To participate in the survey, go to the Hillsborough County Engagement & Education Hub and search for the FishHawk Sports Complex Baseball Softball Survey.





Year In Review – Updates On Our Top Stories From 2025

USF MOVES FORWARD WITH PLANS FOR PROJECT FEATURING HOUSING, RESEARCH FACILITY, RESTAURANTS AND MORE

Staff Report



The Florida Board of Governors, which oversees the State University System, has unanimously approved University of South Florida's planned Fletcher district. The first phase of the project is estimated to cost $268 million and span 908,000 square feet, according to Board of Governors documents. The first phase is planned to start this spring and be completed by July 2028.

Original Story Printed In October 2025.

The University of South Florida (USF) Board of Trustees today voted to advance plans to transform the university's former 138-acre golf course into a vibrant mixed-use destination. Referred to as the Fletcher District, the project offers housing, restaurants, retail, a hotel and conference center, an academic research facility and a recreation space. The project will provide a new hub of activity and support the university's strategic vision for the future.

"The Fletcher District will be transformational for the University of South Florida and will help to further elevate and drive economic development in the Tampa Bay region," USF President Rhea Law said. "We are creating a dynamic destination to live, work, learn and play that provides exciting new opportunities to bring together members of the USF and surrounding communities."

The first phase of the project consists of approximately 27 acres north of Fletcher Avenue and east of North 46th Street. It will be developed as a public-private partnership, with the university entering into a master development agreement with ACE Fletcher LLC. Each component of the project will be managed through separate ground subleases with private developers, while the university retains ownership of the land. The district is expected to foster innovation and strengthen ties with the areas nearby.

The initial phase includes the following estimates, with specific details subject to change as plans for each element of the project are finalized:

Student housing: Approximately 700 beds and 335,000 square feet.

Multifamily housing: Approximately 150 units and 160,000 square feet.

Hotel and conference center: Approximately 150 guest rooms and 78,000 square feet.

Restaurants and retail spaces: Approximately 60,000 square feet of space. Four to six restaurants.

USF-developed academic research building: Approximately 350,000 square feet. Exact size and scope to be determined based on several factors, including available funding.

Supports university's mission and strategic goals by providing needed academic and research space.

Expands USF's academic footprint north of Fletcher Avenue.

Will be developed and funded by the university, and USF will retain the master ground lease.

The project is pending approval by the Florida Board of Governors, which USF intends to seek in November. Following approval, construction of the first phase is expected to begin in fall 2026 and open by fall 2028. More information about the project can be found at www.usf.edu/facilities/notices/fletcher/index.aspx.

A KID'S PLACE BREAKS GROUND ON 12,000-SQUARE-FOOT ACTIVITY CENTER

Staff Report



A Kid's Place celebrated the groundbreaking of its new 12,000-square-foot activity center.



According to Samantha Mellen, development director at A Kid's Place Tampa Bay, $6 million of the $8 million goal for the new activity center has been raised, and construction is very close to starting. It is in the final checklist phase to receive its civil permit. Construction is estimated to begin in early January, and it is projected that the activity center will be completed in a year.

Original Story Printed In June 2025.

What began as a vision from Dottie Berger MacKinnon to create a group foster home in Eastern Hillsborough County that would keep siblings together has grown into a thriving, 13-acre campus — and it continues to expand.

This April, A Kid's Place marked a major milestone with the groundbreaking of the MacKinnon Family Activity Center, a new 12,000-square-foot facility designed to enhance services and experiences for the children in its care. The center will feature an expanded indoor gathering space for birthdays, holidays and other celebrations, as well as additional rooms for therapy, family visitation, arts and crafts and vocational training. The building will also include an educational computer lab and dedicated areas to support the 'Stepping Stones' program, which helps youth ages 13 and up develop independent living skills. Outdoor features will include a basketball court, courtyard, swimming pool and exercise room.

Leaders, board members, staff, volunteers, donors and community officials gathered for the groundbreaking ceremony, which included presentations, refreshments and campus tours.

"This is so heartwarming," said Sandy MacKinnon, husband of founder Dottie. "Sheriff David Gee wanted a place to take kids that deputies could bring kids day or night where they could have love and affection and the caring that they so desperately need."

Hillsborough County has also played a key role in the organization's continued growth. Myers attended the event and shared the county's commitment to the cause.

"Today is special, and these children are looking for the same hope and opportunity as us, and the county contributed $900,000 to help. And this is what it's all about, we invest in our communities," she said.

A Kid's Place has served the Tampa Bay region since its founding in 2009, providing a safe, home-like environment for children removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Located on a 5-acre site, the campus includes a 60-bed facility that provides care for children from birth to age 17, as well as extended services for young adults ages 18-22 aging out of foster care. The nonprofit's mission is to keep sibling groups together while meeting the social, educational, medical and emotional needs of each child.

Over the past 16 years, A Kid's Place has helped more than 1,700 children and 753 families across Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties. For more information, visit https://akidsplacetb.org/.



Year In Review – Updates On Our Top Stories From 2025

RIVERVIEW RESIDENTS INVITED TO SHAPE COMMUNITY'S FUTURE

By Brian Bokor



According to Jay Collins of the Planning Commission, the update for the Riverview Community Plan had two series of community meetings in 2025, and that many or more are expected in 2026.

"The community through these meetings and corresponding surveys began working with staff to update the plan's adopted vision, goals and strategies. No draft language has been produced that is part of the workflow for 2026," Collins stated. "We heard many priorities from the community in 2025, but some that stand out include infrastructure for current and future growth, mobility options and flooding concerns. We look forward to continuing to work with the community in 2026."

Original Story Printed In April 2025.

Hillsborough County's Planning Commission and the Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA) are calling on Riverview residents to actively participate in shaping their community's future, particularly concerning a potential infrastructure project along U.S. 301.

The core of this initiative involves updating the Riverview Community Plan, originally adopted in 2006, to align with THEA's study of potential improvements to U.S. 301. This study, prompted by rapid population growth and resulting traffic congestion, will explore options including the extension of the Lee Roy Selmon Expressway and potential elevated toll lanes, similar to Selmon West Extension.

"We are at the very beginning of this project," stated the Planning Commission's Jay Collins, emphasizing the importance of early community input. "This is your chance to reprioritize Riverview's goals in 2025 moving forward."

The Riverview Community Plan, encompassing 13 goals related to community character, economic development and transportation, is under review. Officials are specifically seeking feedback on land use and mobility strategies along the U.S. 301 corridor.

THEA's Bob Frey highlighted, "We welcome as much information from the start as possible," stressing the value of community input in the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study. "The more input we get at the beginning, the better (for the study)."

This study, a process developed by the Florida Department of Transportation, will evaluate various alternatives for adding capacity to U.S. 301, including toll lanes, while assessing social, economic and environmental impacts.

Residents have voiced concerns regarding traffic congestion, pedestrian and cyclist safety and emergency evacuation routes. The PD&E study aims to address these concerns by evaluating alternatives to alleviate congestion on U.S. 301 and I-75, along with local arterial roads and at several US 301 intersections.

Collins pointed out the significance of the Riverview Community Plan, noting its existing "wording specific to the Highway 301 Corridor District" and "defined Downtown District."

At this time, the PD&E study will look at different alternatives for adding capacity to U.S. 301, including providing toll lanes along the corridor, along with a no-build (or do-nothing) alternative, again stressing the importance of your input in getting this PD&E approved.

To ensure community needs are met and to strengthen grant applications, resident input is crucial. Residents are encouraged to participate by visiting https://selmonstudies.com/us-301-study/ to take a survey. Information on the broader Hillsborough Plan and volunteer opportunities can be found at https://planhillsborough.org/. The existing Riverview Community Plan is available at https://planhillsborough.org/planriverview/. The project is in its early stages, with future public engagement opportunities planned as the PD&E study progresses.

