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BIG BEND ROAD PROJECT AIMS TO EASE CONGESTION IN SOUTH HILLSBOROUGH

By Brian Bokor



Hillsborough County Florida
Big Bend Road Project Location Map
US 41 to Covington Garden Drive
CIP 69647000 / 69692000

Hillsborough County is moving forward with plans to widen a key section of Big Bend Road in South Hillsborough County, a $25.2 million project designed to improve traffic flow, increase capacity and enhance safety along one of the area's busiest corridors.

To help keep pace with that growth, Hillsborough County is moving forward with plans to widen approximately three-quarters of a mile of Big Bend Road between U.S. 41 and Covington Garden Drive, a project expected to cost about $25.2 million.

The project will transform the existing four-lane divided roadway into a six-lane urban corridor designed to improve traffic flow, increase capacity and enhance safety.

County officials designed the project to ease congestion and improve mobility along a corridor that has experienced significant growth in recent years.

Improvements include widening the roadway from four lanes to six lanes, adding curb and gutter systems, a closed drainage network, improved stormwater infrastructure and a landscaped median ranging from 11-36 feet wide.

Drivers will also see a new traffic signal and southbound left-turn lane at Kings Lake Drive and Old Big Bend Road.

Another major change will occur at the intersection of Big Bend Road and Covington Garden Drive. Under the current design, Old Big Bend Road will no longer connect directly through the intersection. Instead, the intersection will be converted into a three-leg configuration intended to improve traffic operations and reduce conflict points.

The project also includes 10-foot-wide sidewalks on both sides of Big Bend Road, enhanced pedestrian crossings and approximately one-quarter mile of new concrete trail along Waterset Boulevard. The trail will connect the Scenic Drive Trailhead to the future sidewalk network along Big Bend Road.

The improvements come as South Hillsborough continues to add new homes, businesses and commercial development, bringing more vehicles onto roads originally built for a much smaller population.

Big Bend Road serves as a key connection between U.S. 41, Interstate 75 and some of the county's fastest-growing communities, making transportation improvements along the corridor a priority for local leaders.

Funding is expected to come from a combination of Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) funding, impact fees, grants, county matching funds and development-related contributions. More than $12 million of the project's funding is expected to come from FDOT.

The project remains in the design phase. Design completion is anticipated in 2026, with procurement expected to conclude in 2027. Construction is currently projected to be completed by mid-2029.

For more information, residents can contact Hillsborough County Public Works at 813-635-5400.

SUMMER FEEDING PROGRAM PROVIDES FREE MEALS AT 150 SITES ACROSS COUNTY

Staff Report



Hillsborough County Public Schools is once again helping ensure children have access to nutritious meals during the summer months through its annual Summer Feeding Program, which offers free breakfasts, lunches and snacks at more than 150 locations throughout the county.

The program started June 1 at HOST sites, with additional locations opening as summer programs get underway. Available to all children and teens ages 18 and younger, the meals are offered at no cost regardless of school enrollment status, and no registration is required.

District officials say the program is designed to bridge the gap for families who rely on school meals during the academic year. By providing convenient access to healthy food options throughout the summer, the district hopes to support student well-being while school is out of session.

At weekday on-site meal locations, children must be present to receive meals, and all food must be consumed on-site during designated serving times. Community members visiting school-based meal sites are asked to check in at the school's front office before proceeding to the cafeteria or designated serving area.

Families can find nearby meal locations and serving schedules by visiting the website at www.SummerBreakSpot.org and entering their address. Many participating sites also offer activities, enrichment programs or recreational opportunities in addition to meals, depending on the location.

In addition to daily meal service, HCPS is offering a weekly seven-day meal box pickup option at the South County Career Center in Ruskin. The grab-and-go program runs through July 22 and is designed to provide greater flexibility for families who may not be able to visit meal sites each day.

Meal boxes can be picked up every Wednesday between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. at the South County Career Center, located at 2810 John Sherman Way. Unlike on-site meal locations, children do not need to be present for pickup, and meals do not need to be consumed on-site.

Each meal box includes seven days' worth of breakfast and lunch meals, along with a gallon of milk, helping families keep children nourished throughout the week.

The Summer Feeding Program is part of Florida's Summer BreakSpot initiative, which provides free meals and snacks to children and teens across the state. District leaders encourage families to take advantage of the program to help ensure children remain healthy, active and ready to learn when school resumes in the fall.

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Lennard High School girls flag football captured the Class 4A State Championship, defeating Park Vista High School 12-6. The state title for Lennard is the first-ever for the school. he victory was elating for Travis Combs because it was his last game as the Lennard head coach. He accepted a college coaching job to start the women's flag football team at Indiana Wesleyan University.



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PLUMBING YOU CAN COUNT ON, FROM A FAMILY YOU CAN TRUST, CROFTON'S

By Makenzie Atkins Noel



Randy and Delight Crofton built the business on trust and craftsmanship — now their children April and Jon are carrying on that legacy.

Finding a plumber is easy. Finding one you can actually trust with your home, your time and your money is a different story. With more than 35 years of experience, Crofton's Plumbing & Drain Solutions has spent decades earning that trust one job at a time.

As a full-service residential and commercial plumbing company serving Sun City Center, Riverview, Wimauma and the surrounding communities, Crofton's offers a comprehensive range of solutions. Services include repiping, water heater installation and repair, kitchen and bathroom remodels, sewer line repairs and 24/7 emergency services. Every job is backed by a one-year parts and labor guarantee and approached with the same commitment to fast response times, transparency and a client-first standard.

"We treat our customers the way we would want our own family treated: with respect, transparency, and urgency," said Randy Crofton, owner of Crofton's Plumbing & Drain Solutions. "Our goal isn't just to fix the issue. It's to create a positive experience from start to finish."

The foundation of that reputation was laid in the 1980s, when founder Randy Crofton began learning the trade alongside his father. Over the course of more than 35 years, Randy Crofton developed a standard of craftsmanship rooted in honesty and dedication. His wife and business partner, Delight Crofton, has played an integral role in the company's operations, billing and overall direction. Together, they built a business on a principle that has never wavered: Do the job right, treat people with respect and stand behind your work.

That legacy is now carried forward by the next generation. Their daughter, April, serves as chief administrative officer, overseeing the business operations that keep the company running efficiently, while their son, Jon, leads the technical side as director of field operations. Their combined leadership ensures the values Randy and Delight Crofton established remain at the center of every service call.

Crofton's Plumbing & Drain Solutions is not just a company built on experience. It is a company built on relationships, and for homeowners and businesses across Riverview, Sun City Center, Wimauma, and beyond, that commitment is what sets it apart.

For more information, please call 813-633-8923 or visit the website at https://callcroftons.com/.

RIVERVIEW HIGH STUDENT EARNS SECOND PLACE IN CONGRESSIONAL ART CONTEST

By Marie Gilmore

Student artists from Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) earned top recognition in the 2026 Congressional Art Competition, a district-wide showcase announced by Congressman Vern Buchanan celebrating the creativity of high school students across Florida's 16th Congressional District.



Second-place honors went to Olivia Fields of Riverview High School for her work, "Production, Consumerism, Stars, and Stripes."

This year, 31 student artworks were submitted for consideration. HCPS students claimed first, second and third-place honors, underscoring the strength of the district's visual arts programs.

The first-place winner was Ireland Cates, a sophomore at Bloomingdale High School in Valrico. Her piece, "The Capitol," will be displayed for one year in Washington, D.C., in the corridor connecting the U.S. Capitol and the Cannon House Office Building.

Secon- place was awarded to Olivia Fields of Riverview High School in Riverview for "Production, Consumerism, Stars, and Stripes." Third place honors went to Madelyn Bowers of Bloomingdale High School for her artwork, "Repetition."

HCPS students also received recognition in the competition's Facebook Fan Favorite Awards, which honor student works selected by the public and displayed in the congressman's offices in Washington, D.C.; Bradenton; and Brandon. Fan Favorite Award winners include Malik Dante Walker of Sumner High School in Riverview for "Jammin' Under the Sun" and Adam Nuykin of Sumner High School for "Make a Splash."

"I'm incredibly impressed by the talent and creativity showcased by the students who participated in this year's Congressional Art Competition," Buchanan said. "Each submission reflected remarkable skill, originality and hard work."

The judging panel included representatives from State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, including faculty and administrative leaders in art, academic affairs and public engagement.

The Congressional Art Competition is held annually to recognize and encourage artistic talent among high school students across participating congressional districts.



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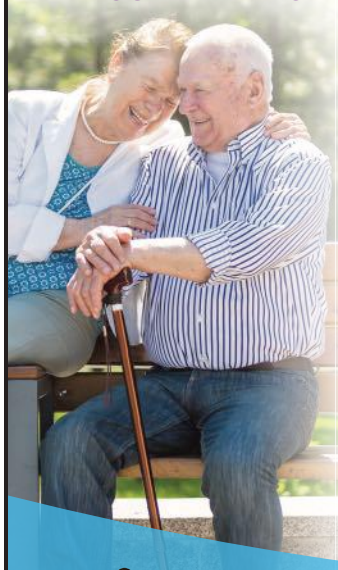
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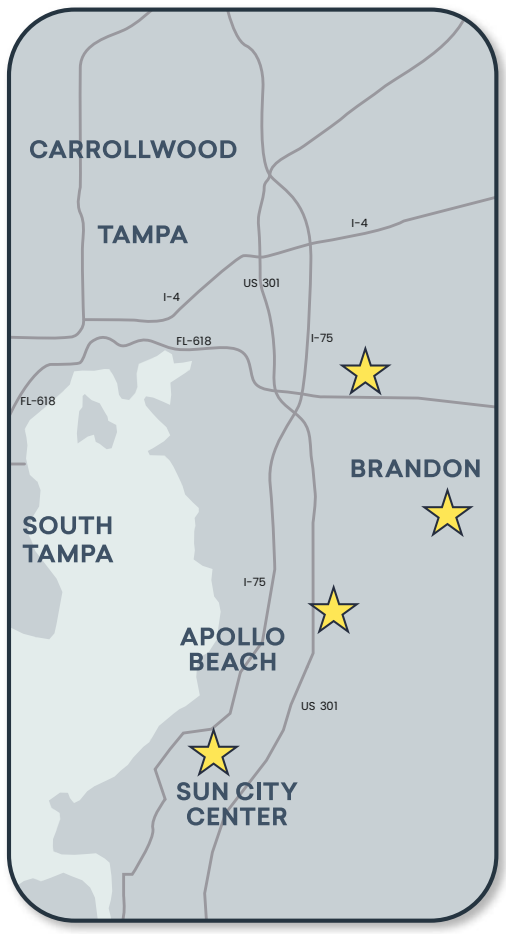
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FOUR FAMILIES MOVE IN AT HABITAT'S WINDHORST COMMONS

Staff Report



Megan Grufman celebrates with her children, David and Melanie.



Devan Mitchell and her son, Stephen, stand outside their new home in Windhorst Commons.



Natalie Sanchez and her daughter, Sariah, tour their new Habitat for Humanity home.

For four Hillsborough County families, the dream of homeownership has become a reality thanks to Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough and a network of community partners dedicated to addressing the region's affordable housing crisis.

During a series of home dedication ceremonies this spring, four mothers and their children received the keys to new homes in Windhorst Commons, Habitat's 23-home affordable housing community in Brandon. Each family arrived with a different story, but all shared a common challenge: rising housing costs that made stable homeownership seem increasingly out of reach.

For Megan Grufman, a single mother of two, the dedication marked the end of years spent living in overcrowded conditions with extended family. After rent prices made independent housing unaffordable, Grufman and her children moved in with her parents. Grufman shared a room with her 11-year-old son, David, while her 17-year-old daughter, Melanie, slept in a makeshift space in her grandmother's room.

Now, the family has a home of their own thanks to Habitat's 2025 Real Estate Build, sponsored by the Suncoast Tampa Association of REALTORS®.

"There were so many times I didn't know how we would ever get ahead or have a place of our own," Grufman said during her dedication ceremony.

Just days earlier, Devan Mitchell and her 15-year-old son, Stephen, celebrated a similar milestone. The billing specialist had spent years navigating rising rents and maintenance issues in rental housing while trying to provide stability for her family.

"This home means everything to us," Mitchell said. "It means stability, safety and hope for my son and me."

Mitchell's home was made possible through a partnership between Hillsborough County and Habitat for Humanity. The county invested $1.4 million toward construction costs and materials for homes in Windhorst Commons, along with an additional $600,000 for infrastructure improvements including roads, utilities and sewer lines.

The need for affordable housing has also affected families like Natalie Sanchez and her 6-year-old daughter, Sariah. As a remote retention specialist, Sanchez spent years balancing work and motherhood while



Paris Johnson celebrates with her children, Galaxy and Deavi, at their Habitat home in Brandon.

struggling with the financial pressures of escalating rental costs.

Through Habitat's affordable homeownership program and support from home sponsor Central Bank, Sanchez now has an affordable mortgage and a permanent place to raise her daughter.

The family's dedication ceremony marked one of the earliest milestones in the development of Windhorst Commons, which was specifically designed to provide affordable, disaster-resilient housing for working families and veterans.

For Paris Johnson and her children, Galaxy and Deavi, homeownership means something beyond financial stability — it means permanence.

Johnson, a billing and funding specialist, had watched her rent climb by more than $600 per month since 2019. Despite the financial strain, she worked through Habitat's homeownership program, completing financial education courses and hundreds of hours of required sweat equity.

"We've always made every rental feel like home," Johnson said. "But this is the first time we can truly settle in without worrying about having to leave."

Her home was sponsored by Ajax Paving, whose volunteers joined Habitat supporters in celebrating the family's achievement.

Habitat homeowners purchase their homes through affordable mortgages designed to fit family budgets. In exchange, participants complete financial education courses and contribute sweat equity hours, often helping build not only their own homes but those of future neighbors as well.

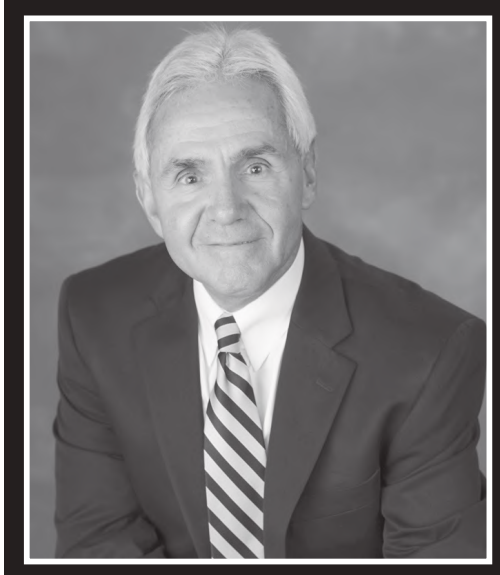
According to Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough CEO Tina Forcier, the impact of homeownership extends far beyond the walls of a house.

"A home changes everything for a family," Forcier said. "From a child's confidence in school to a parent's peace of mind, affordable homeownership creates opportunities that can last for generations."

Windhorst Commons is being developed as a hurricane-resilient neighborhood featuring homes equipped with storm shutters and built to withstand Florida's challenging weather conditions. The community will eventually include 23 homes.

As construction continues through early 2027, additional families will join the growing neighborhood, each bringing their own story of perseverance and determination. For more, visit HabitatHillsborough.org.

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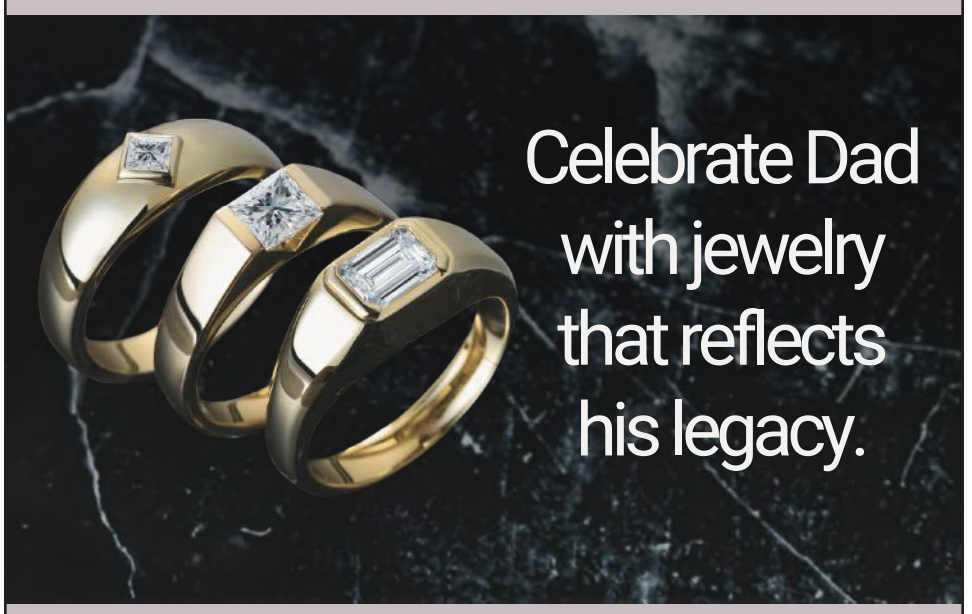
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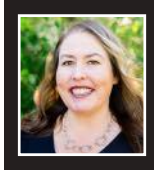
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'ROGUE' IS THE 'ONE' YOU WANT IN THE GARAGE!

By Nitish Rele



Time was when the tremendously popular midsize Altima ruled the roost. But with SUVs and cross-overs taking over, the sedan's time has passed. Undoubtedly, the Nissan Rogue with a cozy, well-damped ride has slowly but surely caught up with the youth and their active lifestyles. Now, this compact SUV is the Japanese carmaker's top-selling vehicle in the United States, and rightly so.

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For 2026, the powertrain maintains its status quo with a 1.5-liter DOHC intercooled and turbocharged engine developing 201 horsepower at 5,600 rpm and 225 pounds-feet of torque at 4,000 rpm. It is coupled with a continuous variable transmission, which can be noisy at times. The electric power rack-and-pinion steering conveys a solid on-center feel, willing to change directions when hustled along the road. An independent strut with coil springs makes up the front, while the rear is equipped with a multilink suspension. The all-wheel-drive system distributes torque evenly to the wheels irrespective of road conditions. Drive modes available are eco, auto, sport, off-road and snow.

Ensconced on the unibody-type structure is a V-motion black grille with mesh, and LED headlights and daytime running lights. Offered at no extra cost on the Rock Creek trim are dual auto AC, 8-inch touchscreen for infotainment controls, eight-way driver and four-way front-passenger power and heated seats, quilted leatherette seats and shifter, a D-shaped tilt/telescopic steering column, push-button start, a 12.3-inch digital instrument panel and a center console pass-through. Ingress and egress are effortless with the 60/40-split rear seat, which, when folded, ekes out 74.1 cubic feet of space. And passenger volume is an admirable 105.4 cubic feet. Need to haul extra luggage/belongings? The tubular roof rack capacity can hold up to 220 pounds of weight. That this is the off-road capable and adventure-ready Rock Creek model is evident from all-terrain 17-inch tires, hands-free power lift gate, all-season cargo area protector/floor liners, and lava red accents on tires, roof rack, seats, front fascia and seat back rests.

The dual front and side airbags, front-center airbag, side curtain airbags for both rows, four-wheel antilock brakes with electronic brake distribution and brake assist, vehicle dynamic control, antiskid system, front-seat active-head restraints, rear cross-traffic alert, front/rear crumple zones, hill start assist, blind-spot warning, lane-departure warning, auto emergency brake with pedestrian detection, daytime running lights and tire pressure monitoring system are standard. Looking into the future of autonomous transport, the ProPilot Assist helps drivers to maintain their lane and set vehicle speed and distance to a car ahead.

Listen up, all you younger and urban SUV buyers. Nothing beats the Rogue in usefulness, functionality, respectable fuel-economy figures and value. In fact, it is one handy 'Rogue' you want to keep by your side, or, in this case, parked in the garage.

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STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE HOLDS FIRST-EVER 'ADVOCACY DAY'

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez

When someone becomes the victim of a crime, their life can change in an instant. In those painful moments, our office works hard to provide support and compassion as we seek justice. It's why we held our first-ever 'Advocacy Day' during National Crime Victims' Rights Week in April.



State Attorney Suzy Lopez and 69th district of the Florida House of Representatives member Danny Alvarez speak during the inaugural Advocacy Day event, bringing together victim advocates, survivors and community partners to support crime victims and strengthen the network of care throughout the community.

We brought together victim advocates, survivors and community partners from across our region to strengthen the network of care that helps victims and their families rebuild. The event focused on healing and hope as attendees heard from our keynote speaker, Lisa Mae, who miraculously survived an abduction and assault by serial killer Bobby Joe Long. In an ultimate story of survival and triumph, she shared how she turned her pain into purpose by becoming a Hillsborough County Sheriff's Deputy in order to help victims.

Attendees also heard from sexual assault survivors, specialists in critical incident stress management and even got to partake in a short trauma-informed yoga session. And no event is complete without a visit from Lorne the Courthouse Facility Dog, where participants got to see firsthand the power of animal-assisted intervention.

Their stories were a profound reminder that victim advocacy is not only about services but also about restoring hope when it is needed the most. While seeking justice is my top priority as state attorney, supporting crime victims is just as important. From launching our first-ever Victim Toolkit to connect individuals to vital resources to creating this meaningful Advocacy Day event, I will remain committed to ensuring that no victim feels forgotten or alone.

Throughout the week, our victim advocacy team also created a moving art installation in our lobby by featuring the word "STRONG," filled with colorful ribbons representing different types of crime. It stood as a visible reminder that while every victim's story is different, each deserves to be heard.

Every day, victim advocates, prosecutors and support staff walk alongside individuals during some of the darkest chapters of their lives.

They offer strength and reassurance. And we will continue to do so not only during National Crime Victims' Rights Week but every single day.

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

ROUGH RIDERS MUSEUM RECEIVES BLUE STAR MUSEUM DESIGNATION

By Zofia Osterman



A new national designation is bringing attention to one of Tampa's most historic sites while offering military families a meaningful way to connect with local history. The Tampa Rough Riders Museum in Ybor City has officially been designated a Blue Star Museum, joining a nationwide initiative that provides free admission to active-duty military personnel and their families from Armed Forces Day through Labor Day.

Located at 601 N. 19th St. in Tampa, the Tampa Rough Riders Museum is housed inside the headquarters of the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment Rough Riders Inc. The museum preserves the legacy of President Theodore Roosevelt and the Rough Riders while educating visitors about Tampa's role in the Spanish-American War.

The Blue Star Museums program is a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and Blue Star Families working with museums across the country to support military families through educational and cultural opportunities. The Tampa Rough Riders Museum joins other participating institutions in Tampa, including the Tampa Bay History Center, Museum of Science and Industry, Tampa Museum of Art and Florida Museum of Photographic Arts.

Col. Billy Hogan, Tampa Rough Riders past president, said the Blue Star designation reflects the museum's appreciation for those currently serving the nation.

"A Blue Star Museum is one which is open for free for active-duty military and their families from Armed Forces Day until Labor Day," said Hogan. "It is a small way to give back to those who are currently serving our country."

The Tampa-based nonprofit organization was founded 48 years ago to honor and preserve the history of Roosevelt and the First U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment. Tampa served as the assembly and embarkation site for U.S. military forces during 1898 as troops prepared to depart for Cuba.

"Our organization was specifically created 48 years ago to honor and preserve the memory of the unique accomplishments of our 26th president, Teddy Roosevelt, and his 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment," said Hogan.

The museum continues that mission through exhibits, artifacts and research focused on the soldiers who served during the era. Its current exhibit, Preparing for War, remains open through Monday, June 29. Beginning Tuesday, June 30, visitors may explore the Combat Operations in Cuba exhibit, commemorating the battles fought during early July 1898.

Free guided tours are available Monday to Friday from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. by appointment. For more information, call 813-248-1898, email office@tamparoughriders.org or visit www.tamparoughriders.org.





CHAMBER CELEBRATES OPENING OF SALADWORKS + FRUTTA BOWLS

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 14 celebrating the grand opening and one-month anniversary of Saladworks + Frutta Bowls in Riverview. The event welcomed chamber members, community leaders, local residents and supporters for an afternoon of networking, celebration and fresh, healthy dining.

Guests gathered at Saladworks + Frutta Bowls to commemorate the business's exciting milestone and show support for owner and fellow chamber member Haifa El-Taher. Attendees enjoyed the vibrant atmosphere, networking opportunities, and a taste of the restaurant's fresh salads, wraps, smoothies, toasts and signature açaí bowls.

As part of the celebration, guests were invited to participate in special grand opening promotions, including discounted menu offerings and loyalty app giveaways.

El-Taher welcomed guests and shared her appreciation for the warm support the business has received from the community during its first month in operation. She highlighted the restaurant's mission of providing fresh, customizable, nutritious meals in a convenient fast-casual environment designed to fit a variety of lifestyles.

Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce President Amber Aaron offered remarks welcoming attendees and congratulating Saladworks + Frutta Bowls on its successful opening and growing presence within the Riverview community before officially commencing the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Following the ribbon cutting, BRCC Ambassador Melissa Canfield presented a special proclamation declaring May 14 as 'Saladworks + Frutta Bowls Day' in celebration of the occasion.

Saladworks + Frutta Bowls combines two popular brands into one unique dining experience. The restaurant features chef-inspired salads, wraps, grain bowls, soups and sandwiches from Saladworks alongside Frutta Bowls' popular smoothies, açaí bowls and superfood-based menu options. Guests can also build their own personalized meals from a wide variety of fresh ingredients. In addition to dine-in service, the restaurant offers takeout, delivery and catering services.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce was honored to celebrate this exciting milestone with Saladworks + Frutta Bowls and encourages the community to continue supporting local businesses that contribute to the growth and vitality of the Brandon and Riverview areas.

Visit its location at 9830 Upper Alafia Court in Riverview.







THREE USF FACULTY TO BE INDUCTED INTO FL INVENTORS HALL OF FAME

Staff Report



The Florida Inventors Hall of Fame announced that three distinguished University of South Florida faculty innovators are among the 2026 class of inductees. Dr. Mark Frankle, Dr. Patrick Hwu and Donald Keck are receiving the prestigious honor for their groundbreaking research and contributions to science and society.

"The University of South Florida is proud to serve as the home of the Florida Inventors Hall of Fame," said USF President Moez Limayem. "The 2026 inductees represent the very best in Florida-connected innovation. Their achievements remind us that research, entrepreneurship and invention have the power to improve lives, strengthen industries and shape the future."

Dr. Frankle, the chief of shoulder and elbow surgery at the Florida Orthopaedic Institute and a clinical professor in the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine, is an internationally recognized orthopedic surgeon, inventor and medical device innovator.

"It is incredibly meaningful to see reverse shoulder arthroplasty recognized by the Florida Inventors Hall of Fame as an invention that has changed lives," Dr. Frankle said. "The goal was always to restore function and relieve pain for patients who had limited options. I am proud that this work developed here in Florida."

Dr. Hwu is the president and chief executive officer of Moffitt Cancer Center and a professor of oncologic sciences in the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine. He is an internationally recognized physician-scientist and pioneering innovator in cancer immunotherapy. Dr. Hwu is best known for foundational work in developing chimeric receptor genes that led to modern CART-cell therapies.

Dr. Hwu holds more than 10 U.S. patents, and he has authored more than 300 scientific publications.

Keck, a professor in USF's Institute for Advanced Discovery & Innovation, is a pioneering physicist whose work revolutionized global communications and laid the foundation for the modern internet. As a member of Corning's Optical Waveguide Project team, Keck co-invented low-loss optical fiber in 1970, transforming fiber optics from a scientific concept into a practical, scalable technology for long-distance communication.

The 2026 class of inventors will be formally inducted on Friday, November 6, at the annual Induction Ceremony and Fundraising Gala in Tampa.

KEEP TAMPA BAY GROWS GREENER FUTURE WITH VOLUNTEERS & TREES

By Ella Baroni



For more than three decades, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful has demonstrated that meaningful environmental change begins at the local level, empowering residents to improve their communities through volunteerism, education and hands-on conservation projects.

Founded in 1989, the nonprofit organization has become a leading force for environmental stewardship throughout Hillsborough County, engaging thousands of volunteers each year in community cleanups, tree plantings, sustainability initiatives and educational programs. Its mission is simple: inspire individuals to take an active role in creating a cleaner, greener and more resilient Tampa Bay.

One of the organization's latest efforts took place in May when Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful partnered with United Airlines and the Arbor Day Foundation to plant 15 trees at Skyway Park in Tampa. The project was designed to address several environmental challenges facing urban areas, including poor air quality, extreme heat, limited shade and a lack of green space.

The newly planted trees will provide long-term benefits to the community, helping reduce temperatures, improve air quality, manage stormwater runoff and enhance habitat for local wildlife. The initiative also supports efforts to rebuild tree canopy lost to storms, development and other environmental stressors.

"Projects like this are about investing in our communities and creating spaces where people can thrive," said Kristina Moreta, executive director of Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful. "With help from United Airlines and the Arbor Day Foundation, we are able to bring more shade, beauty and environmental benefits to neighborhoods that need it most."

The tree-planting project is part of a broader collaboration between Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful, the Arbor Day Foundation and corporate partners committed to strengthening urban forests and increasing climate resilience across the region.