Contact Collins at collinsj@plancom.org or 813-582-7335 and Andrea Papandrew at papandrewa@plancom.org or 813-665-1331. Keisha Pickett Boyd, representing THEA, can be reached at keisha.boyd@tampa-xway.com or 813-272-6740, ext. 211.

DELANIE'S LEMONADE STAND TO HOLD FIFTH ANNUAL PET ADOPTION FAIR

By Taylor Wells



Delanie Dennis in front of her lemonade stand at The Dallas Bull.



According to Delanie Dennis' parents, her fifth annual adoption fair was very successful.

"There were 23 rescues and 10 vendors. We had skunks, an armadillo, a baby alligator (for educational purposes only). There were 15 animals adopted but several other applications submitted to rescues. We also raised over $1500 at the event with lemonade and food sales and some auction items," they said.

Original Story Printed In September 2025.

Delanie Dennis is a 13-year-old local resident and the founder of the nonprofit Delanie's Lemonade Stand, and her mission is to help animals and raise funds for local animal rescues, shelters and sanctuaries. To that end, she and her family are holding their fifth annual Squeeze the Day Adoption Fair at The Dallas Bull on Sunday, November 2.

"My goal this year is to reach a record of rescues as well as animals adopted," said Delanie. "There are going to be vendors. There are going to be rescues. It's free to have a table or a tent. It's going to be really fun."

In previous years, over 30 rescues have taken part in Delanie's adoption fair, so she hopes to beat all past turnouts by having 40 rescues there.

The event is free to the public, and rescue tables are free as well. At the adoption fair, guests can enjoy not only vendors but also food trucks, dessert tables, K9 demonstrations with the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, exotic animals for meet and greet and a check presentation for the rescue Delanie selected to raise money for in October.

"The Dallas Bull generously donates their entire facility every year for this, inside and outside," said Andy Dennis, Delanie's dad. "It's been great."

The event is a group effort, as not only does The Dallas Bull host the event, but some vendors also provide tables and chairs, some provide linens and some help promote the event, all for the sake of animals being adopted into new homes.

"I think over the last four years, she's averaged over 20 adoptions. I think the highest was 32 and the lowest was, like, 17," said Andy.

"Fun fact: We got one of our dogs from said adoption fair," Delanie said.

At the event, the rescues will bring flyers and information about themselves, have adoptable animals, have animals you can meet and greet with and then adopt later and bring animals that are for educational purposes — such as the exotic animals. Last year, the event had one of the largest breeds of owls, and for a donation guests had the opportunity to have it on their arms and get their pictures taken with it.

"I would like to say thank you to all the rescues for what they do," said Delanie. "Once you get into the rescue part personally, you really see how difficult it can actually be."

The Dallas Bull is located at 3322 U.S. 301 in Tampa. To learn more or sign up for the Squeeze the Day Adoption Fair, email delanieslemonadestand@aol.com or contact Julie Dennis at 813-957-8301.

HELPING FAMILIES PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

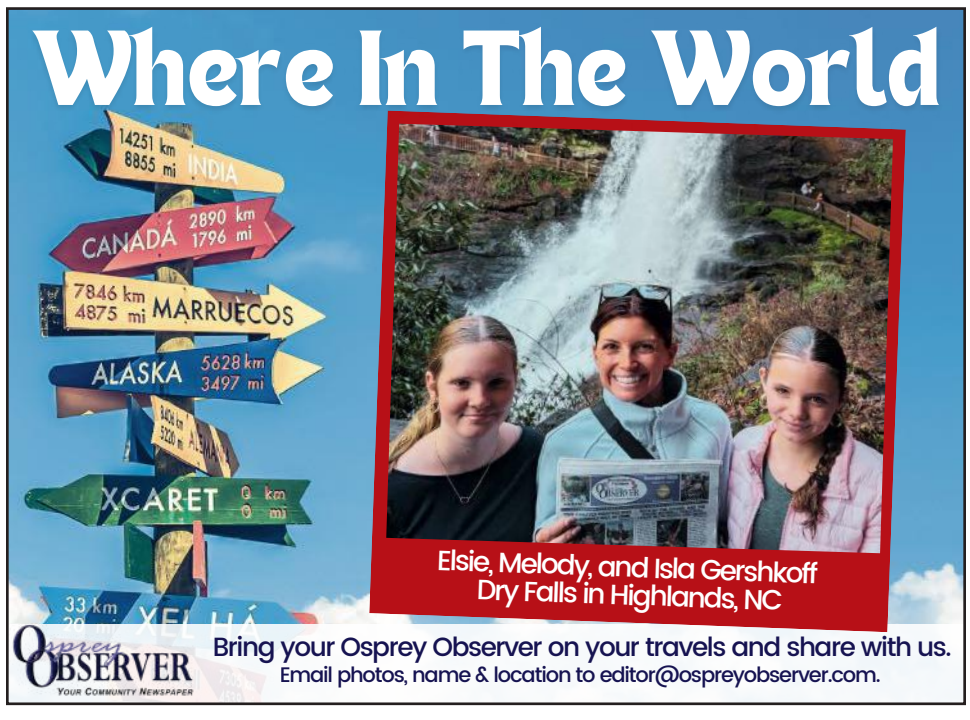
- Estate Planning
- Medicaid and Long Term Care Planning
- Powers of Attorney
- Guardian Advocacy
- Probate and Trust Administration



Laurie Ohall
FL Board Certified
Elder Law Attorney

THE LAW OFFICES OF
LAURIE E. OHALL P.A.
HONOR EDUCATE PROTECT

(813)438-8503 | WWW.OHALLLAW.COM
1464 Oakfield Drive, Brandon, FL



GROUNDBREAKING ANNOUNCED FOR TAMPA FLORIDA CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST TEMPLE

Staff Report



According to Miriam Cook, "construction is ongoing and construction completion, dedication and opening dates have not been announced yet. Once the Tampa Florida Temple is completed, there will be a free public open house for several weeks before it is dedicated."

She added that construction is estimated to be completed within a few years.

In the meantime, guests are invited to learn more about and view images of the Tampa Florida Temple at the visitors center, located on the temple grounds at 9445 Camden Field Parkway in Riverview, from Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Original Story Printed In August 2025.

The First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has announced the groundbreaking date for the Tampa Florida Temple.

Groundbreaking services for the Tampa Florida Temple will be held on Saturday, August 23. Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will preside at the event.

As previously announced, the single-story temple of approximately 29,000 square feet will be constructed on a 12-acre site at 9445 Camden Field Parkway in Riverview. Church President Russell M. Nelson announced the Tampa Florida Temple during the April 2022 general conference.

Nelson said then, "Positive spiritual momentum increases as we worship in the temple and grow in our understanding of the magnificent breadth and depth of the blessings we receive there."

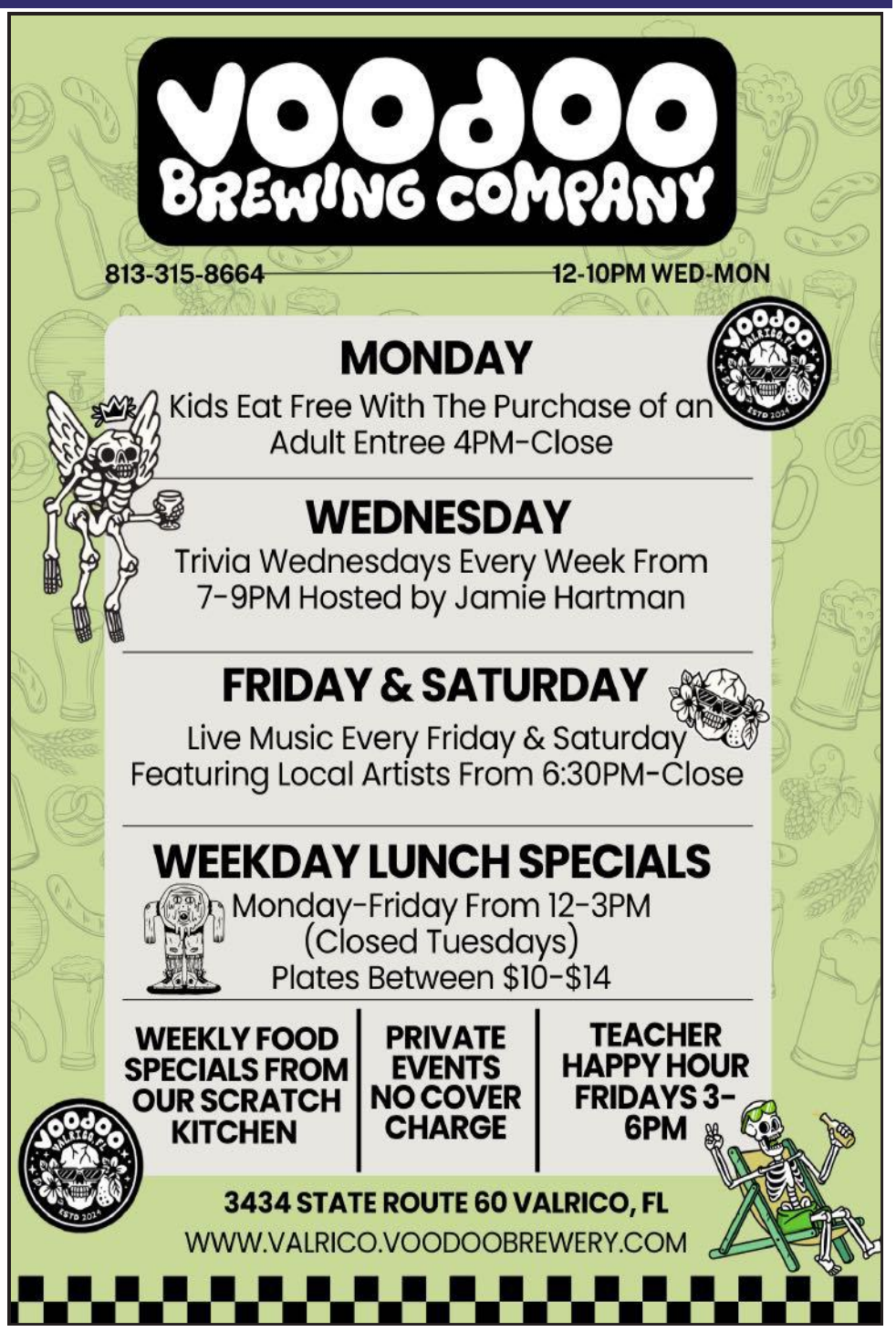
The first Latter-day Saint congregation in Florida was created in 1897 in the Big Bend region. Today, there are more than 176,000 Latter-day Saints in nearly 280 congregations in Florida, which is part of the church's United States southeast area.

Brandon Florida Stake President John Hunter, a lay leader who presides over eight congregations in the Tampa region, explained, "The groundbreaking of the Tampa Florida Temple is a powerful reminder of the Lord's deep love for His children in this area. It feels like a promise fulfilled — He sees us, He knows us and He is inviting us to draw closer to Him in His holy house."

Other temples that are announced, under construction or in operation in Florida, include the Fort Lauderdale Florida Temple, Jacksonville Florida Temple, Orlando Florida Temple and Tallahassee Florida Temple.

Latter-day Saints consider each temple a house of the Lord and the most sacred place of worship on Earth. Temples differ from the church's meetinghouses (chapels). All are welcome to attend Sunday worship services and other weekday activities at local meetinghouses.

For more information, visit www.churchofjesuschrist.org.





ASSOC. CHAPTER HONORS THE DEVIL'S BRIGADE AT MENTON EVENT

By David Miller



Members of Special Forces Association Chapter LX gathered on December 4 for an evening of remembrance, gratitude and fellowship during the annual Menton Day Celebration. Hosted at Team House Tampa, the event brought together U.S. Army Special Forces veterans, Canadian partners and members of the community to honor the deactivation of the 1st Special Service Force (FSSF) on December 5, 1944, in Menton, France.

But Menton Day is far more than a commemoration of a date. It is a recognition of a fighting formation whose courage, ingenuity and sacrifice fundamentally reshaped the concept of special operations and laid the foundation for the modern Green Beret and Canadian SOF heritage.

Formed in 1942 as a binational U.S.-Canadian force, the 1st Special Service Force, soon nicknamed the Devil's Brigade by German troops, was tasked with missions no other unit had the training or audacity to attempt. Operating in extreme environments, advancing against fortified mountain defenses and conducting relentless night raids, the FSSF repeatedly succeeded where conventional forces could not.

Their legendary assault on Monte La Difensa in Italy, scaling sheer cliffs under darkness to seize a position considered unassailable, demonstrated a fusion of endurance, tactical innovation and fearlessness that stunned Allied commanders. At Anzio, Italy, their aggressive patrolling and silent infiltration of enemy lines instilled such fear that German soldiers referred to them as "Die Schwarzen Teufel" — The Black Devils.

The Devil's Brigade became the prototype for modern special forces in both the United States and Canada. Their seamless binational integration set the early standard for today's allied SOF partnerships, while their independence as small teams operating behind enemy lines foreshadowed the 12-man ODA structure used by Green Berets today. Their demanding training in demolitions, mountaineering, amphibious operations, winter warfare and close combat shaped the broad skillset now expected of special forces soldiers

In keeping with longstanding tradition, attendees wore their berets, carried a knife of choice and brought the iconic canteen cup, symbols of field service, shared hardship and the brotherhood that defines the special forces community.

Special Forces Association Team House in Tampa is open to all veterans Wednesday through Sunday from 3-10 p.m.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY FIRE RESCUE ANNOUNCES NEW DIVISION WITH ROVING PARAMEDICS AND AMBULANCES

Staff Report



Hillsborough County Fire Rescue is creating a Peak Rescue Division of roving paramedics and ambulances that will offer efficient and quick response times to medical calls and transports, helping to save lives throughout the county.

The Peak Rescue Division will add a total of 48 Hillsborough County Fire Rescue first responders. They will include 20 rescue lieutenants and 26 paramedics. A section chief and training officer will manage the division. The goal is to have the Peak Rescue Division, which will be administered under the Rescue Division, operating in the spring of 2026.

The board of county commissioners approved the new division at its November 5 regular meeting. It also approved the purchase of five new rescue units for the Peak Rescue Division.