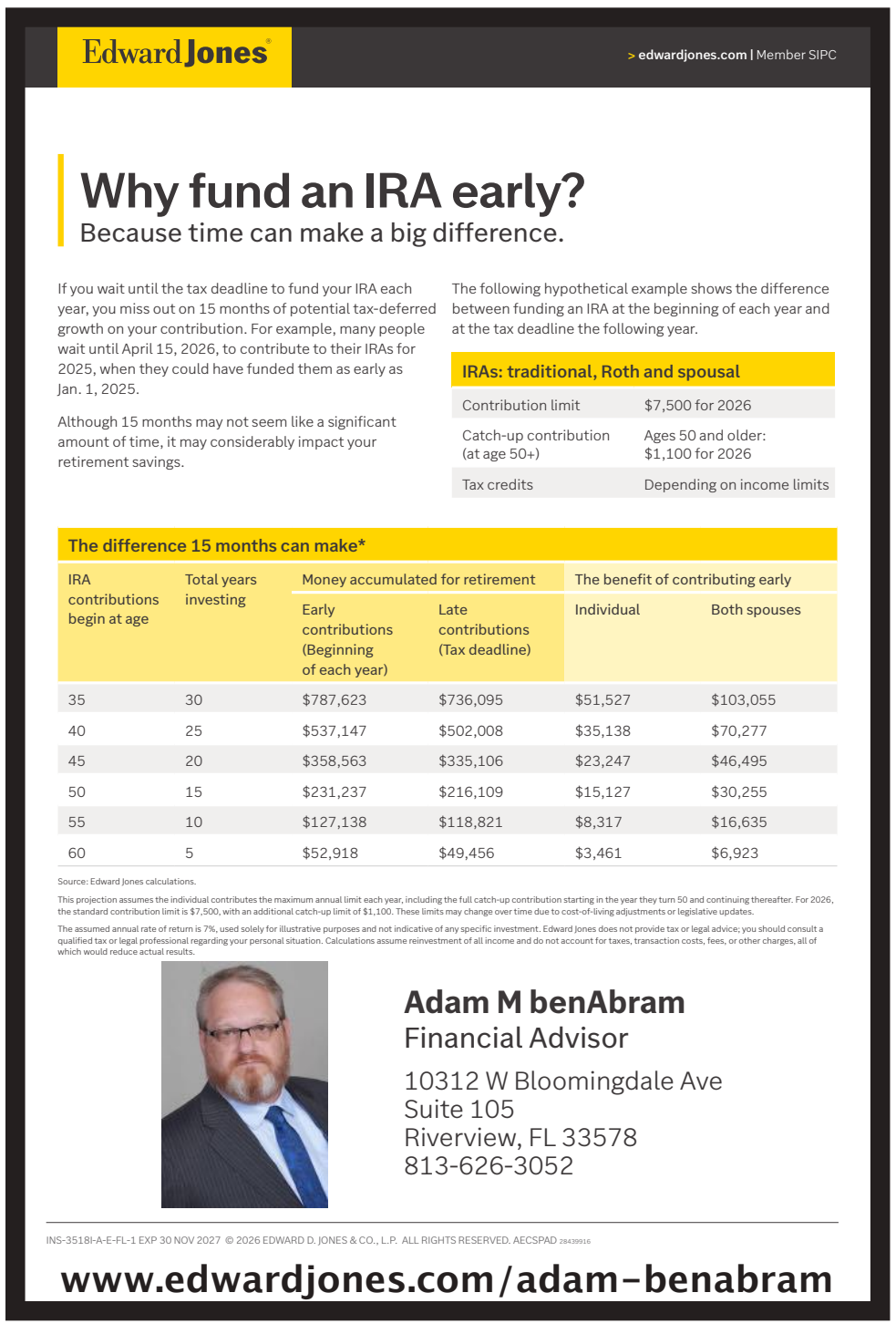
The Arbor Day Foundation, a global nonprofit organization that has helped plant more than 500 million trees in communities and forests around the world, worked alongside local volunteers to make the Skyway Park project possible.

The recent effort is just one example of Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful's ongoing work. The organization also manages community cleanup events, Adopt-A-Road programs, hurricane preparedness and recovery initiatives, shoreline restoration projects and environmental education opportunities. Earlier this month, the nonprofit launched another major initiative to plant 100 trees at MacDill 48 Park.

As Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful continues expanding its reach, the message remains clear: when community members come together, even small actions can grow into a movement that benefits Tampa Bay for generations to come.

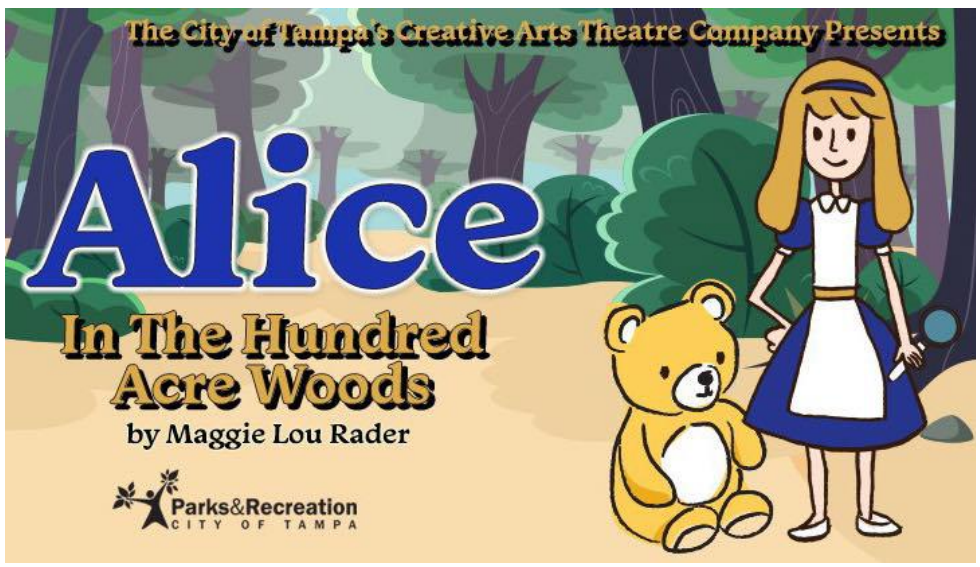
To get involved and learn more about opportunities, visit the website at www.keeptampabaybeautiful.org.





ALICE IN THE HUNDRED ACRE WOOD CHILDREN'S THEATER AT LIBRARIES

Staff Report



In June, residents are invited to attend a free, live children's theater experience, *Alice in the Hundred Acre Wood*, written by Maggie Lou Rader, at the library that focuses on dramatic and imaginative play.

True crime in the Hundred Acre Wood? Yes, please! Join the fun as Alice, the best detective in Wonderland, hunts for clues in a crime caper mystery featuring some of childhood's favorite characters. When Winnie the Pooh hires Alice to solve the case of Christopher Robin's kidnapping, she arrives in the Hundred Acre Wood to find a very anxious Piglet, a terribly unfocused Tigger and a very Eeyore-y Eeyore.

Will Alice find the culprit? Will she be able to bring Christopher Robin home? This literary mashup will have audiences laughing as they follow clues and help Alice crack the case.

This event is recommended for ages 5 and up. Tickets will be available at the marked service point 15 minutes prior to each showing on a first-come, first-served basis.

Show times and locations:

Thursday, June 4, at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. at Jan Kaminis Platt Regional Library, located at 3910 S. Manhattan Ave. in Tampa.

Friday, June 5, at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. at Riverview Public Library, located at 9951 Balm Riverview Rd. in Riverview.

Monday, June 8, at 11 a.m. at C. Blythe Andrews, Jr. Public Library, located at 2607 E. Dr. MLK, Jr. Blvd. in Tampa.

Thursday, June 11, at 11 a.m. at Riverview Public Library.

Friday, June 12, at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. at New Tampa Regional Library, located at 10001 Cross Creed Blvd. in Tampa.

Tuesday, June 16, at 11 a.m. at Town 'N Country Regional Public Library, located at 7606 Paula Dr., Ste. 120, in Tampa.

For more information, visit https://hcplc.org/childrenstheatre.

This event is presented by Creative Arts Theatre Company, the City of Tampa's professional theatre company for young audiences.

HOKUS POKUS LIVE! AT TAMPA THEATRE, PREPARE TO BE SPELLBOUND

By Abigail Dumas



This fall, get ready for a night of wickedly good fun as the beloved Sanderson Sisters take the stage like you've never seen them before. On Tuesday, November 3, at 8 p.m., the historic Tampa Theatre will host Hokus Pokus Live!, a theatrical parody of everyone's favorite Halloween classic.

This 18-plus camp retelling will be performed by a star-studded cast of drag royalty, including Jujubee, Sapphira Cristal and Ginger Minj of RuPaul's Drag Race as the three witches and Landon Cider of Dragula as Billy the zombie. The show follows the iconic three witches as they are resurrected for a night of chaos and comedy. In true Sanderson Sister fashion, the witches are ready to hex, enchant and attack unsuspecting victims in their quest for beauty and immortality. The production includes original songs and glamorous costumes, while serving tribute to the original 1993 movie.

The Tampa Theatre has historically offered diverse programming and celebrated queer art, being the annual host of the Tampa International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival since 1990. Additionally, the venue often shows films directed by or starring LGBTQ+ individuals. Hokus Pokus Live! is one of the most high-profile drag shows ever hosted by the theater with it being a highly anticipated event by many.

The Tampa Theatre previously hosted the 2025 production of Hokus Pokus Live! last October during its first tour, and tickets sold out completely. The show was well received by theatergoers in both America and Canada, prompting the cast to tour again. Excitingly, the final performance of this year's tour will be here in Tampa as the cast and crew wrap up their second season on the road.

Tickets are on sale now and can be purchased at the Tampa Theatre's physical box office, located at 711 N. Franklin St., in Tampa, or online at https://tampatheatre.org/. Standard tickets range from $23.50-$73, while VIP Meet and Greet packages start at $69 and go up to $99 plus fees and taxes. For those who love anything fun, campy and a little spooky, Hokus Pokus Live! is the perfect pick. Grab your broomsticks, gather your coven and prepare for a bewitching night at the Tampa Theatre.

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SORORITY CELEBRATES 95 YEARS OF BETA SIGMA PHI AT FOUNDER'S LUNCH

Staff Report



Members of Beta Sigma Phi's Delta Delta Chapter celebrate the sorority's 95th anniversary during the annual Founder's Day Luncheon held at the Columbia Restaurant Museum in Ybor City.

Members of the Delta Delta Chapter of Beta Sigma Phi International Sorority recently joined sisters from across the Suncoast Council (Tampa) to commemorate a milestone anniversary at the organization's annual Founder's Day Luncheon. This year's celebration honored the 95th birthday of Beta Sigma Phi and marked the close of another sorority year.

The luncheon was hosted at the historic Columbia Restaurant Museum in Ybor City, where attendees gathered among displays of vintage costumes and cultural artifacts that reflect decades of rich history. The venue provided a fitting backdrop for an afternoon steeped in tradition, reflection and celebration.

A highlight of the event included the reading of the Mayor's Proclamation, followed by members uniting to recite the Founder's Day Pledge — a tradition that reinforces the sorority's values of friendship, learning, and service.

Recognition of outstanding members was also a focal point of the program. Lee Livingston was honored as Delta Delta Chapter's 'Woman of the Year,' while Julia Pickens received the distinction of Suncoast Council's 'Woman of the Year,' acknowledging their contributions to the organization.

The ceremony included the installation of the 2026-27 Suncoast Council Executive Board, ushering in a new year of leadership. Excitement continued, as it was announced that the upcoming Beta Sigma Phi theme will be 'BSP Sisters Light Up the World.'

Looking ahead, members eagerly anticipate the 2026 Florida Cruise Convention, which will take place aboard Royal Caribbean's Radiance of the Seas. The event promises to be a memorable gathering of sisters from across 26 stated, culminating in the announcement of the Florida 'Woman of the Year.'

Beta Sigma Phi is an organization for women over the age of 18. Women interested in learning more about membership opportunities can contact Pickens at juliapickens88@gmail.com or visit the Suncoast Council website at https://bspsuncoastcouncil.weebly.com/.

FLVS FLEX OFFERS TUITION-FREE SUMMER COURSES FOR STUDENTS

Staff Report



As summer break approaches, Florida students have the opportunity to use time away from the traditional classroom to focus on practical skills that support academic success, career readiness and personal well-being through tuition-free online courses.

Available to students statewide, the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) Flex option allows students to take individual courses online and work at their own pace, making it possible to continue learning alongside summer schedules, jobs or family commitments.

"FLVS Flex provides students with a way to continue learning on their own terms," said Jason Schultz, senior director of instruction at FLVS. "By offering courses online and year-round, we're able to meet students where they are."

FLVS Flex courses are aligned with Florida educational standards and state requirements and are designed to support a range of student academic and instructional needs.

For example, the Driver Education/Traffic Safety course fulfills the state requirement that students complete a driver education course before obtaining a learner's license.

Health and fitness offerings provide options for students completing required physical education coursework outside the traditional school year, while career and leadership courses allow students to explore postsecondary interests and develop decision-making and organizational skills.

All courses are taught by Florida-certified teachers and include instructional support and interactive components. Students may enroll in one or more courses based on individual academic plans.

FLVS Flex courses are available tuition-free to Florida students, with unique requirements that apply to those receiving scholarship funding. Students can enroll in individual courses on a rolling basis throughout the summer. Additional information about course offerings and enrollment is available on the Florida Virtual School website at www.flvs.net/enrollment/flex.

Course Offerings

FLVS Flex offers courses designed to help students develop academic, career and life skills outside the traditional classroom.

Middle school courses include:

- Business Keyboarding
- Career Research and Decision Making
- Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Learning Strategies

High school courses include:

- Career Research and Decision Making
- Critical Thinking and Study Skills
- Driver Education/Traffic Safety
- Fitness Lifestyle Design
- HOPE - Physical Education (Core)
- Leadership Skills Development
- Life Management Skills
- Outdoor Education
- Personal Fitness

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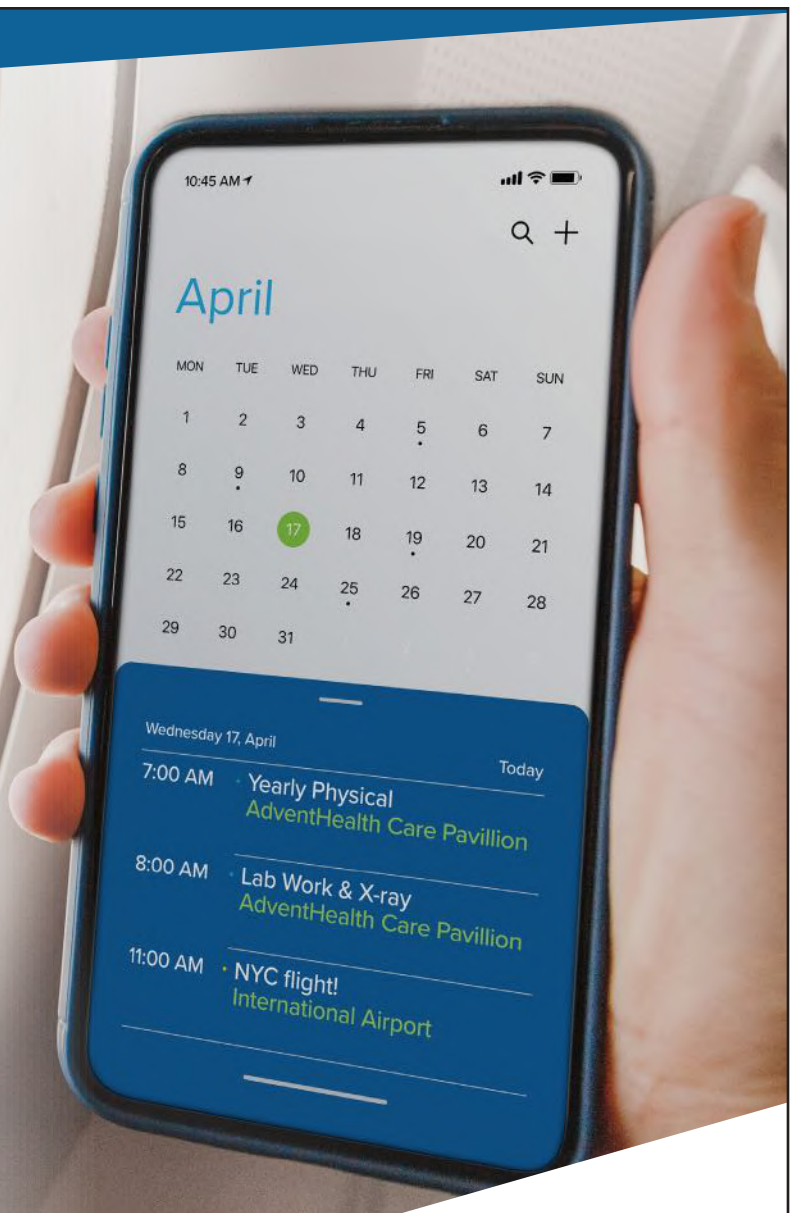
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BRANDON RIVERVIEW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CELEBRATES LOCAL EXCELLENCE AT 2026 CHAMBER MEMBER AWARDS

Staff Report



Nonprofit Award: A Kid's Place.



Medium Business Award: The GOAT Plumbing Company.



Large Business Award: Grease Monkey.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly hosted its annual Chamber Member Awards (CMAs) on April 30 at Hillsborough College, bringing together business leaders, nonprofit organizations and community advocates for an evening dedicated to celebrating the strength and success of the local business community. The event was presented by HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, with additional sponsors including Christopher Ligori & Associates (Bar Sponsor), Hillsborough College, Suncoast Credit Union, TECO, Spectrum Reach, The Regent, Grease Monkey and Beach Geeks IT.