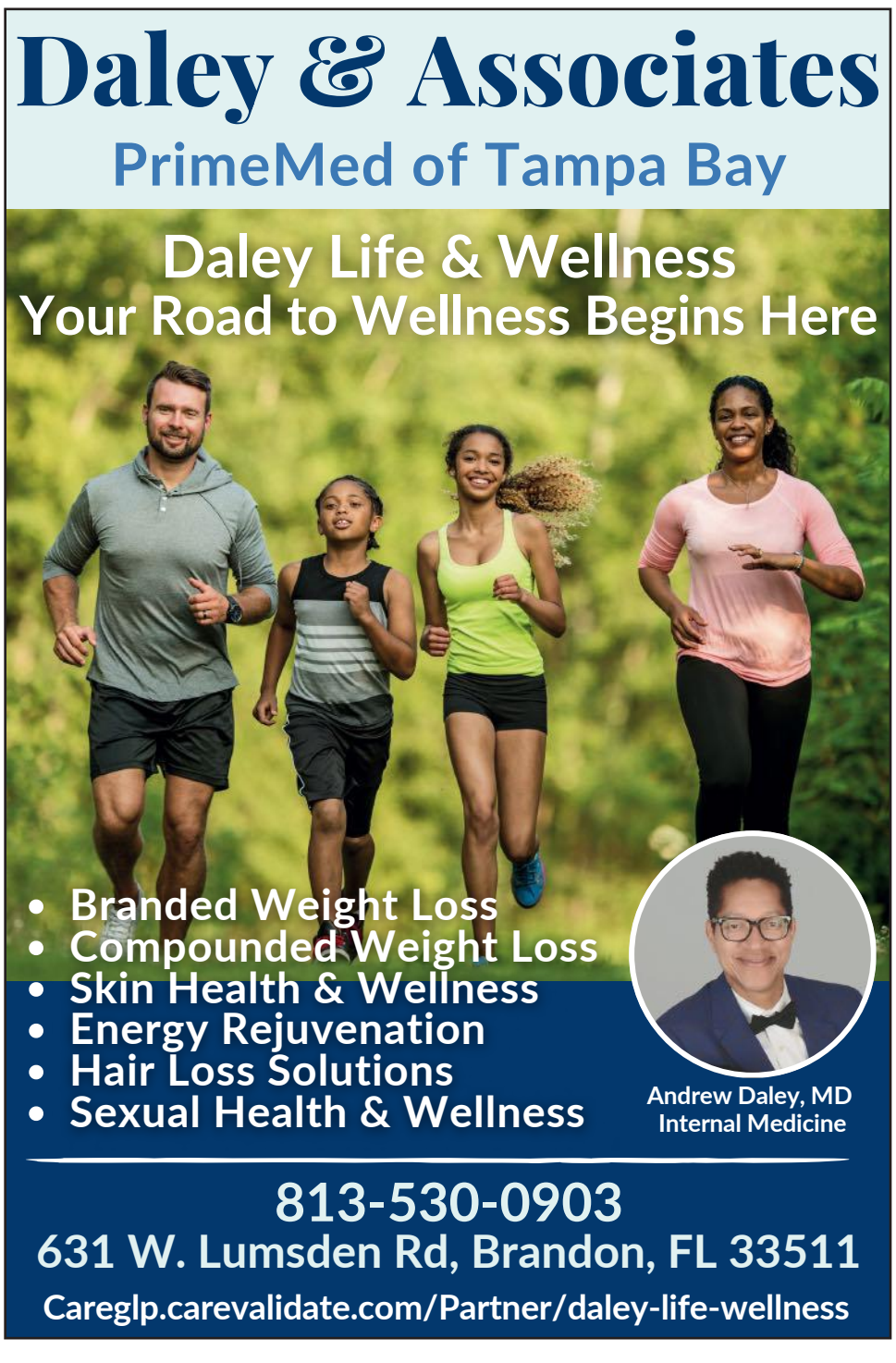
The division will have a total of 10 units that will be on the move and operating away from fire stations. It will be staffed 12 hours a day, seven days a week, including holidays. The units will operate from 7 a.m.-10 p.m., which is the busiest time for emergency calls.

Because the Peak Rescue units won't be assigned to a fire station, they will be more nimble and flexible to respond to calls wherever they may be needed, helping to reduce response times. This also will free up paramedics who are assigned to specific stations to respond to more calls for service.

"Having the Peak Rescue Division operational by spring 2026 is critical for our growing community. This division will enable us to respond faster during our busiest hours, reduce strain on existing rescue units and ensure that residents receive the rapid, high-quality care they expect from Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. It's an important investment, a needed expansion and an opportunity to strengthen our service when it matters most," said Rob Herrin, Hillsborough County Fire Rescue public safety information section chief.

With the additional units in service, Fire Rescue expects to reduce some of its current reliance on third-party ambulance companies. While Fire Rescue expects the number of medical transports to increase, the medical transport revenue will offset the increase in cost to manage the additional units.

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue has been diligently exploring options to better serve the emergency medical needs of Hillsborough County's growing population. In May 2024, it created a pilot program with five roaming three-person units using existing crews to cover peak periods in key areas. The pilot program proved a success. It helped reduce response times by increasing the number of staff and availability during high demand. In certain circumstances, a rescue unit in the pilot program could arrive two minutes faster than a rescue unit leaving from a fire station, a critical improvement when every second counts to save lives.









GET THE DIRT:
SPICE UP YOUR HOLIDAYS

BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT

More holidays are upon us. Some favorite spices include rosemary, sage and marjoram.

Rosemary is a fragrant herb that is easy to grow and works well in your landscape and kitchen. It can be used fresh or dried in recipes containing meats, breads and vegetables. Rosemary adds great flavor to a skewer for the barbecue. It's attractive in the landscape and is drought-tolerant, thriving on well-drained soil and at least six hours of sun. Don't water too often — less is better than more.







Sage thrives in full sun and well-drained soil. It is drought-tolerant once established but can't tolerate wet or poorly drained soils, which may lead to root rot. This perennial herb is a low-maintenance plant that can be pruned to maintain shape and encourage bushier growth. Salvia officinalis, or common sage, is used to flavor meats (pork, poultry), stuffings for turkey, sauces and soups. It can be fried until crispy or infused into butter for pasta, potatoes and squash.

Marjoram has a delicate, sweet and slightly piney flavor. Most people use it to enhance poultry, pork, fish and delicate vegetables, like green beans, carrots and squash. This spice compliments tomato sauces, soups and salads. Many people add fresh marjoram at the end of cooking to preserve the subtle flavor.

Contact Lynn Barber at labarber@ufl.edu.

ROTARY SPOTLIGHT:
ACTIVITIES, MEETINGS & MORE

Staff Report

Rotary Club of Brandon

Rotary Club of Brandon is kicking off 2026 with two major fundraising events aimed at supporting local charities and providing scholarships for college-bound students.

The first event, the 34th Annual Bill Harper Classic Golf Tournament, is scheduled for January 15, 2026, at Buckhorn Golf and Country Club. Those interested in participating or learning more can contact Brett Briggs at 813-240-5380.

Next on the calendar is the 2026 Wild Game Dinner, set for February 27, 2026, at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds. Attendees will enjoy an all-you-can-eat wild game feast, an open bar, a wall-of-guns raffle, a cornhole tournament, and a 50/50 drawing.

Tickets, sponsorship details, and additional information are available at www.BrandonWildGame.com, or by reaching out to any Rotary Club of Brandon member.

If you are interested in finding out more about Rotary or how to join this amazing club, text Debbie Meegan at 813-601-2315 or join us for lunch on Tuesdays at noon at the Rivard Simmons Rotary Event Center located at 3007 S. Kings Avenue. Brandon

The FishHawk/ Riverview Rotary

The FishHawk/ Riverview Rotary Club continues its community programming with several meetings and events planned through December and January. The club will hold a Club Assembly on December 15 and a White Elephant Gift Exchange on December 22. January programs include Liz Anderson, Director of Development for the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, on January 5; Hillsborough County Chief Deputy Joe Mauier on January 12; and a Honduras Trip recap highlighting recent international service work on January 26.

You can also join the club on Mondays from 12 Noon–1 p.m. at Gasparilla Pizzeria & Growlers, 1028 E Bloomingdale Ave, Valrico, FL 33596, or on Thursdays from 5–6:30 p.m. at the Shrimp Boat, 1020 Bloomingdale Ave, Valrico, FL 33596. For more information, contact Betty Huth at betty@hbphoto.com.

Eye Exam
$35
with rebate
Must bring in coupon at time of service. Expires 2-28-2026



$100 OFF
a Complete Pair of Eyeglasses
Some restrictions apply. Most Prescriptions.
Not valid with any other offers. Expires 2-28-2026

Contacts
7 month supply starter kit with exam $149
Some restrictions apply.
Not valid with any other offers. Expires 2-28-2026

Progressive No-Line Bifocals
$99
Some restrictions apply. Clear.
Not valid with any other offers. Expires 2-28-2026

SUN HILL OPTICAL

VALRICO
(813) 653-2244
LA FITNESS | SUN HILL OPTICAL | DOLLAR GENERAL | Valrico Rd
CRACKER BARREL
HWY 60

RIVERVIEW
(813) 672-8100
McMullen Rd | PEP BOYS | PUBLIX | SUN HILL OPTICAL
Boyette Rd

SUN CITY CENTER
(813) 634-6344
New Location
1601 Rickenbacker Dr. Suite 8
POST OFFICE | SCC Plaza | EMERGENCY SQUAD | SAV-A-LOT | SUN HILL OPTICAL
Rickenbacker Dr

Our office accepts many Insurance Plans so we ask that you contact our staff who will research and verify your insurance coverage.

Se habla español

The patient and any other person responsible for payment has a right to refuse to pay, cancel payment or be reimbursed for payment for any other service, examination or treatment which is performed as a result within 72 hours of responding to the ad for the free, discounted fee, or reduced fee, exam or treatment.

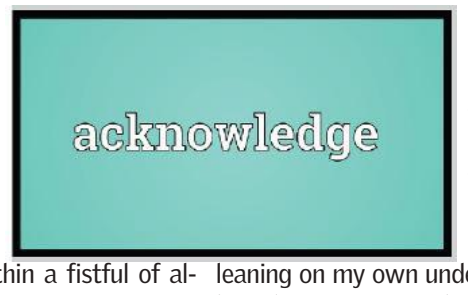
Christian Voice



Grace Notes

Word for the Year

By Debora Coty



Each January, many people choose a word for the upcoming year—a single word that symbolizes their New Year's quest. A focus. An aspiration. A goal. You might even say a resolution encased within a fistful of alphabet letters.

An easily post-able, portable, proverbial reminder of what we deem most important to personally achieve during the next 365 days.

I decided to choose a word this year too. So I asked Papa God for wisdom about my focal word. Several flitted through my mind, but none seemed quite right. Then I looked up. My eyes focused on the contrail of an airplane slashing the blue morning sky with a straight, white line disappearing into cloud cover, its final destination hidden from view.

Acknowledge, a still, small voice whispered to my heart. And a familiar Scripture flashed before my mind's eye: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways a c k n owl e d g e him, and he will make your paths straight," (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV).

I could sure use a straight path. But in order to find one, the Word of God says I need to do three things: Trust in the Lord with all my heart. Stop leaning on my own understanding, which is based on my personal experiences and perceptions and colored by my pain.

Acknowledge Him in all my ways. Know God first (the root of 'knowledge'). Then take action based on that knowledge.

Action + knowledge = acknowledge. Of course. That's my word. And my quest for this year: To actively lean on His understanding, not mine, by delving deeper into His Word, which will allow me to discern His will; to base my actions on that knowledge and trust Him with my whole heart.

This will result in a straight path. Even though I can't see where the path ends, it's the trail I want to be on. Like that contrail. So how about you, my friend?

Are you up for the challenge of choosing your life focal word for the upcoming year? New year. New adventures. New blessings. After all, the sky's the limit!

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

HOLIDAY DECORATIONS: ORNAMENTAL OR SACRAMENTAL?



This column may be born on Christmas, but it works for the new year too. I will start with a quiz. Ready? Looking at this photograph, what is the most compelling decorative element?

The handmade quilt? Or the beautiful tree in the corner? Is it the collection of lace snowflakes? Maybe the poinsettias in the hearth?

They are all good answers, but the response I'm thinking of is our dog, Max! An artfully placed golden retriever enhances any holiday scene. Actually, he just plopped down after walking through. When I photographed our last house for sale, someone asked why I put Max in so many pictures. I didn't; he just shows up, and he's pretty stealth about it.

But, other than being decorative, Max is real — and I think that is the most compelling thing. Holiday decorations — other than the occasional 'live' tree — are only real to the extent the symbolism they carry points to truth rather than make-believe.

Symbolism is fine, but it only holds life if it is rooted in life. Absent spiritual truth and our connection to the heart of God, a manger scene and a heavenly host are about as real as the plastic Santa on the front lawn — maybe less so because at least Santa oils the wheels of commerce.

I believe that the emptiness that is so pervasive in our world is amplified to the extent that the manger scene, the baby Jesus, the lights on the house and the Christmas symbols we display have no meaningful connection to that Holy Night, the Living God, a personal Jesus and the very real introduction of hope and promise and redemption into this world.

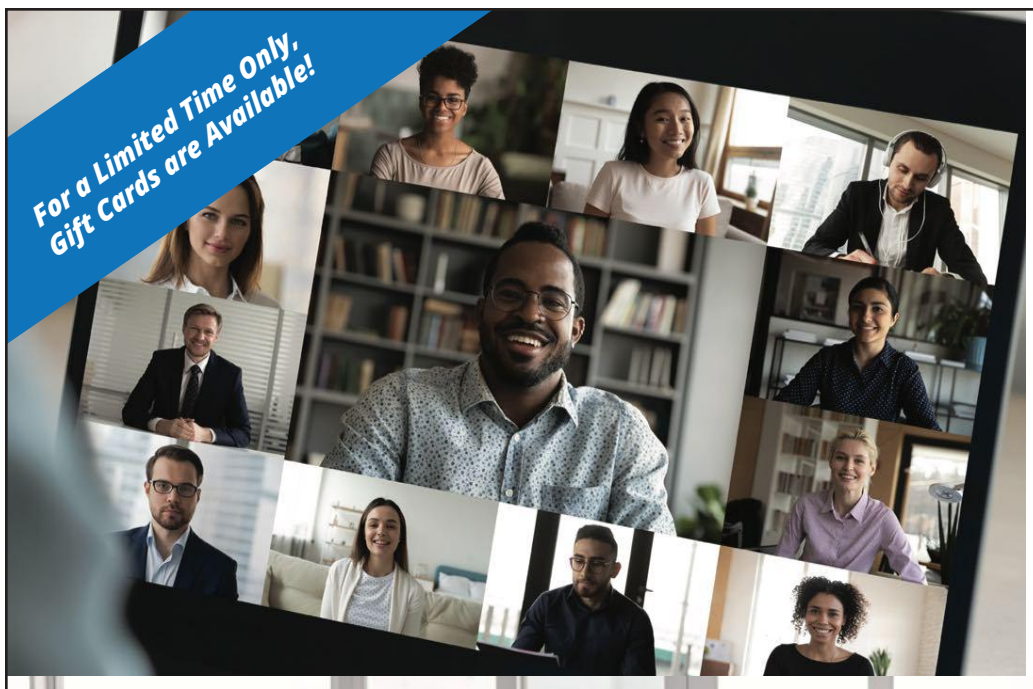
Nostalgia alone does not cannot answer the deep yearning people have for a restored relationship with the Creator and for spiritual healing.

If the only holiday decoration that seems real to you is the golden retriever, then understand this: Because of Jesus — Wonderful Counselor, Beautiful Savior, Prince of Peace — the decorations are no longer merely ornamental, they will become sacramental.