The CMAs recognize organizations and individuals who have made a significant and lasting impact through leadership, innovation and service. The event honored not only award recipients and finalists but also the collective contributions of the chamber's membership, which continues to shape the economic and social fabric of Brandon and Riverview.

"This event is about our members — the small businesses, nonprofits, and service organizations that make up the foundation of our community," said Amber Aaron, chamber president. "The chamber exists because of them, and we are proud to celebrate their achievements and contributions."



Citizen of the Year: Melissa Canfield.



Community Leadership Award: Col. Nikki Bosley, HCSO



Volunteer of the Year: Pat Magruder

2026 Chamber Member Awards winners:

- Emerging Business Award: Skyline Transport
- Small Business Award: 2nd Amendment Armory
- Medium Business Award: The GOAT Plumbing Company
- Large Business Award: Grease Monkey
- Nonprofit Award: A Kid's Place

Individual award honorees:

- Citizen of the Year: Melissa Canfield
- Volunteer of the Year: Pat Magruder
- Ambassador of the Year: Allie Savvides
- Community Leadership Award: Colonel Nikki Bosley, HCSO

Business of the Year finalists:

- Emerging Business: Camp Mirage and United Direct Lending
- Small Business: G-Force Parking Lot Striping of Tampa and Parwani Law, P.A.
- Medium Business: Fluent Cannabis and T&J Painting
- Large Business: Spectrum Reach and Suncoast Credit Union
- Nonprofit: ECHO and Easterseals Florida

Bosley was recognized for her outstanding leadership, extensive service in law enforcement and commitment to community partnership and professional excellence, with an impact that extends far beyond the Brandon-Riverview area.

Taste of BRCC Winner

A highlight of the evening was the Taste of BRCC, where attendees sampled offerings from local restaurants and food vendors and voted for their favorite. This year's winner was Embassy Suites Tampa Brandon.

Participating vendors included Bolay Kitchen Brandon, Ciccio Cali, Dave's Hot Chicken, Donovan's Meatery, Embassy Suites, Graze Craze, New York New York Pizzeria, Tutto Tavola and Funnel & Funk.

Celebrating Community Impact

The CMAs serve to recognize the dedication, perseverance and entrepreneurial spirit required to build and sustain successful businesses and organizations. Each finalist and winner represents a commitment to excellence and a passion for making a difference in the community.

Event Partners

The BRCC extends its gratitude to event partners who helped make the evening a success, including Messer Productions, ABC Event Planning, Socially Funded and Photo Booth Rental & More.

About the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce

The BRCC empowers businesses through opportunities for brand exposure, education and advocacy while fostering meaningful connections that strengthen its community and promote collaboration and growth. For more, visit www.centralhillsboroughchamber.com.



STUDENTS DESIGN 'I VOTED' STICKERS FOR 2026 ELECTIONS

Staff Report



Winning students from Durant, Blake and Wharton high schools display their "I Voted" sticker designs after being recognized at a Hillsborough County School Board meeting.

Hillsborough County high school students showcased their creativity and civic pride through the 2026 VoteHillsborough Art Contest, submitting more than 300 designs for a new 'I Voted' sticker to be distributed during upcoming elections.

Supervisor of Elections Craig Latimer praised the overwhelming response and the quality of the entries.

"Thank you to all the high school students who entered our 2026 VoteHillsborough Art Contest. We received more than 300 submissions and were incredibly impressed with not only the number of entries but the quality of the designs," Latimer said.



Three seniors were selected as winners for their standout designs: Angelica Pertab of Durant High School, Juniper Worthington of Blake High School and Simran Wadhera of Wharton High School.

The winning artwork will be reproduced as a 2-inch by 2-inch round sticker and distributed to voters who cast ballots early or drop off mail-in ballots during the two weeks leading up to Election Day for the 2026 primary and general elections.

Finalists were recognized during a recent Hillsborough County School Board meeting, where winners were also announced. Students received prizes donated by contest sponsors, including the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Busch Gardens and The Florida Aquarium.

"We had a great time honoring the finalists and revealing the winning sticker designs at this week's School Board meeting," Latimer said. "Look for the first-place design when you vote this year — and wear that beautiful sticker proudly."

According to Gerri Kramer, chief communications officer for the Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections Office, the contest was open to high school students and winners were selected through a vote by staff and community partners.

The contest is part of an ongoing partnership between VoteHillsborough and Hillsborough County Public Schools aimed at encouraging civic engagement among young people. In addition to the art contest, the elections office visits local high schools each semester to help eligible seniors register to vote.

"Our partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools is a long-standing and important one," Kramer said.

For more information about voting in Hillsborough County, visit the website at www.votehillsborough.gov.

80 CLUBS AND COUNTING: FLVS CONNECTS ONLINE LEARNERS

By Srishti Tripathi



Florida Virtual School students, families, and club sponsors gather face-to-face at the Hilton Orlando on May 14 to showcase academic, performance, and leadership milestones during the annual FLVS Club Awards event. (Photo courtesy of Florida Virtual School.)

Most people probably imagine online learning as a lonely experience, just a student and a computer, far from everyone else. But Florida Virtual School (FLVS) keeps proving that idea wrong. FLVS has created an online environment that feels very much like a real, thriving community. You can really see this in action every year at the FLVS Club Awards. Last month, students from all over Florida, including the Southeast Hillsborough County area, came together in Orlando for the big event.

On May 14, the Hilton Orlando buzzed with excitement as more than 150 students (from kindergarten all the way through 12th grade), along with their families and club sponsors, gathered for the celebration. This was one of those rare chances for students who usually connect online to finally shake hands, exchange stories and show off all the projects and skills they've poured their hearts into during the school year.

The Club Awards afternoon didn't disappoint. The room was alive with energy as students put on dance routines, cheerleading performances and theater scenes. The energy shifted when American Sign Language students took the stage to interpret songs live, a moment that clearly stuck with everyone in the audience. It wasn't just about the arts, either. The FLVS Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter kicked off the event, and the senior class of 2026 officers delivered an original skit that captured the ups and downs of their virtual high school journey. If you wandered around, you could catch a mock debate, browse a photography showcase and check out projects from the Science National Honor Society.

If you're a family in Riverview or Hillsborough County and you want your child to have these kinds of experiences, there's plenty to choose from. FLVS currently runs more than 80 clubs and activities, such as the Spanish Honor Society and groups focused on robotics, creative writing and specific interests that appeal to all kinds of students. The FLVS Foundation supports these clubs, and although most meetings happen online, the school organizes in-person events throughout the year, so students have a chance to turn virtual friendships into real ones.

Summer is around the corner, and for a lot of local families, the Club Awards are a reminder that education doesn't have to mean being stuck inside a traditional classroom. FLVS keeps blending the flexibility of digital learning with those classic, unforgettable moments you'd expect from any school experience. If you want to find out more or check out the clubs for yourself, head over to www.flvs.net. There's a whole new community waiting for you.

Visit its website or call 800-374-1430. For student activities and extracurricular information, visit www.flvs.net/clubs.

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TONY BARONI AWARDED REALTOR OF YEAR BY TAMPA BAY TOP PRODUCERS

By Libby Hopkins

The Tony Baroni Team at Keller Williams Realty in Valrico was built on relationships, referrals and creating exceptional client experiences. Tony Baroni entered into the real estate world in 2005 after previously working as a logistics consultant in the automotive industry, where he focused heavily on strategy, saving clients' money, negotiation and efficiency systems. Over time, the business naturally grew through referrals from happy clients across North America and trusted relationships throughout the logistics community.



Local Valrico realtor Tony Baroni of Keller Williams recently won Male Realtor of the Year – Agent's Choice through Tampa Bay Top Producers

"The team has now helped thousands of families buy and sell homes and has earned more than 2,800 five-star reviews online," Baroni said. "Our focus is getting listings sold, helping relocations move here from out of state and helping clients buy and sell in the same market and closing on the same day."

Baroni was incredibly honored to recently be nominated and to win Male Realtor of the Year – Agent's Choice through Tampa Bay Real Producers.

"What made the recognition especially meaningful was that it came from peers within the real estate community," Baroni said. "In the last five years, our team has won Male Realtor of the Year three times, the Ultimate Leadership award twice and Team of the Year once through Tampa Bay Real Producers, which is the top 500 agents in Tampa Bay within three counties. For the entire team, it felt less like an individual accomplishment and more like recognition of the culture, hard work and client experience that the whole organization strives to create every day. Everyone on the team contributes to that success."

If you ask Baroni what makes his realty business different from other ones in the community, he will tell you it's his team's reputation and service.

"One of the biggest differences is that our business was truly built on reputation, yet we are technology enhanced," Baroni said. "We focus heavily on relationships and long-term connections, rather than simply transactions. We want clients to feel supported not just during the buying or selling process but long after closing as well. Our old-school philosophy of answering our phones, getting back to people quickly and making the process as smooth as possible is what we focus on as a team."

The team also places a huge emphasis on systems, communication and culture internally so that clients consistently receive a high level of service no matter who they work with on the team.

"We genuinely believe that creating an outstanding experience is what earns repeat business and referrals for life," Baroni said. "So, training is a huge part of what we do on an ongoing basis."

You can visit its website at www.tonybaroni.com or call 813-425-1400. Its office is located at 2350 E. SR 60, Ste. 207, in Valrico.

HC SWEEPS 2026 NJCAA WOMEN'S TENNIS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Staff Report

The Hillsborough College (HC) Hawks tennis team won the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA) Division I Women's Tennis National Championship during the national tournament held in Sumter, South Carolina, from May 2-6. This is the team's fourth national championship title in school history and the third in the last four years.



Photo Credit NJCAA

The Hillsborough College Hawks women's tennis team celebrates after capturing the 2026 NJCAA Division I Women's Tennis National Championship in Sumter, South Carolina. The Hawks swept all nine singles and doubles flights to earn their fourth national title in program history and third championship in the last four years.

The Hawks won in dominant fashion, sweeping the championship to win every match in the Division I singles and doubles competitions, for a total of nine individual champions.

"I am unbelievably proud of how this team competed to sweep all nine flights and bring the national title back to Tampa Bay," said Sarah Lytle, HC athletic director and tennis head coach. "We are so grateful for the opportunity to represent Hillsborough College on a national stage and hope we made our community proud."

"Once again, our HC Lady Hawks tennis team has risen to excellence in the tennis world," said Joe Bentrovato, Dale Mabry campus dean of student services. "Capturing their second consecutive NJCAA national championship and third in four years, these remarkable student-athletes went undefeated in the tournament. This is a testament to their intense focus, resilience and teamwork."

HC ended the tournament with a final team score of 45 points, with second place going to Cowley College with 32 points and third place going to Collin College with 23 points.

Flight winners, earning first-team All-American honors, included:

Flight 1 singles — Younsoo Cho.

Flight 2 singles — Salomea Jasiczek.

Flight 3 singles — Sydney Stark.

Flight 4 singles — Noah Rojas.

Flight 5 singles — Aisulu Zholbolat.

Flight 6 singles — Emily Lederer.

Flight 1 doubles — Stark and Cho.

Flight 2 doubles — Rojas and Zholbolat.

Flight 3 doubles — Lederer and Jasiczek.

Additional recognition went to Lytle, who was named Coach of the Tournament.

"Behind every great team are great coaches and support staff," Bentrovato said. "That's where Sarah Lytle, Chris Nyholm and Scott 'Kiki' Keller come into play. Together, they make Hillsborough College proud and further cement this program as one of enduring excellence."

"I want to thank all the staff at HC and the community members who support us year in and year out," Lytle said. "This team would not be possible without every single one of you."

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

Visit www.hcfl.edu/accreditation for more information.



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WELLNESS WARRIORS HELP ENHANCE LIVES THROUGH HOLISTIC PRACTICES

By Libby Hopkins



Shirley Sullivan, Lisa Kennedy and Shari Leiterman are known as the Wellness Warriors.

Shirley Sullivan, Lisa Kennedy and Shari Leiterman are known as the Wellness Warriors to the Brandon community.

"Shari and I first met while she was working at a local cafe, and I was immediately drawn to her high-vibrational energy and warm spirit," Kennedy said. "When she asked if we could be friends, I didn't hesitate to say yes. Our connection grew naturally through our shared passion for wellness, spirituality and community."

At that time, Kennedy had recently graduated from yoga teacher training and was beginning to step into teaching.

"Shari started attending the new moon goddess circles and full moon gatherings I was hosting in my home, and she became incredibly supportive of my journey," Kennedy said. "She connected me with the owner of the local health food store and cafe, who graciously allowed me to begin offering yoga classes there. Shari also helped spread the word to everyone she knew. I still remember teaching my very first class in that space. It was such a meaningful moment because it gave me the confidence to continue teaching and eventually expand into other locations and wellness offerings."

Leiterman introduced Kennedy to Sullivan, who happened to be a neighbor.

The three women joined together to form the Wellness Warriors.

"The Wellness Warriors was created as a community-centered wellness group focused on bringing people together through holistic healing, education, mindfulness, movement, spirituality and connection," Kennedy said. "We recognized that many people were searching for authentic community and meaningful ways to support their well-being beyond traditional approaches."

What began as small gatherings and wellness discussions gradually expanded into workshops, circles, healing events, educational presentations and community collaborations.

The Wellness Warriors' activities include sound healing, meditation experiences, full moon and new moon circles, yoga, drumming circles and educational wellness workshops, to name a few.

"We welcome anyone who feels called to explore wellness, healing, mindfulness, spirituality or simply meaningful human connection," Kennedy said.

Visit www.facebook.com/share/1fe6ehdgpd/ or call 813-946-6164. The Wellness Warriors meet at Divine Harmony LLC - Holistic Wellness, located at 1218 Millennium Parkway in Brandon.

LENNARD FLAG FOOTBALL WINS SCHOOL'S FIRST STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

By Nick Nahas, Photo courtesy of SamanthaNikolePhoto



Lennard High School girls flag football captured the Class 4A State Championship, defeating Park Vista High School 12-6 to secure the school's first-ever state title in Tampa on May 16.

"It means everything to me to help bring the first state championship to Lennard High School," said running back Willow Rager. "Being able to make history with this team is such a special feeling because we knew we were representing our school and community every time we stepped on the field. It's something we've worked toward all season, and I'm so proud of what we accomplished together."

Rager had a key touchdown catch to help beat Park Vista 12-6.

"When I caught the touchdown, my first reaction was just pure excitement," said Rager. "In that moment, everything felt unreal because I knew how important it was for our team. All the hard work, practices and preparation throughout the season paid off, and being able to make a play like that for my teammates meant a lot to me."

Head Coach Travis Combs was very impressed with his defense that shut down the opposition, holding them to only six points. A late-game interception by Oryele Roberts sealed the game for the Lady Longhorns.

"My reaction to getting that interception was 'Wow, I really just did that,' like it felt almost unreal to make such an impact like that on the game, and I immediately thought to myself that the game is over for Park Vista because our defense didn't take their feet off the gas all game," said Roberts. "Park Vista was an outstanding opponent — the only reason we were able to shut them down like we did was because we had an amazing scout team that gave us a perfect representation of Park Vista."

Lennard (14-7) faced many roadblocks throughout the season. After losing in the district tournament, the team fell short of winning a district title, but that didn't deter them.

"When we didn't win a district championship, this team didn't quit," said Combs. "Our hashtag this season was #fight4it, and I told them that if we make it into regionals, it's time to fight, and they did."

The victory was elating for Combs because it was his last game as the Lennard coach. He accepted a college coaching job to start the women's flag football team at Indiana Wesleyan University.

"This championship was about a team, not one player or coach, and that is what makes it so great."

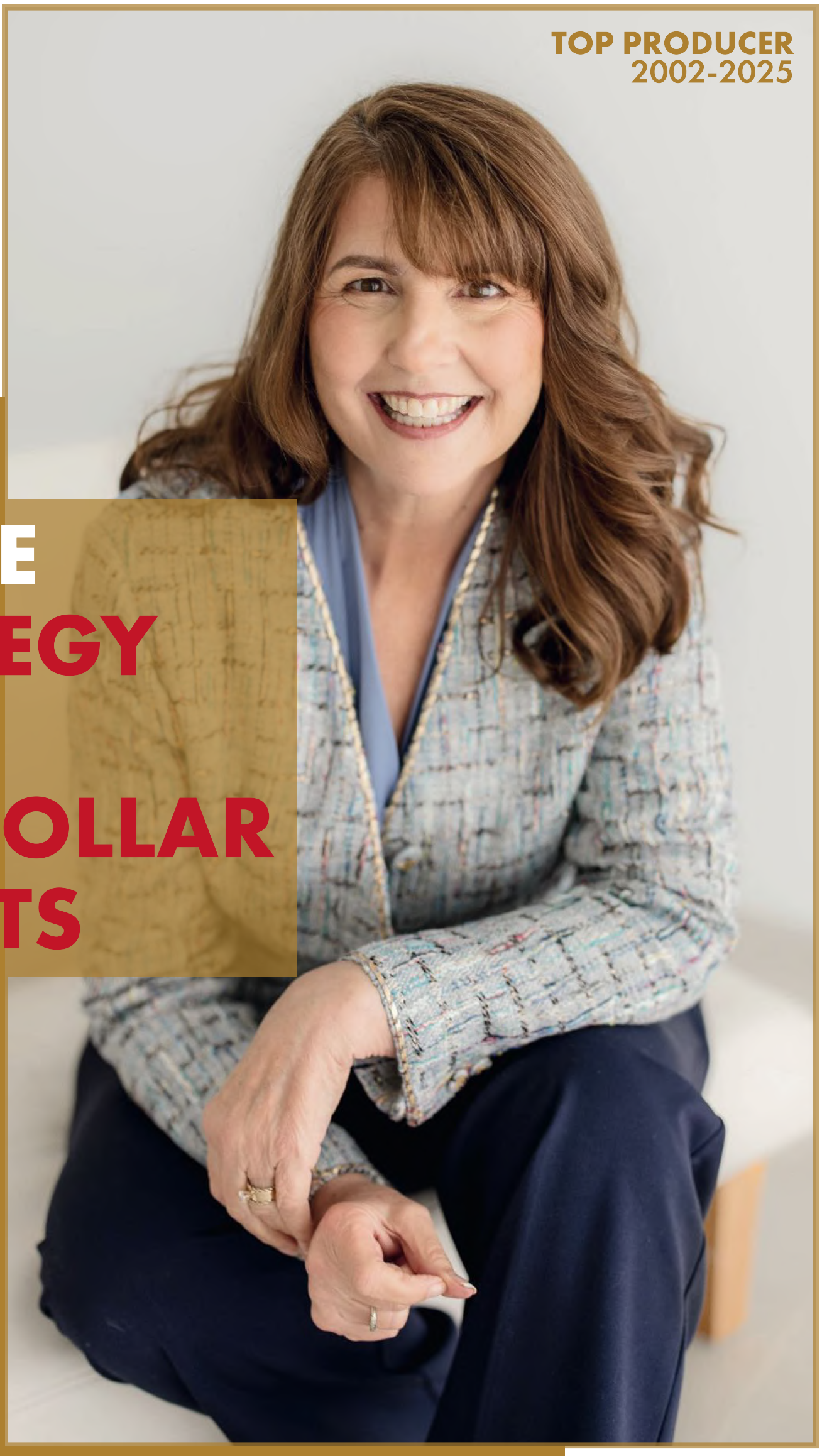
Rager will never forget this season and the chemistry that she had with her coaches and teammates.

"I'm just really appreciative of my teammates and coaches," said Rager. "Everyone played a huge role in this season, and we all believed in each other from the start. We pushed each other every day to get better, and that's what helped us become successful as a team."



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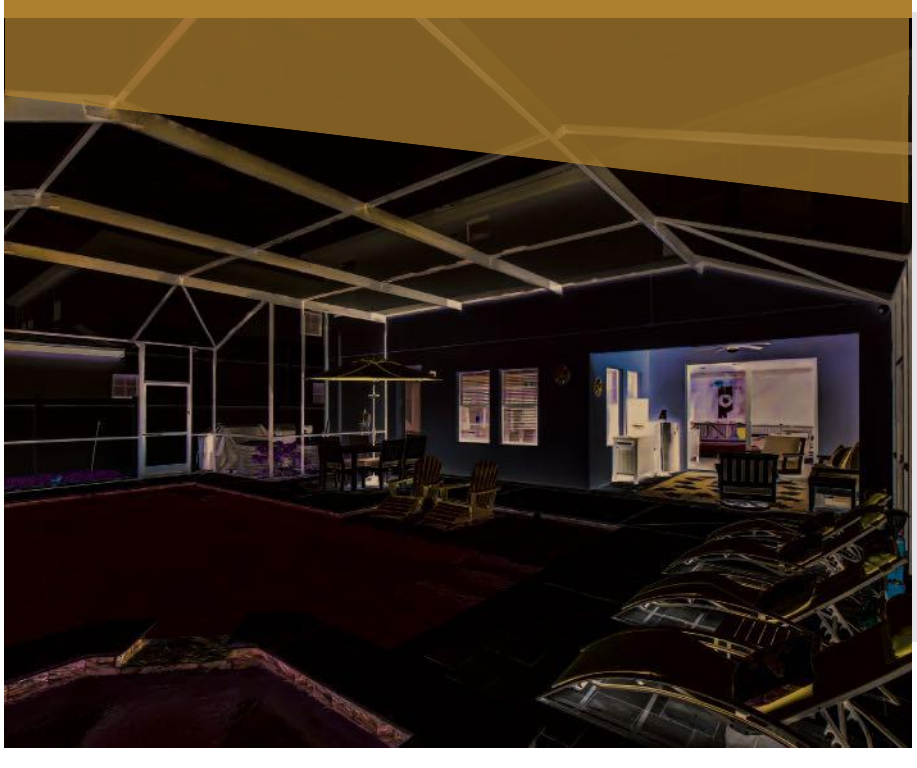
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AMERICAN SEWING GUILD BRANDON WINS BIG AT STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

By Libby Hopkins



Members of the Brandon/Eastbay Chapter of the American Sewing Guild (ASG) competed in the sewing competition at the Florida Strawberry Festival. Many of the guild's members took home ribbons this year from the competition.

The 91st Florida Strawberry Festival took place this past February. One of the highlights at the festival was the Neighborhood Village's sewing competition for adults 18 and up. The 2026 festival's annual theme of 'Still Growing' was incorporated into every category, including sewing.

Members of the Brandon/East Bay Chapter of the American Sewing Guild (ASG) competed in the sewing competition, and many of the guild's members took home ribbons.

"There were a variety of categories to enter," said Judy Rich of the Brandon/East Bay Chapter of ASG. "The categories that most of our members entered were quilting, wearing apparel and accessories, hand embroidery and needlework, home decor, and embellished-upcycleable. Several of our members assisted with the intake process for quilts and hand sewing. Under home decor, some members entered wall hangings and table runners, both quilted and machine embroidery. For wearing apparel and accessories, members entered children's clothes, machine embroidered and constructed bags of all varieties. One member entered a refurbished bench cover; another entered a bag with multiple zippers to use for sewing supplies."

The American Sewing Guild's headquarters is located in Houston, Texas, and serves as a link between its chapters. ASG's mission is dedicated to advancing sewing as an art and life skill.

"The national organization started in 1978 as the American Home Sewing and Crafting Association," Rich said. "In 1983, it became a nonprofit organization, and in 2001 ASG opened their national headquarters in Houston. The Brandon/East Bay Chapter was incorporated in 2003 when the charter was signed. We currently have two of the founding members in our group."

There were 12 quilts entered into the sewing competition from various ASG members.

"It was the most quilts entered into the sewing competition over the last 12 years," Rich said. "I am amazed at the talent that our group has. Many hid their light under a basket. We are always excited to have new members whatever their level of sewing is. We were all beginners at one point."

The group meets on the first Wednesday of the month at Brandon Community Center, located at 502 E. Sadie St. in Brandon, from 10 a.m.-12 Noon.

"There are smaller neighborhood groups that meet in Sun City, Brandon and Riverview," Rich said. "At the moment, our chapter has more than 110 members, and they come from as far as Wimauma and Wesley Chapel to be a part of our group."

The chapter's meetings consist of a sewing tutorial, and then members have time to share their current projects with the group to inspire fellow members.

"We love seeing what other members are working on," Rich said. "It gives us the opportunity to get our creative juices flowing."

If you would like to learn more about ASG, you can visit its website at www.asg.org. If you would like to learn more about the Brandon/East Bay Chapter of ASG, you can contact Rich at judyrich49@gmail.com or visit its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/brandoneastbayasg.

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SEVEN SENIORS EARN SCHOLARSHIPS FOR K-12 PERFECT ATTENDANCE

Staff Report



Seven Hillsborough County Public Schools seniors were recognized at the June 2 School Board meeting for achieving perfect attendance from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Seven Hillsborough County Public Schools seniors were recently recognized for an extraordinary accomplishment that few students achieve: maintaining perfect attendance from kindergarten through 12th grade.

The students were honored during the Hillsborough County School Board meeting on June 2, where district leaders celebrated their dedication, perseverance and commitment to education over the course of 13 consecutive school years.

To further recognize the achievement, Suncoast Credit Union presented each student with a $500 scholarship.

The students earning the distinction of perfect attendance throughout their entire K-12 educational journey are Julius Montalvo of Gaither High School; Nathan Jorden and Noah Jorden of Lennard High School; Amanda Harris of Newsome High School; Darius Donaldson-Dunphy of Plant City High School; and Matthew Mason and Sadie Jones of Sickles High School.

Perfect attendance requires students to be present every school day for more than a decade, despite illnesses, family obligations, transportation challenges and other circumstances that can interrupt school attendance. District officials noted that the achievement reflects not only the students' commitment but also the support of parents and guardians who prioritized education and helped ensure their children were in class each day.

"I am incredibly proud of these students and commend the consistency and commitment they have shown throughout their education," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "Their dedication speaks volumes about their character and will serve them well in the future. I also want to congratulate their families for providing the support that helped them succeed and thank Suncoast Credit Union for recognizing these students in such a meaningful way."

School leaders say regular attendance is one of the strongest indicators of academic success, helping students stay engaged in learning, build relationships with teachers and peers, and develop habits that prepare them for college, careers and life beyond graduation.

As these seven students prepare to begin the next chapter of their lives, they leave behind a remarkable record of reliability and determination that sets them apart among their graduating classmates. Their achievement serves as an example of the value of consistency, responsibility and commitment to personal goals.

FROM HOMETOWN PUZZLES TO GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT EMPIRE

By Libby Hopkins

In 2017, father-and-son team Jeffrey and Blake Stone were proudly showing off their very first business venture in Brandon, a single escape room facility hand-built inside a converted law office. Today, the Stone family has transformed that local passion project into an international entertainment powerhouse, anchoring a massive global escape room franchise and introducing cutting-edge British virtual reality technology to the United States.



The GAME OVER Escape Rooms brand has expanded to more than 34 countries worldwide.

The Stone family is the owner of several GAME OVER Escape Rooms throughout Brandon and Tampa.

"Our family's rapid ascent showcases a masterclass in business scaling, shifting from localized, handcrafted experiences to high-tech, multinational partnerships," said Jeffery Stone. "When Legends Escape Rooms first opened its doors on Brandon Boulevard, it was a deeply personal affair. Our family spent six months meticulously building every puzzle by hand. Our initial rooms leaned heavily on family heritage and immersive storytelling."

That focus on premium quality paid off massively; their popular Dungeon VII room reached international critical acclaim when it received the Best Overall In-Person Escape Room of the Year award in 2021 from the industry site ESCAPETHEROOMers.

To aggressively scale their business, the Stone family partnered with GAME OVER Escape Rooms, a global industry titan originally founded in Athens, Greece.

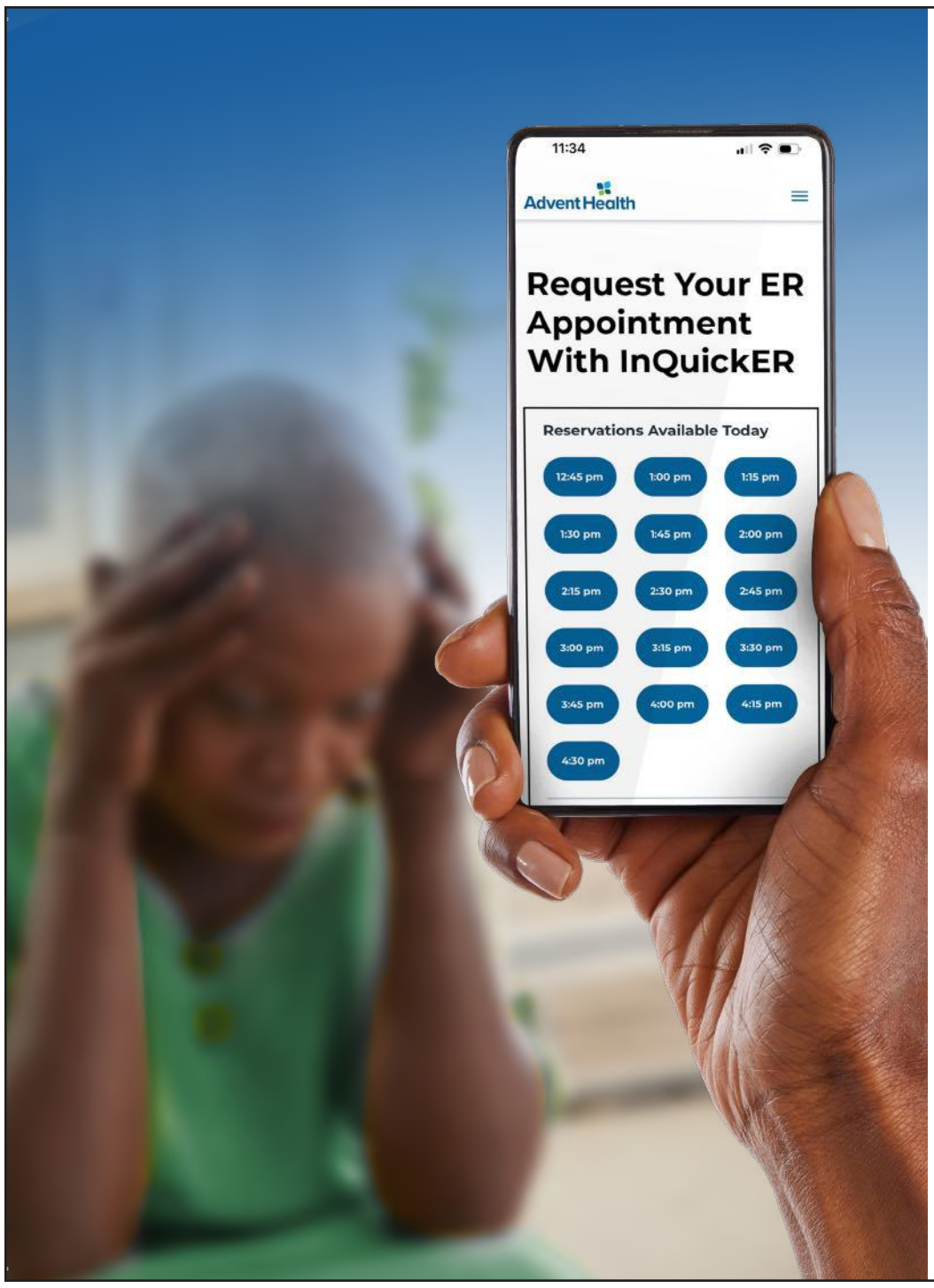
"Transitioning our operations to serve as official flagship showrooms, we opened high-tech corporate locations across the area," Jeffery Stone said. "The upgrades brought premium electronic automation, movie-set-quality detailing and world-renowned room themes, like Lost City of Atlantis, Money Heist, Haunted Mansion, and Philosopher Stone."