May it be so. — DEREK



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





There's never been a better time to quit with Group Quit

*Tobacco Free Florida's Group Quit Sessions (in-person or virtual) now offer participants $25 - $125 in gift cards for their attendance.**

Group Quit offers free, expert-led in-person or virtual sessions for all Florida residents regardless of insurance status. Upon class completion, participants are eligible for nicotine replacement therapy such as patches, gum, or lozenges.**

Pre-registration required

Call USF AHEC Program today at:
813-974-7889

*while supplies last
**if medically appropriate for those 18 years of age or older

Learn more about all of Tobacco Free Florida's tools and services at TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/QuitYourWay.

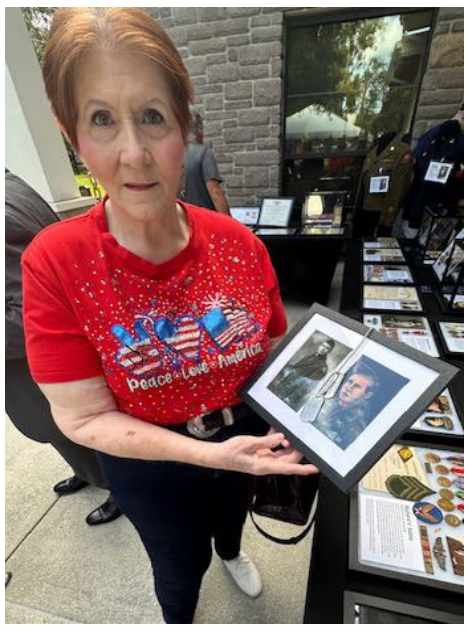
AHEC USF AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER PROGRAM

Florida HEALTH | Tobacco Free Florida .com

HOW A DECORATED WWII VETERAN SHAPED BRANDON'S EARLY GROWTH: THE STORY OF COL. FRIEDERICH

By Taylor Wells

Kathy Godwin and her siblings, Carol Miltner and Robert Friederich, poured months of time into learning, reconstructing, and preserving the legacy of their late father, Col. Lambert P. Friederich, a decorated World War II officer.



Col. Lambert P. Friederich's documentation and personal materials on display at the WWII Veterans History Project, donated by Kathy Godwin, one of his daughters.



Lambert, born on September 18, 1922, entered the U.S. Army on February 11, 1943, at Camp Blanding in Starke, commissioned as an officer in Company E, 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. In a rare family legacy, Lambert actually served in the same historic unit as his own father, Lambert A. Friederich, who served in World War I.

The 3rd Infantry Division fought relentlessly throughout a number of battles and operations, including Operation Dragoon, the Vosges Mountains, Rhineland and the Ardennes-Alsace Campaign. For their fearsome reputation, enemies called them the "Blue and White Devils," after their insignia's colors.

Lampert's battalion also participated in the liberation of the Augsburg-Pfersee subcamp of Dachau in 1945, where brutal medical experiments were being conducted. One prisoner was so grateful that they made a portrait of Lambert.

"Everything that I have has actually either come from the 30th Infantry or a book that was written — this is how I first learned the information; it was 10 years ago," said Godwin.

Godwin called the 30th Infantry, who told her to first read the book to learn her father's war history. Afterward, they further explained the history.

"The history is really hard to follow, and I wanted to make sure that whatever I gave to anybody, I wanted my documentation to be exactly 100 percent correct," said Godwin.

For his dedication to his country, Lambert was highly decorated, having received a Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart, to name a few.

A graduate of H.B. Plant High School and an active ROTC member, Lambert achieved his dream of becoming a Florida Gator. He later moved to Brandon in the early 1960s. There, Godwin said, he founded Brandon Insurance Agency, the first local insurance office; was a president of the chamber of commerce; helped fight to have the Brandon Regional Hospital built; was a mayor of Brandon; and helped create the Rotary Club of Brandon and the Brandon '86 Rotary Club.

To preserve his great legacy, Godwin donated her father's documentation and personal materials to the WWII Veterans History Project, which is located at 4327 S. Hwy. 27, Ste. 139, in Clermont.

BUCHANAN HONORS 19 VETERANS WITH CONGRESSIONAL COMMENDATION

Staff Report



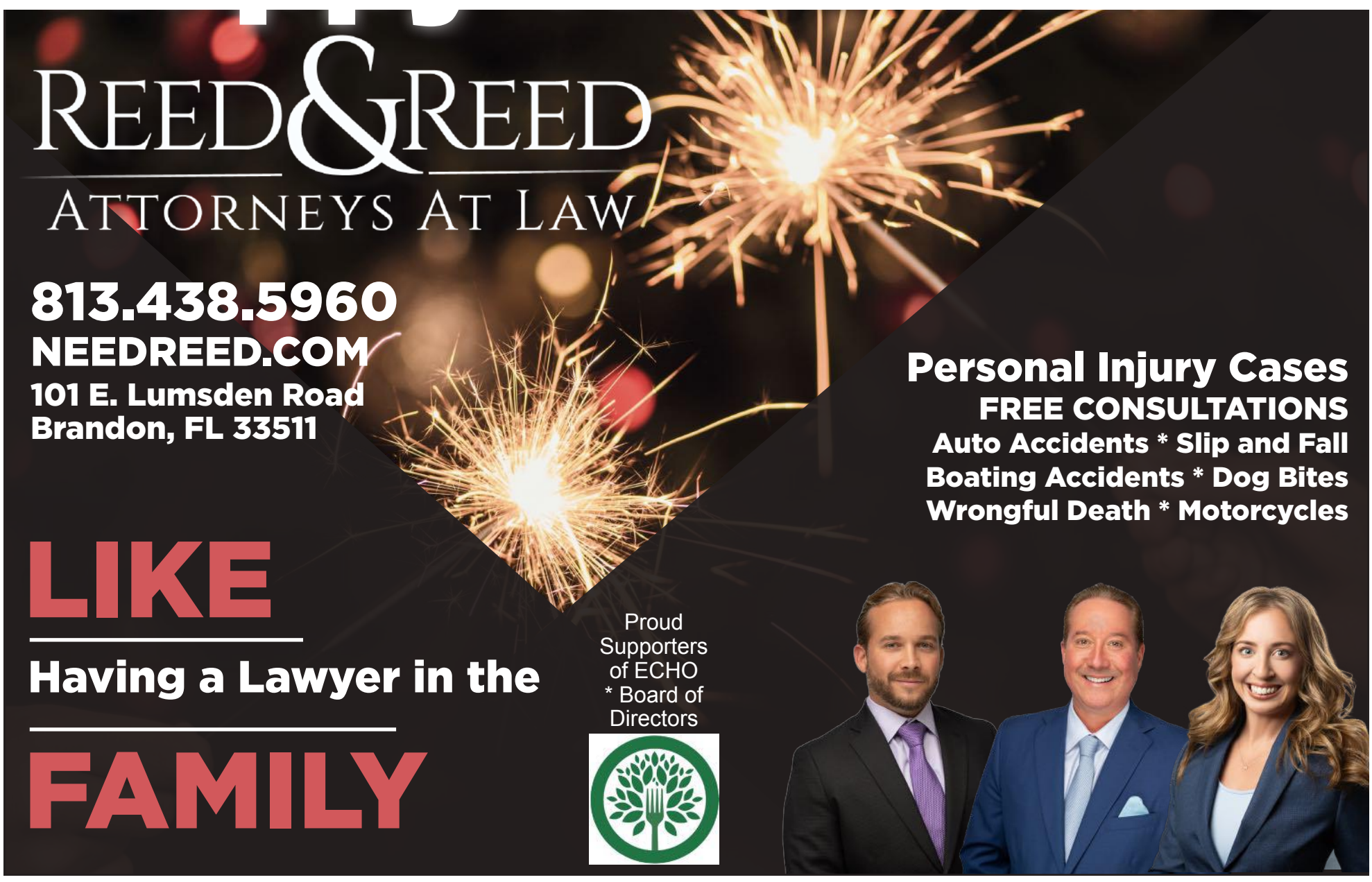
In December, Congressman Vern Buchanan announced the honorees of the 3rd Annual Congressional Veteran Commendation ceremony. Buchanan established the awards to honor the wartime sacrifices and peacetime community involvement of veterans residing in Florida's 16th Congressional District which is home to more than 64,000 Veterans.