The GAME OVER Escape Rooms brand has expanded to more than 34 countries worldwide. Because of their proven operational expertise, the Stone family now helps facilitate North American franchise opportunities for the GAME OVER corporation, guiding the next generation of entertainment entrepreneurs across the continent.

"In addition to conquering physical escape rooms, we have officially pivoted into the future of immersive tech," Jeffery Stone said. "Our family has partnered with VRXtra, a premier virtual reality gaming company from the United Kingdom that has taken the British entertainment sector by storm."

In a massive win for the local economy, the Stones have just launched the first-ever VRXtra location outside of the United Kingdom right here in the Tampa Bay area. Located at 317 N. Dale Mabry Highway in Tampa, the state-of-the-art facility sits in the booming Midtown district.

If you would like to learn more about GAME OVER Escape Rooms or visit https://tampa.escapegameover.us/en.



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SERVING UP INCLUSION: JUDY MOORE MARKS 25 YEARS OF TENNIS FOR FUN

By Jay Braden













For 25 years, Judy Moore has been quietly transforming lives on the tennis courts of Brandon. What began as her son's high school project has grown into Tennis For Fun (TFF), a widely respected program serving individuals with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities — one that is now inspiring similar initiatives across Florida and beyond.

For Moore as director of TFF, the milestone is less about longevity and more about impact. The program has become a cornerstone for families seeking inclusive recreational opportunities, offering participants not just a chance to learn tennis, but a space to build confidence, friendships, and a sense of belonging.

"When we started, the goal was simple," Moore has often said in reflecting on the program's early days. "We wanted everyone to have the chance to play, to feel included, and to have fun." That guiding principle remains at the heart of TFF today.

Over the years, the program has expanded significantly. What began in Brandon now serves as a model for other communities looking to replicate its success. Programs inspired by TFF have been established in multiple locations throughout Florida and in other states, a testament to both its effectiveness and its adaptability.

This Brandon program empowers individuals with Down syndrome, intellectual or developmental disabilities to grow into a model replicated across Florida and beyond.

Participants in Tennis For Fun engage in structured tennis activities tailored to their abilities, supported by a network of dedicated volunteers, coaches, and family members. The emphasis is not on competition, but on personal growth and enjoyment. For many families, the program fills a critical gap.

Parents often describe the program as life-changing. Beyond the physical benefits of exercise, participants develop social skills and independence. Many form lasting friendships, while others discover a newfound confidence that carries into other areas of their lives.

"Before joining, my son was hesitant to try new things," one parent shared. "Now he looks forward to every session. He's made friends, he's more active, and he feels proud of what he can do."

The success of TFF is also rooted in its community support. Volunteers play a central role, working one-on-one with participants to ensure each individual feels encouraged and included. Their commitment, combined with Moore's steady leadership, has created a program culture that is both welcoming and empowering.

As the program has grown, so too has its influence. Organizations in other regions have looked to TFF as a blueprint for developing inclusive sports programming, thus demonstrating that such initiatives can be both impactful and sustainable, Moore and her team have helped significantly to broaden access to recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Despite the expansion and recognition, those closest to the program say Moore remains focused on the individuals she serves. Her leadership style—hands-on, compassionate, and consistent—has been a driving force behind TFF's enduring success.

As Tennis For Fun marks its 25th anniversary, the celebration is as much about the community it has built as it is about the years it represents. For participants and their families, the program is more than an activity—it's a source of joy, connection, and possibility.

And for Judy Moore, the mission continues much as it began: one player, one rally, and one smile at a time.

For more, visit http://tennisforfun.org/.





HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS TRANSPORTATION TEAM SWEEPS TOP HONORS AT STATE SAFETY ROADEO

Staff Report

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is celebrating a standout performance by its Transportation Department after hosting and competing in the State School Bus Safety Roadeo, organized by the Florida Association of Pupil Transportation (FAPT).



The top finishers include: Juan Maldonado, first place, Area 1. Cassandra Varnes, second place, Area 5. Romy Taju, third place, Area 7.

HCPS welcomed transportation teams from Sarasota, Manatee and Gadsden counties for the statewide event, which tests school bus operators on driving skills via a challenging obstacle course, safety knowledge and precision. HCPS rose to the top, earning first, second and third place overall.



Romy Taju serves Schmidt Elementary, Brandon High, Jennings Middle, Tampa Bay Technical High and Mann Middle Schools.

The top finishers include:

- Juan Maldonado, first place, Area 1.
- Cassandra Varnes, second place, Area 5.
- Romy Taju, third place, Area 7.



Cassandra Varnes serves the 40th Street magnet ramp, Young Middle Magnet and Lockhart Elementary Magnet Schools.

"These three professionals don't just represent HCPS on the leaderboard — they represent the heart of our Transportation Department," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "Their dedication to safety, skill and excellence reflects the high standards we set for serving students every day."

All three winners will go on to represent the State of Florida at the International School Bus Safety Roadeo this summer in Austin, Texas, competing against top drivers from across the nation.

Interested in joining the HCPS Transportation Team? Visit www.hillsboroughschools.org.

Juan Maldonado and Cassandra Varnes serve magnet schools.

Juan Maldonado serves the HDA magnet ramp, Jefferson High School, Tampa Heights Elementary Magnet School and Woodbridge Elementary School.

Cassandra Varnes serves the 40th Street magnet ramp, Young Middle Magnet School and Lockhart Elementary Magnet School.

Romy Taju serves Schmidt Elementary School, Brandon High School, Jennings Middle School, Tampa Bay Technical High School and Mann Middle School.

IN BLOOM MINISTRIES LOOKS TO HELP VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

By Libby Hopkins

Jess Waldrop of Lithia is the owner of In Bloom Aesthetics and Med Spa, located at . Her focus has always been about making women feel and look beautiful, as well as helping women start their own businesses.



Jess Waldrop is the owner of In Bloom Aesthetics and Med Spa in Lithia.

"One of my biggest goals with the spa is to help women launch their own businesses," Waldrop said. "I run a yearlong certification program that includes advanced training and business development where I walk alongside aestheticians as they grow their skills and build their practices from the ground up."

In 2021, God told Waldrop to build a ministry for removing the branding off women who have been trafficked.

"These tattoos are typically on their face and neck and it's a constant reminder of the trauma that they went through," Waldrop said. "When I found our current location in FishHawk, I knew immediately that it would be a safe place for these women to come to. It's a 1,250 sq. ft. warehouse built out as a spa. Once you walk through the door and it locks behind you, it feels like the world could be ending outside and you'd never know. The parking lot is also very private, since most of the surrounding businesses close by 5 p.m. It felt like God had set the space apart for exactly this purpose."

From there, In Bloom Ministries was born.

Tattoo removal is a process, not a single event. Most tattoos take anywhere from eight to 15 laser sessions to fully remove, depending on the size and the type of ink used and where it sits on the body.

"Sessions have to be spaced six to eight weeks apart to give the body time to heal between treatments, which means a full removal journey can take a year or longer from start to finish," Waldrop said. "The lasers used for this work are medical-grade and represent a significant investment. We're partnering with licensed laser technicians and medical professionals who share our heart for this mission. Industry pricing for a single session typically costs $200 to $500, so the full cost to remove a tattoo from one woman can easily reach $3,000 to $7,000 or more. These survivors will not see a bill, never feel pressure and never owe us anything."

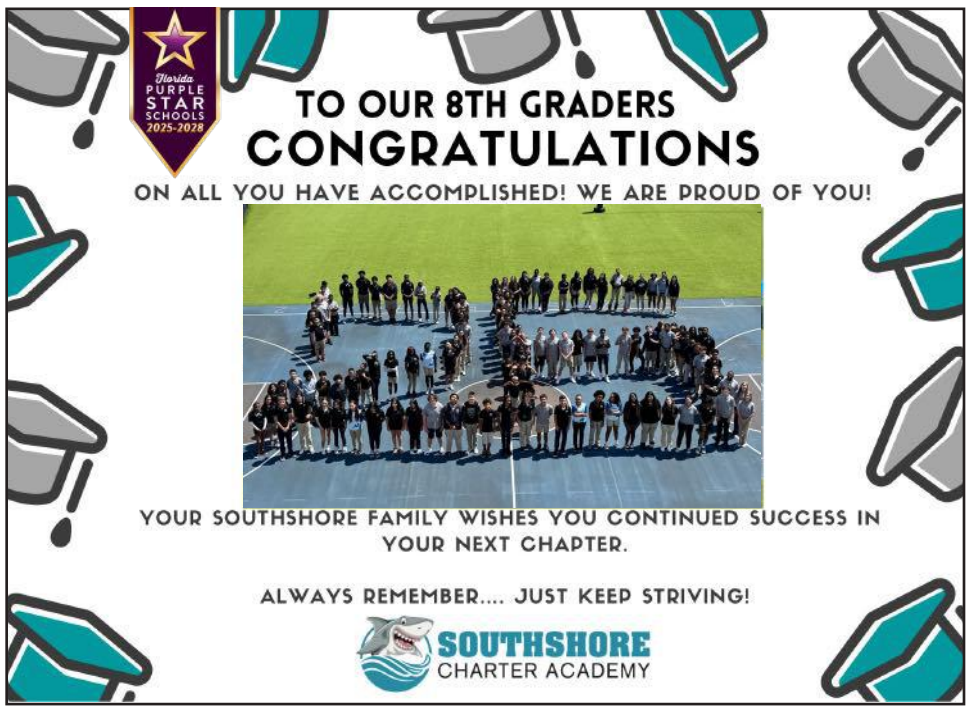
Waldrop has assembled a board and is currently waiting for her nonprofit status to be approved for In Bloom Ministries. She is looking to the local community for grant writers, donors and local doctors to help her with her mission.

"The most immediate need is help finding grants to purchase the machines," she said. "We're also building a network of licensed laser technicians and doctors who are willing to donate their services."

If you would like to help Waldrop and In Bloom Ministries, you can contact her at 813-990-0063 or jess@inbloommedspa.com.

In Bloom Aesthetics and Med Spa is located at 16637 FishHawk Blvd., Ste. 102, in Lithia. For more information, visit www.inbloommedspa.com.







SOUTH BAY ACADEMY ENROLLMENT OPENS FOR THE 2026-27 SCHOOL TERM

By Libby Hopkins



South Bay Academy is a Christ-centered pre-K through 12th grade private school in Riverview that strives to be Christ-centered in all aspects of the learning environment. It teaches and leads from a biblical worldview.

"We offer a premier Christian Education to students, not just those who excel but those with unique abilities as well," said Sean Doherty, executive pastor of South Bay Church and treasurer of South Bay Academy. "Our mission is to cultivate a Christ-centered learning community where students are cared for with compassion, equipped with excellence, sent with purpose and connected deeply to the great commission."

South Bay Academy's journey is built on the faithful foundation of Livingstone Academy (Riverview campus), which served students on South Bay Church's campus from 2011 through 2025.

"Their years of dedication, particularly in providing personalized education and exceptional ESE services, helped shape the high standard of care we provide today," Doherty said. "We are proud to carry that legacy forward."

In 2023, South Bay Church cast a vision to establish a K-12 institution that would continue this history of excellence under a new banner. Following a successful transition year, South Bay Academy officially launched for the 2025–26 school year.

South Bay Academy specializes in serving our students with a premier ESE department, specifically designed to support those with SLD and speech language impairments.

"At South Bay Academy, we believe every student deserves an environment where they are truly known," Doherty said. "We combine rigorous Christian education with the specialized support necessary for every child to thrive."

South Bay Academy believes that excellence honors God and inspires people; so, it is a school with high academic standards. It prepares students to achieve their highest potential.

Enrollment is currently open for the 2026-27 school term.

"Parents of preschool through 11th grade students can inquire by visiting our website or calling us," Doherty said. "South Bay Academy is really about creating a family where students feel known and supported as they grow in their faith. The big hope is that by surrounding kids with mentors who truly care, they'll develop the confidence and character to go out and make a real difference in the lives of others."

If you would like to learn more about South Bay Academy or if you'd like to enroll your child at the school, you can visit its website at www.southbay.academy or call 813-399-3180. The school is located at 13498 U.S. 301 S. in Riverview.

GRAZE CRAZE ELEVATES CHARCUTERIE WITH ARTFUL BOARDS & WORKSHOPS

By Makenzie Atkins Noel





Graze Craze Charcuterie Boards & Boxes, located in Brandon, specializes in handcrafted grazing boards, boxes, and catering spreads made with fresh, visually stunning ingredients.

Its offerings include individual Char-Cutie-Cups and Grab & Graze meals perfect for personal snacking or lunches, as well as larger picnic boxes, themed boards, and catering trays designed for everything from intimate gatherings to corporate events and celebrations.

Customers can choose from a variety of curated styles including meat and cheese forward "Gone Grazey," vegetarian focused "Vegegrazian," sweet inspired "Sweet & Grazey," keto friendly options, brunch boards, and seasonal specialty selections. They can also upgrade their experience with new offerings like the Premium Meat & Cheese Board, featuring elevated selections of meats and cheeses paired with a cracker box for a more indulgent spread. Each order is built with a thoughtful mix of artisan cheeses, fresh fruits and vegetables, breads, dips, jams, and sweet treats, all arranged in an artful presentation.

Proudly veteran owned and family operated, Graze Craze Brandon is owned by Air Force veterans Jack and Tara White, who have brought the same precision and care from military service into their new venture. In just six months, the family has built the business around a mission of creating memorable experiences through food for the Brandon, Riverview, and greater Hillsborough County community. Their son, a Newsome High School junior, also helps contribute to the artistic grazing displays that have become part of the brand's identity.

"Graze Craze is more than just a business, it's a family passion," said White. "We're proud to serve our community with fresh, artfully arranged charcuterie boards made with love while helping create memorable experiences for our customers."

Every board is assembled fresh by trained "Grazologists," who focus on balance, color, and presentation so each spread feels like edible art rather than traditional catering. Customers can order online for pickup or delivery, making gourmet charcuterie an easy, stress-free option for both everyday meals and event planning.

Graze Craze also offers in-store Build-a-Board Workshops that turn charcuterie into an interactive experience. Groups are invited to join a fun session where they can sample a beautifully curated charcuterie board before creating their own masterpiece to take home. The workshops are a popular option for girls' nights, birthdays, team outings, or simply a fun get-together with friends.

With every board, workshop, and event, Graze Craze continues to build connections across the community through food that is meant to be shared.

To learn more and schedule a private Build-a-Board Workshop, please visit https://www.grazecraze.com/locations/brandon-fl or call (813) 692-9230.









LEADERSHIP CLASS COMPLETES LEGACY PROJECT BENEFITING A KID'S PLACE

Staff Report





The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is proud to announce the completion of the Leadership Brandon Riverview Class of 2026 Legacy Project benefiting A Kid's Place, a local nonprofit organization dedicated to providing a safe, stable, and nurturing home for foster children.

Each year, participants in the Leadership Brandon Riverview program select a community Legacy Project designed to make a lasting impact on a local nonprofit organization.

After hearing the heartfelt mission and needs presented by A Kid's Place, the Leadership Class selected the organization as the recipient of this year's project. A Kid's Place provides a unique, home-like foster care environment where sibling groups can remain together.

One of the needs identified by the organization was the replacement of aging benches in the children's outdoor play area.

To fund the project, the Leadership Class partnered with the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce to host the Leadership Brandon Riverview Cornhole Tournament in March. The tournament was a tremendous success thanks to Tampa Electric, Raulerson Castillo & Company – CPA's and Consultants, Sellers and Associates, Tampa Bay Harley-Davidson, SouthState Bank, Hungry Howie's, Suncoast Credit Union and RSA Consulting.

Additional excitement was provided by event vendors including LeAnne's Old Fashioned Cookies, Funnel & Funk, Champion Wellness Centers, Photo Booth Rental and More, and Socially Funded.

The class dedicated a full day of service to completing the project and worked together to purchase supplies, build, and install four custom benches with attached planters surrounding the children's play area.

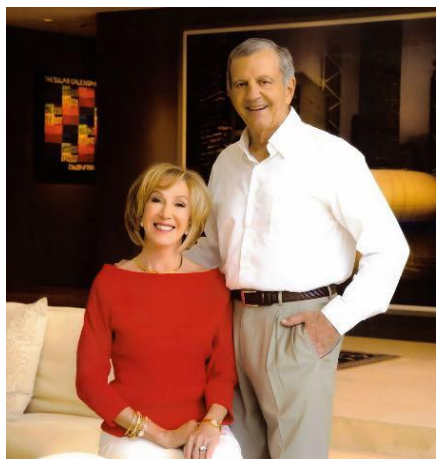
"The Legacy Project is one of the most meaningful parts of the Leadership Brandon Riverview program because it allows participants to make a direct and lasting impact in our community," said Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce President Amber Aaron. "The Class of 2026 demonstrated tremendous heart, teamwork, and dedication throughout this entire process, and we are incredibly proud of what they accomplished for A Kid's Place."

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce thanks everyone who supported the Cornhole Tournament and Legacy Project and helped make a meaningful difference for the children and families served by A Kid's Place.

To learn more about A Kid's Place, visit http://www.akidsplacetb.org/. For more about Leadership Brandon Riverview and the Chamber of Commerce, visit www.centralhillsboroughchamber.com.

$1 MILLION DONATION ADVANCES TAMPA MUSEUM OF ART EXPANSION

Staff Report



Maureen and Doug Cohn have made a $1 million gift to the Tampa Museum of Art, establishing the Maureen and Doug Cohn Gallery.

The Tampa Museum of Art has announced the creation of the Maureen and Doug Cohn Gallery, recognizing a $1 million gift from the longtime museum supporters and community philanthropists.

The contribution marks the latest milestone in the museum's ongoing Centennial Campaign for Renovation and Expansion, which has now raised more than $100 million toward transforming the downtown Tampa cultural institution.

Museum leaders said the new gallery will serve as a dedicated space for contemporary art exhibitions, showcasing works from the museum's extensive collection as well as loans from artists and institutions around the world.

"Maureen and Doug's dedication to this museum is extraordinary, and this gift speaks volumes about their belief in what the Tampa Museum of Art means to our community," said Tom Hochhausler, the Penny and Jeff Vinik interim executive director of the museum. "The Maureen and Doug Cohn Gallery will be an essential part of our museum where Tampa audiences can experience contemporary art at the highest level."

The gallery will feature both permanent and rotating exhibitions, providing visitors with new opportunities to engage with contemporary art. The museum's collection includes more than 8,000 objects, with over 7,000 works representing modern and contemporary art across a variety of media.

For the Cohns, the gift reflects their commitment to ensuring that contemporary art remains accessible and relevant to future generations.

"Contemporary art has the power to change how we see the world, and sharing that experience with others is important to us," said Maureen Cohn. "We hope the gallery will serve as a space where people come to discover, to be challenged and to be inspired by the contemporary art of our time."

Doug Cohn said the gallery represents an investment in the museum's future and in Tampa's growing cultural landscape.

"The Tampa Museum of Art has always been committed to bringing meaningful works to this community, and we are honored to be a part of it," he said.

The gallery is part of the museum's broader expansion plans. A major renovation completed in 2023 added seven new gallery spaces, a redesigned lobby and museum store, and the 8,000-square-foot Vinik Family Education Center.

The Centennial Campaign launched in 2021 and was anchored by a $28 million gift from Tampa developer and philanthropist Dick Corbett, the largest private donation ever made to a public art museum in Florida.

Museum officials said the Cohns' gift strengthens the campaign's momentum while helping secure a permanent home for contemporary art in Tampa for years to come.

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$1.6 BILLION ONE WATER PROJECT MOVES FORWARD IN S. HILLSBOROUGH

By Brian Bokor





Hillsborough County officials officially broke ground on the One Water South Wastewater Conveyance and Treatment Project on April 24, marking a major milestone in the county's $1.6 billion One Water infrastructure initiative.

The project centers on construction of a 200-acre Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant near the Southeast County Landfill in Lithia. County officials said the facility is designed to support South Hillsborough's long-term wastewater and reclaimed water needs through at least 2050.

The One Water Program serves the county's rapidly growing south-central service area, including Apollo Beach, Brandon, Gibsonton, Riverview, Ruskin, Sun City Center, Valrico and Wimauma.

County leaders described the One Water Program as a long-range strategy focused on resiliency, sustainability and future growth. The 'One Water' concept treats drinking water, wastewater, reclaimed water and stormwater as one interconnected system designed to protect resources while supporting regional development.

The wastewater conveyance and treatment project itself is estimated at approximately $1.2 billion. The project includes the advanced treatment facility, the Balm Road Super Pump Station and more than 20 miles of wastewater and reclaimed water pipelines. The broader $1.6 billion capital program also includes additional long-term drinking water and reclaimed water improvements throughout South Hillsborough County.

By 2030, the Lithia facility is expected to process 24 million gallons of wastewater per day, with designs already in place to eventually expand capacity to 30 million gallons per day.

"What's going to be built is a 30 million gallon per day advanced wastewater treatment plant, some of the most advanced technology that's out there, for purposes of providing adequate treatment capacity for our growing community," said George Cassady, assistant county administrator for public utilities.



The project also includes the Balm Road Super Pump Station, which can move up to 56 million gallons of wastewater per day to the new facility. The station features a 5-million-gallon emergency storage tank designed to improve long-term system resiliency.

Pipeline construction is another major component of the project, including 10 miles of wastewater pipeline and 13 miles of reclaimed water pipeline ranging from 42-48 inches in diameter. Officials said reclaimed water infrastructure is critical because it reduces dependence on drinking water supplies while improving environmental sustainability and future water reliability.

Much of the large-scale utility construction residents are currently seeing throughout South Hillsborough, including pipeline staging, trenching operations and roadway utility work, is tied to multiple major infrastructure projects happening simultaneously across the region.

While Tampa Bay Water's 26-mile South Hillsborough Pipeline project and Hillsborough County's One Water Wastewater Program are separate initiatives, the two projects are closely connected and designed to work together to support continued growth across Riverview, Brandon, Ruskin, Valrico and surrounding communities.

The project is being delivered through a progressive design-build partnership between Garney Construction and Hazen & Sawyer, along with partners Ardurra, Stantec and Wade Trim.

"What makes this project stand out is that it goes beyond simply adding treatment capacity," said Eric Wagner, director of southeast plant operations at Garney. "At a time when growing communities are looking for more sustainable ways to plan ahead, Hillsborough County is setting a strong example through its long-term investment in infrastructure."

County leaders said the investment is necessary as South Hillsborough continues experiencing rapid residential and commercial expansion.

"We are developing homes here, but we didn't have the infrastructure before," said Hillsborough County Commissioner Christine Miller. "And so, as the people continue to push outside of the city, we have to provide the resources for them."

While pipeline work began in fall 2025, the April 2026 groundbreaking launched vertical construction for the treatment facility and pump station. Phase one is expected to be completed in 2028, with full buildout anticipated by 2030.

Officials said existing customers should not notice interruptions to daily water or wastewater service during construction.

"The beauty of this program is that customers will not see a change in their service," Cassady said. "This will just provide additional resilient capacity for now and in the future."

Drivers may notice construction activity near County Road 672 and east of U.S. 301, though county officials said efforts are being made to minimize traffic disruptions during construction.

Once complete, the One Water Program is expected to become one of the most important infrastructure systems supporting long-term growth and resiliency throughout South Hillsborough County.



HCA FLORIDA BRANDON CELEBRATES NICU GRADUATION OF BABY PHILLIP BORN AT 23 WEEKS

Staff Report





HCA Florida Brandon Hospital proudly celebrates the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) graduation of Phillip Brown, a baby born at just 23 weeks gestation who has overcome extraordinary odds after spending 196 days in the hospital's Level III NICU.

Born on October 16, 2025, Phillip weighed just 630 grams (1 lb., 6.2 oz.) at birth. After more than six months of specialized, around-the-clock care, he is now heading home with his family weighing 6,245 grams (13 lbs., 12 oz.), marking a significant milestone in his journey.

Phillip's mother, Michelle Brown said, "Today, I'm feeling really emotional. Six months ago, I prayed for this day every day, and it's finally here. I'm excited he's coming home, but I'm very teary-eyed because of everything we have been through, from him being born at six months to having to have two procedures and how he's been progressing. I honestly can't thank the NICU team enough. Not only did they save my son, but they also treated me with love and care and made sure I knew my son was stronger than I could ever imagine. They all love him so very much."

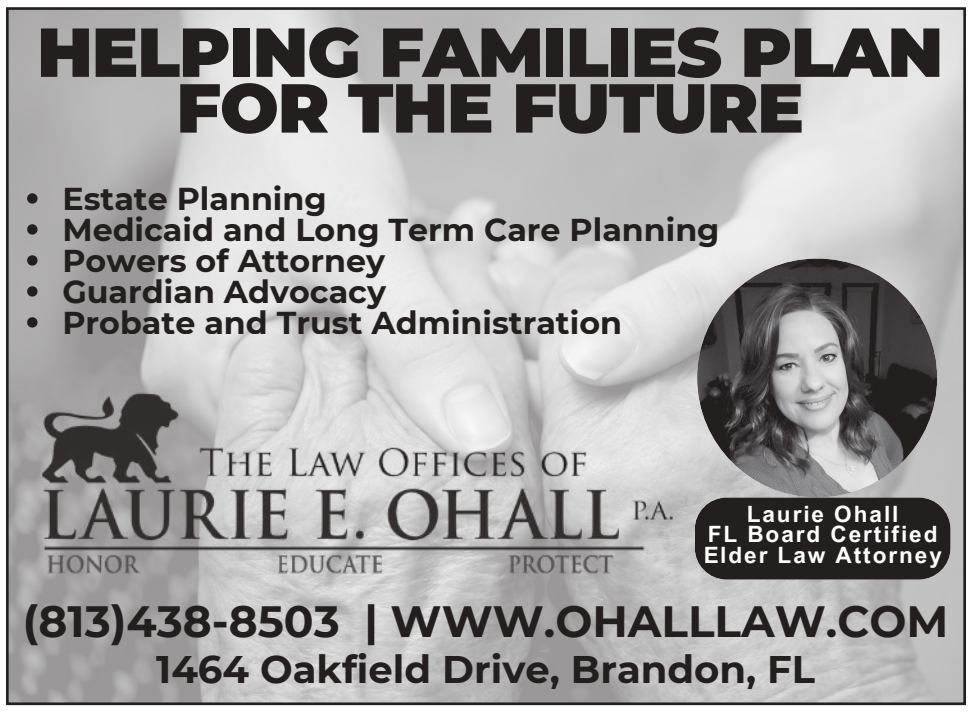
Phillip's care journey included advanced respiratory support, nutritional management and more delivered by a multidisciplinary team dedicated to the most fragile patients. As a Level III NICU, HCA Florida Brandon Hospital is equipped to care for premature and critically ill newborns requiring complex medical attention. Now, Phillip is one of the first micropreemies (born extremely premature) to go home without any need for additional oxygen support.

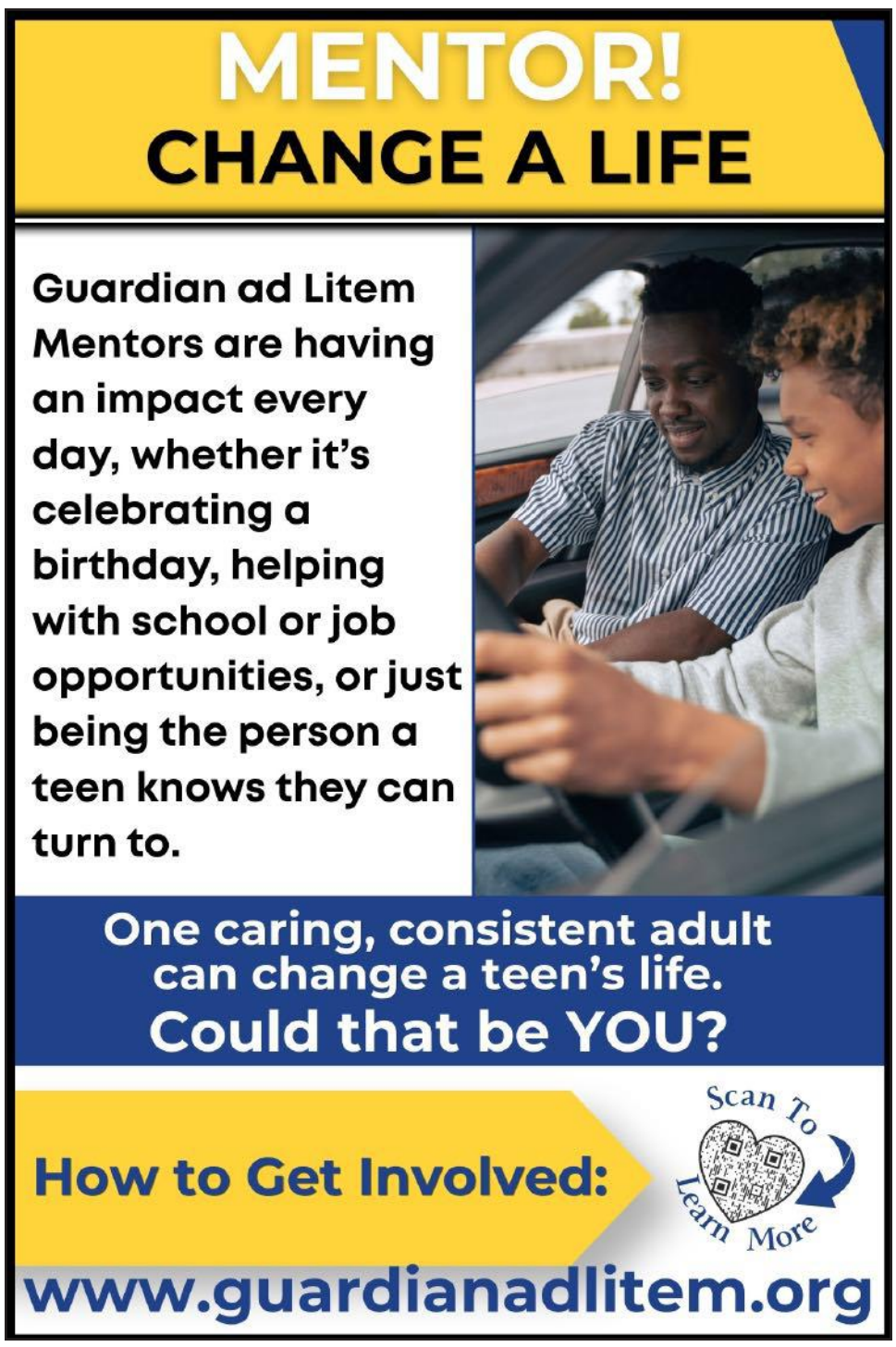
Dr. Kiran Dwarakanath, NICU medical director at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, praised both Phillip's resilience and the team's commitment. "Phillip's journey is a powerful example of what is possible with advanced neonatal care, early intervention and an unwavering team approach. Babies born this early face significant challenges, but Phillip showed incredible strength every step of the way. We are honored to have been part of his care and to support families like Michelle's through such critical moments."