"I established these awards to recognize our local heroes who have valiantly served both our country in uniform and our community," said Buchanan. "While we will never be able to fully repay the honorees for their selfless sacrifices, I hope the Congressional Veteran Commendation helps express how grateful our community truly is for their service."

Buchanan has a strong record of fighting for veterans and military families. In December 2021, a Buchanan measure to reduce military training accidents following the death of Bradenton soldier Nicolas Panipinto was enacted into law. In February 2025, Buchanan introduced the Veterans Mental Health Crisis Referral Enhancement Act (H.R. 1290), which directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a three-year pilot program to refer veterans experiencing mental health crises to approved non-Veterans Affairs mental health care providers, ensuring timely access to competent care. Buchanan also reintroduced the Veterans Overmedication and Suicide Prevention Act (H.R. 136) this Congress, which requires the VA to study the link between addictive opioids and the alarmingly high rate of suicides among veterans.

An independent panel chose the following 19 veterans for their service:

Nelson Betancourt U.S. Army.
Benny Blackshire U.S. Army-Vietnam
Jeffery Camp U.S. Army & Army National Guard Iraq and Afghanistan Wars
Jack Carter U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam and Gulf Wars
Charles Conover Jr. U.S. Army
Ronald Cousineau U.S. Air Force
Emily Farkas U.S. Air Force Iraq and Afghanistan Wars
Ferris Garrett Jr. U.S. Air Force Vietnam.
William Greer U.S. Air Force
Brian Hammer U.S. Army Iraq and Afghanistan Wars
Nathaniel Hawthorne U.S. Navy Iraq
Roberta Jordan U.S. Army
Robert Lucas II U.S. Army
Danny Melton U.S. Marine Corps
MaryAnn Rowe Michigan Army National Guard Iraq
Richard Steinestel U.S. Navy Vietnam
Roland Tiso Jr. U.S. Army Iraq and Afghanistan Wars
Paul Wheat Jr. U.S. Army Vietnam
Edward Wudarsky Jr. U.S. Army Vietnam



HIMES BREAKFAST HOUSE LAUNCHES FRANCHISE PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR LIFESTYLE-FRIENDLY OWNERSHIP

Staff Report



Himes Breakfast House, a Florida-born breakfast and brunch concept, celebrated for its made-from-scratch classics and guest-first hospitality, has officially launched its franchise program. The opportunity gives entrepreneurs a chance to bring a proven, profitable model to their communities — and to own a business that works around their lives, not the other way around.

Founded in 2021 by husband-and-wife team John and Jess Christen, Himes has quickly become a go-to destination across the Tampa Bay area for flavorful, Southern-inspired breakfast, brunch and lunch. Built on decades of multiunit restaurant experience, the concept combines operational efficiency, accessible start-up costs and a family-first culture to create an ownership model that prioritizes both profitability and balance.

"Deciding to franchise Himes was inspired by family and opportunity," said co-founder John. "Early in my career, I was given the chance to take over the legacy Shells Seafood brand with the guidance of my parents and their industry peers. That experience shaped me — and now my passion is to create that same path for ambitious entrepreneurs: to give them the tools, guidance and support to build something meaningful."

Himes provides franchisees with an approachable entry into restaurant ownership backed by comprehensive support, from site selection and buildout to training, marketing and ongoing operations. With a streamlined kitchen, limited hours and daytime-only schedule, franchisees benefit from simplified staffing and genuine work-life balance — a rarity in the restaurant world.

"The real secret to Himes isn't just our food — it's our people," said Jess. "We envision our future franchisees as part of the family. With our systems, tools and support, they can build a neighborhood favorite where guests feel welcome and team members feel valued."

As Himes expands throughout Florida and beyond, the brand continues to champion a business model that blends heart, hospitality and opportunity — one plate at a time.

To learn more about franchising opportunities with Himes Breakfast House, visit https://himesfranchise.com/.

Today, Himes operates three locations across the Greater Tampa Bay area, each rooted in community and built on a culture of warmth and connection.

Himes locations operate six days a week from 7 a.m.-2 p.m., offering a streamlined model that prioritizes simplicity, efficiency, and genuine work-life balance.

AREA SCHOOLS DESIGNATED 2025-28 PURPLE STAR SCHOOLS OF DISTINCTION BY THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE

Staff Report

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is proud to announce that 16 schools have earned the Florida Department of Education's Purple Star School of Distinction designation for the 2025 through 2028 school years. The Purple Star program honors schools that demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting military-connected students and their families during school transitions and throughout their K-12 experience.

"Serving military families is part of who we are as a community," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "Our Purple Star schools provide dedicated points of contact, intentional transition supports, and resources that help students thrive academically and socially from day one. We're honored to support the men and women stationed at MacDill Air Force Base and the thousands of military-connected families who call Hillsborough County home."

Florida's Purple Star School of Distinction designation lasts three school years and recognizes campuses that provide targeted supports for military families and students, such as clear enrollment and records transfer processes, a designated military point of contact and accessible information about school and community-based resources. The program was established by the Florida Legislature in 2021 (school designation) and expanded in 2024 to include districts; it is defined in Rule 6A-1.0999, F.A.C.

Visit https://bit.ly/HCPS-Military-Families to see the list of our Purple Star Schools of Distinction and to learn more about our programs and resources for our military families.

Congratulations to schools who earned this designation:

2025-28:
Boyette Springs
Collins Pre K-8
Dawson Elementary
Lennard High School
Nelson Elementary
Newsome High
Stowers Elementary

2024-27:
Jule F. Sumner High School.
Lithia Springs Elementary School.
Riverview High School.

2023-26:
Bevis Elementary School.
East Bay High School.
FishHawk Creek Elementary School.
Randall Middle School.

2022-25:
Nelson Elementary School.
Newsome High School.
Stowers Elementary School

ASP AMERICA'S SWIMMING POOL CO.
Pool Cleaning and Inspections
Call 813-641-4968
or Visit ASPSouthShoreFL.com

Tailored Travel, Where Every Trip Is A Treasure!
Your Vacation Experts, Specializing in Cruises, Land & Tour Vacations
Matthew Gordon & Marji Beam
Cruise Planners® Independent Franchise Owners
Group Cruise Seminar:
• Dolly Parton & Kenny Rogers True Love Cruise
• 7-night cruise out of Miami Sailing
• Date: June 6, 2026
COME SEE US AT KINGS POINT
in the Ripple Room
January 16 10:00 AM to Noon
CRUISE PLANNERS
YOUR LAND AND CRUISE EXPERTS
717-856-2646
www.ventureoutvacation.com

Make the journey count.
trax CREDIT UNION
6106 Delancey Station Street
Riverview, FL 33578
619 30th Street NE
Ruskin, FL 33570

Customized advice that changes with your needs.
›Retirement Planning
›Wealth Management
›Estate Planning
›Insurance Strategies
›Tax Planning
SOUTHSHORE WEALTH MANAGEMENT
THIS WAY to financial clarity
Mike McCormick
Founder-Wealth Manager
Dena Diab
Branch Operations Manager
Contact Us Today | (813)499-9247 | www.southshorewlth.com
1601 Rickenbacker Dr, Suite #1, Sun City Center, FL 33573
Securities offered through Cetera Advisor Networks LLC (doing insurance business in CA as CFGAN Insurance Agency LLC), member FINRA/SIPC, Advisory Services offered through Cetera Investment Advisers LLC, a registered investment adviser. Cetera is under separate ownership from any other named entity.

BUCHANAN ANNOUNCES 2025 FIRE AND RESCUE/EMS AWARD WINNERS

Staff Report





Sun City Center Emergency Squad received the Dedication and Professionalism Award

Congressman Vern Buchanan announced the recipients of the 16th Congressional District Fire and Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Awards. Buchanan established the awards to give special recognition to fire and rescue and EMS personnel who have provided distinguished service to his constituents in 2025.

"As first responders, fire departments and EMS teams are summoned on short notice to serve their communities," said Buchanan.

"Oftentimes, they arrive at scenes of great adversity and trauma, to which they reliably bring strength and composure. I believe these awards are a fitting tribute to our first responders and a reminder of the important role they play in our communities."

This year's award recipients were selected by an independent committee comprised of a cross section of current and retired fire and rescue personnel living in the district.

Buchanan presented awards to the following Hillsborough County fire and rescue and EMS personnel:

Dedication and Professionalism Award: Hillsborough County Fire Rescue: Company Fire Captain Ralph Mascaro Sun City Center Emergency Squad

Preservation of Life Award: Hillsborough County Fire Rescue: Firefighter/Paramedic Jacob Campbell, Fire Captain Clifford Davis, Firefighter/Paramedic Anna Inman, and Firefighter Maurice Swan

Unit Citation: Tampa General Hospital Aeromed: Pilot Stu O'Shannon, Flight Nurse Alisha Burnett, Flight Paramedic Chuck Nelson, Flight Paramedic Orientee Luis Vazquez, Pilot Mark Boudreau, Flight Nurse Rob Freas, and Flight Paramedic Kelly Curren

Career Service Award: Hillsborough County Fire Rescue: Battalion Chief Jeff Martin

In total, 125 Area First Responders and 4 Civilians Recognized for Distinguished Service. Visit https://buchanan.house.gov/.

NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD ANDREA ROMINE BEGINS REAL ESTATE CAREER AT KELLER WILLIAMS VALRICO

Staff Report



Andrea Romine, a 19-year-old real estate professional with Keller Williams, is proud to announce the launch of her real estate career in the local market after relocating from Ohio to Florida. New to the area but driven by ambition and a strong support system, Romine is building her business around two core missions: serving as a trusted Ohio-to-Florida relocation connector and inspiring young people to start their real estate careers early — without the need for a traditional four-year degree.

A Dedicated Ohio-to-Florida Relocation Connector

Having personally made the move from Ohio to Florida, Romine understands the emotions, logistics and timing that come with relocating. She is positioning herself as a go-to Ohio-to-Florida moving agent, helping clients seamlessly sell their homes in Ohio and purchase their next home in Florida — or make the move in reverse.

Romine has built strong relationships with a network of trusted referral associates throughout Ohio, allowing her clients to feel confident in knowing their transaction is handled by experienced professionals on both ends. By acting as the central point of contact, she simplifies the process, reduces stress and ensures continuity from start to finish.

"Relocating doesn't have to feel overwhelming," said Romine. "My goal is to be the connector — someone who understands both markets and can guide clients through every step, whether they're heading to Florida or moving back home to Ohio."

Starting Early: A Message to Future Real Estate Professionals

Romine's second focus is encouraging high school students and young adults who are interested in real estate to start now. She is passionate about showing that a successful career in real estate does not require a college or trade school degree — only discipline, strong work ethic and clear goals.

"Real estate is one of the few careers where you can get licensed right after high school and immediately start building your future," Romine said. "If you have big goals later in life, you might as well start now."

Through Keller Williams, Romine has access to industry-leading training, coaching and mentorship, including classroom-style learning and team-based support. She credits Keller Williams for providing the education and guidance that allows new agents — especially young professionals — to grow with confidence and professionalism.

Romaine is with The Ans Group- Keller Williams Suburban Tampa located at 2350 E. State Rd 60. Valrico. Visit theansgroup.kw.com or call (740) 974-8837.





May the road ahead be brighter for the world

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

May I help you this year? Here's what I did for others last year!



SELLERS
Listing, advertising & selling homes is the largest portion of my business. This custom builder's brand-new, 3,450-SF home with pool, dock & boat lift on a protected cove in Apollo Beach was my highest-priced contract of the year. It sold in March for $1,925,000.



BUYERS
My market knowledge is a key reason buyers ask me to help them navigate & negotiate such a significant step. In this case, the out-of-state couple choosing River Hills Country Club included a mortgage lender with her own high standards. Sold in June for $535,000.



BOTH-SIDERS
I offer client incentives in several scenarios, especially if you buy & sell with me! In Riverview's Shadow Run, selling this home with 6,650 SF under roof wasn't easy, but the owner still got my best discount after buying with me in 2024. Sold in August for $670,000.

EXPERIENCE
I became a Realtor in 1984, & clients rely on my long experience. As the market slowed in late 2024, I suggested the retiring sellers of this pool home in FishHawk's Eagle Ridge might wait for a fresh approach in the spring of 2025. I sold it in June for $805,000.



SERVICE
I'm often willing to do much more than most agents! Loyal clients across the county in Citrus Park needed help on a long list of items after a buyer inspection. My husband did a lot for free, then handled hiring & paying for the rest to get it sold in June for $625,000.



INTEGRITY
I've built my reputation on trust in a field where it's not always found. In Boyette Springs, a new agent & buyers with no integrity bailed out on these seller clients at the last second. We had to halt a move-out & start marketing over again. We did & sold in May for $470,000.



MARKETING
Agents who sell less have less money to spend marketing your property. I can afford to cast a wide net in advertising & pay for extras such as aerial photos, which helped to find the buyers for this home on Riverview's Lake Kenda. Sold in June for $525,000.



NETWORKING
Relationships with other agents can make a difference for clients. A close associate for 20 years knew when he had found the right buyers for this listing of mine in Triple Creek & he worked with me for a deal the sellers could accept. Sold in August for $770,000.



UNDERSTANDING
Real estate is about people, not just business! Sometimes those people express needs beyond holding out for a higher price. In Riverglen, that led to this home selling for much less than a prior agent tried for months before I was asked. Sold in April for $468,900.



NEW CONSTRUCTION
In new communities, many buyers go straight to corporate builders without realizing they can protect themselves & even save money by having their own agent. In Wimauma's West Lake, I helped a buyer get this 1,825-SF home for a sale that closed in July at $324,900.



RENT MANAGEMENT
I've managed dozens of rental homes over many years, frequently helping tenants as well as the landlords when it's time to buy or sell. In Belmont south of Riverview, out-of-state owners finally had their fill of hurricane impacts & sold this property in May for $429,000.



REFERRALS
If you're not selling or buying in the new year but you know someone who is, please consider referring them to me! I can make it worthwhile for you, too, as I have with family of the folks who bought this home in Diamond Hill Golf & Country Club. Sold in April for $415,000.





Ann Marie Vaughan, Realtor

RE/MAX AllianceGroup

Over $15 million in sales in 2025

RE/MAX Hall of Fame, Top 1% among all agents across Tampa Bay

Certified Luxury Home Specialist

34-year resident of Riverview

"I live here. I love it here. And I sell here like no one else!"

Direct: 813-748-4536

Email: annmarievaughan @verizon.net

Web: annmarievaughan. realtor