NICU graduation marks a significant transition for families, symbolizing not only medical progress but also hope, perseverance and partnership between caregivers and loved ones.

Phillip wore a graduation cap and gown, and hospital staff lined the halls, cheering him on as he took his final lap around the NICU on his journey home. His story stands as a testament to the lifesaving capabilities of modern neonatal care and the dedication of the clinicians at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital.











GET THE DIRT: COMMUNITY WATER WISE AWARDS PROGRAM

BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT





The purpose of this award program is to recognize individuals, businesses and community associations that have made a commitment to conserve water resources and protect the environment while using Florida-Friendly Landscaping (FFL) principles. Homeowners complete an application and include photos of their landscape. The entire landscape is evaluated using the FFL principles.

The principles include right plant, right place; water efficiently; fertilize appropriately; mulch; attract wildlife; manage yard pests responsibly; recycle; reduce stormwater runoff; and protect the waterfront.

Landscapes are evaluated by UF/IFAS County Extension agents. Winners are selected based on performance in these categories: retention of existing trees and vegetation, landscape design and plant selection, stormwater runoff prevention, efficient irrigation and aesthetic appeal.

All residents submitting an entry will receive a letter providing feedback. Winning homeowners receive a handmade mosaic steppingstone. Winning businesses can opt for a plaque. Awards are presented in the winning entry landscapes or at a City of Tampa event.

"Up to 50 percent of water used at home can come from watering your lawn," said Amelia Brown, demand management program manager for Tampa Bay Water. "These new awards allow us to celebrate even more homeowners and businesses for efforts to save water while maintaining a beautiful environment."

Winners receive a custom mosaic steppingstone made by a local artist and recognition at local city council and county commission meetings.

The new Best of the Region Award will be presented at a Tampa Bay Water board meeting. Applications are open until Friday, July 31, at https://awards.tampabaywaterwise.org/.

BRANDON MEALS ON WHEELS MARKS 50 YEARS OF SERVING NEIGHBORS

By Libby Hopkins



Greater Brandon Meals on Wheels provides nourishing midday meals from Monday through Friday for those in the Brandon community who are unable to serve themselves. Volunteers reach out to help home bound neighbors in need of a nutritious meal through the combined efforts of many local Brandon churches.

Greater Brandon Meals on Wheels coordinates the activities of the member churches. The menu, preparation and delivery of these meals is the responsibility of each of the member churches. Clients are referred to Greater Brandon Meals on Wheels through various organizations, churches, family, physicians, neighbors or friends.

The local nonprofit recently held its 50th anniversary this past April at Generations Church in Brandon. "Greater Brandon Meals on Wheels celebrated our 50th Anniversary this year," said Barbara Brooks, recording secretary for the Greater Brandon Meals on Wheels. "We were started on March 9, 1976, by St. Andrew's United Methodist Church and Limona Village Chapel. We currently have 17 member churches in the area who deliver almost 200 meals per day, Monday through Friday, to medically needy shut-ins in Brandon, Valrico and Seffner. In 2025, we delivered 48,191 meals. We are a 501(c)(3) and receive no government money."

Volunteers delivered meals through COVID and hurricanes as long as it was safe for its drivers. Many of these volunteers were honored at the recent celebration.

"We honored Lillian Foster of St. Andrew's for her 36 years of service, which included volunteer positions as president and general coordinator," Brooks said. "At age 92, we were delighted to have her in attendance."

Brooks joined the Greater Brandon Meals on Wheels in January 1996 as a cook but became New Hope's driver coordinator in 2006.

"I had just joined the church and was looking to get involved, attended a meeting and signed up to help immediately," Brooks said. "I have been the recording secretary for about 15 years. Our board of directors oversees the 17 churches, but each church coordinates their kitchen and cooks, including preparing their meals and mapping their routes."

Brooks and all the volunteers at the Greater Brandon Meals on Wheel hope to continue their mission as long as there is a need in the community.

"We currently are looking to add one more church on Tuesday to serve about 20 meals," Brooks said.

If you would like to volunteer or if you are a local church that would like to become involved with the organization, contact general coordinator Carol Shick at 813-404-1973.

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FLORIDA ORCHESTRA 2026-27 SEASON FEATURES BEETHOVEN, GERSHWIN & MORE

Staff Report



The Florida Orchestra has announced its 2026-27 season, a lineup that combines classical masterpieces, contemporary American composers and popular entertainment while expanding access to audiences throughout the Tampa Bay region.

The orchestra's 59th season, led by Music Director Michael Francis, will feature 14 Masterworks programs, a variety of Pops concerts and community performances designed to attract both longtime patrons and first-time concertgoers.

"This season is about new discovery and familiar connection," Francis said. "We're performing some of the most powerful works ever written while pairing them with music that feels fresh and unexpected."

Inspired in part by America's upcoming 250th anniversary, the season places a spotlight on American composers, including George Gershwin, Florence Price, Joan Tower, Michael Torke and Christopher Theofanidis. The orchestra will also revisit the work of Ludwig van Beethoven ahead of the 200th anniversary of the composer's death in 2027.

Among the highlights are three Beethoven works never before performed by The Florida Orchestra, including the complete incidental music to "Egmont," "Wellington's Victory" and the composer's only opera, "Fidelio." The orchestra's first-ever concert presentation of "Fidelio" is scheduled for March 2027 and will feature internationally acclaimed tenor Stuart Skelton alongside The Master Chorale of Tampa Bay.

The Masterworks series also includes audience favorites such as Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade," Mahler's "Symphony No. 1," Rachmaninoff's "Symphony No. 2," Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" and Verdi's "Requiem."

The season will bring several notable guest artists to Tampa Bay stages. Rising British pianist Jeneba Kanneh-Mason will make her Florida Orchestra debut performing a concerto by Florence Price, while conductor Leonard Slatkin, violinists Tessa Lark and Charles Yang, and pianist Joyce Yang are among the featured performers.

The Raymond James Pops series will showcase large-scale productions, including "Revolution: The Music of The Beatles" and "Dreams of Bollywood." Other Pops offerings include tributes to film composer John Williams, soul music legends and the music of "The Wizard of Oz," "Wicked" and "The Wiz."

The orchestra also announced efforts to make performances more accessible. Season packages have been simplified, lower-priced seating options expanded and evening concert start times moved to 7:30 p.m. Season tickets start at $22 for Morning Matinees and $25 for Masterworks and Pops performances.

"Our goal is to create more pathways for people to experience live orchestral music," said President and CEO Ignacio Barrón Viela.

Season ticket packages are on sale now, with individual tickets available beginning Aug. 11.

For tickets and information: https://floridaorchestra.org/. To donate now: https://floridaorchestra.org/donate-now/.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING & SUPPORT: WHY TO CHOOSE HILLS VIRTUAL SCHOOL

By Superintendent Van Ayres



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

When families search for learning options that fit their lives, they often face a false choice: flexibility or quality. Hillsborough Virtual School offers both.

As part of Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS), Hillsborough Virtual School is not an outside vendor or a one-size-fits-all platform. Students learn from certified HCPS teachers who know this community and are invested in its students. Families retain access to extracurricular activities, in-person support and the full resources of our district, the same foundation that has earned the trust of Hillsborough County families for generations.

Coursework is aligned to district standards, so students stay on pace with their peers while learning in a way that works for them. Whether a student thrives on a flexible schedule, needs a different environment or is balancing other commitments, Hillsborough Virtual School adapts without lowering expectations. The combination of personalized pacing with rigorous standards is what makes it sustainable choice for so many families.

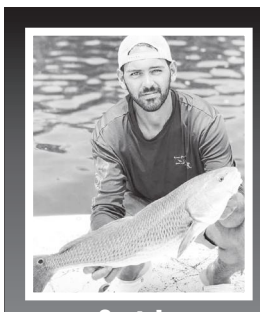
Summer is also a powerful window of opportunity. Students can get ahead in their coursework, recover credits, or strengthen essential skills before the new school year begins. High-quality courses are designed to meet students where they are and help them move forward with confidence and to not just cover material but also truly build on it.

Even in a virtual format, they're far from navigating it alone. Real teachers provide ongoing instruction, feedback and connection. Parents gain greater visibility into their child's progress and a more active role in the learning experience.

This is what sets Hillsborough Virtual School apart: flexibility paired with accountability, independence supported by structure and innovation grounded in the values of our public school system.

If you are considering summer enrollment or planning for the 2026-27 school year, I encourage you to take a closer look. For many families, Hillsborough Virtual School isn't just an alternative; it's the right fit.

Learn more about options directly at www.hillsboroughschools.org/virtual.

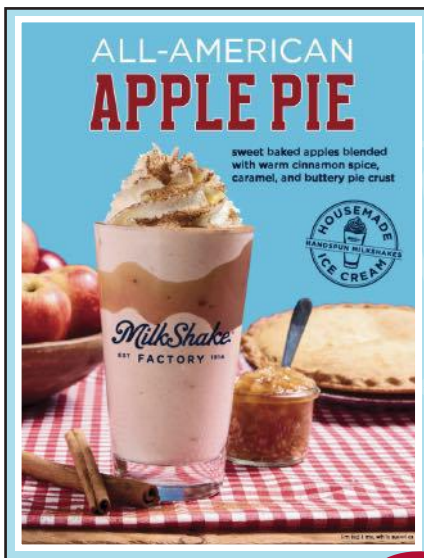

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Seeking Artists, Music Bingo, HC Registration & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Registration Open for Fall 2026 Semester At HC

Fall 2026 registration is open for all new and returning students at Hillsborough College (HC). Registration is available at www.hcfl.edu/registernow for existing students. Registration and application information for new students can be found at www.hcfl.edu/admissions. HC offers flexible class schedules and course delivery options, allowing students to study at their own pace without compromising their work or family obligations. Options include on campus, hybrid, simulcast, online with live class meetings, online without live class meetings and flexible start.

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

County Schools Recognized As Best Community For Music Education



Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) has once again been named a Best Community for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation, a national honor that celebrates school districts demonstrating a strong commitment to providing comprehensive, high-quality music education for all students.

The designation reflects the passion, professionalism and dedication of HCPS music educators, whose efforts ensure students across the district have meaningful opportunities to learn, perform and grow through music. From classroom instruction to performances, advocacy and community collaboration, HCPS music programs continue to make a lasting impact on students and the broader community.

For more information about music education programs in Hillsborough County Public Schools, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org.

Seeking Artists For Arts & Crafts Fair

Redeemer Lutheran Church in Sun City Center will be having its seventh annual Arts & Crafts Fair on Saturday, November 7, from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. It is looking for 40 artists of fine and applied arts. Both indoor and outdoor spaces are available. For more information or an application, email rlceventsscc@gmail.com.

Juneteenth Commemoration And Celebration

The African American Educational Club invites the community to join its Juneteenth Commemoration and Celebration on Saturday, June 20, from 3-5 p.m. at the Florida Room, 1009 N. Pebble Beach Blvd. in Sun City Center. This special event will honor the history and continuing importance of Juneteenth through education, reflection, culture and community fellowship. The program will include presentations, music and recognition of student essay contest participants. Community members of all backgrounds are encouraged to attend and take part in this meaningful celebration of African American history, resilience and achievement.

Community For Women Hosting Music Bingo Fundraising Event

The Community for Women at St. Stephen Catholic church will be hosting music bingo on Thursday, June 18, starting at 7 p.m. The event will be held at Bullfrog Creek Brewing Co., located at 3632 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico.

The Community for Women group supports the St. Vincent de Paul food bank.

Joy In The Decades 16th Spring Recital

Step into the decades with Dancing For Joy as it celebrates the 16th annual Dancing For Joy Recital: Joy in the Decades, featuring music, memories and dance from the 1920s through the 1990s. From its tiniest dancers age 1 to adult performers, you'll experience every style of dance brought to life through generations of joy, passion and celebration. The recital will be held at Morgan High School, located at 1712 West Lake Dr. in Wimauma, on Saturday, June 13, with a choice of performance times.

Purchase your tickets and reserve your seats today at https://app.gostudiopro.com/tickets/nightofjoy.

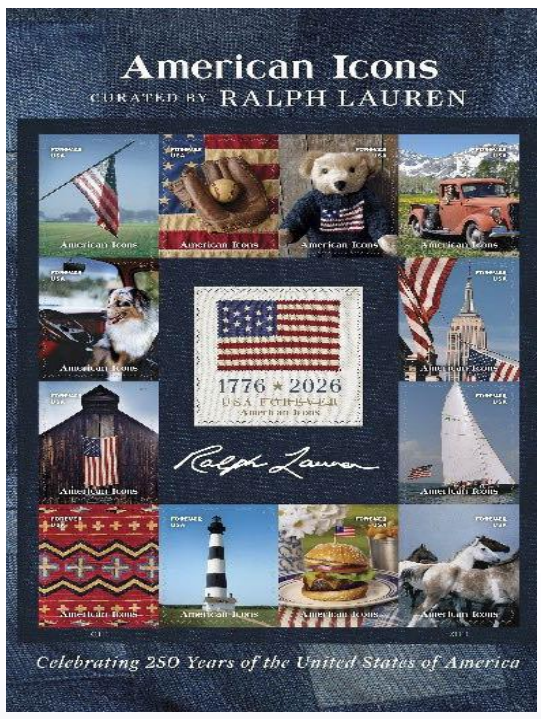
Revival Night At South Bay Church

South Bay Church is holding a revival night on Sunday, June 14. Come expectant for a powerful night of worship, prayer and a life-giving message as everyone seeks God's presence together. There will be food and fellowship from 5:30-6 p.m., followed by worship and a message from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

South Bay Church is located at 13498 U.S. 301 S. in Riverview. Visit https://southbay.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3672584 to register for the event.

USPS HONORS NATION'S 250TH WITH RALPH LAUREN STAMPS

Staff Report



The U.S. Postal Service has announced a special commemorative stamp collection to celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026, marking the first time an individual has been invited to curate an entire official USPS stamp issuance.

Titled American Icons, the collection features 13 Forever stamps selected by legendary fashion designer Ralph Lauren. The stamps highlight images that reflect the values, traditions and symbols that have shaped the United States over the past two and a half centuries.

Lauren, who received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2025, is known worldwide for creating a brand rooted in American heritage and culture. Born in the Bronx in 1939, he built his business from humble beginnings, selling neckties from a single drawer in New York City's Empire State Building before developing one of the world's most recognizable lifestyle brands.

The American Icons collection includes photographs drawn from Lauren's personal archive and imagery that has inspired him throughout his career. Featured designs include the American flag, a baseball glove once used by Jackie Robinson, a weathered pickup truck, a faithful dog, the Empire State Building, a traditional barn, a Diné (Navajo) blanket woven by artist Naiomi Glasses, a teddy bear, a lighthouse, a hamburger, a racing sailboat and wild horses.

At the center of the pane is a 13th stamp featuring a knitted American flag design inspired by Lauren's iconic flag sweater and bearing the dates "1776 to 2026." The pane's surrounding text celebrates 250 years of the United States and identifies the collection as curated by Ralph Lauren.

In addition to the commemorative set, USPS will release a 2026 U.S. Flag Mail Use Stamp featuring a detailed photograph of Lauren's knitted flag design. The definitive stamp will be available in panes, booklets and coils for everyday mail use.

The stamps will be formally dedicated during a ceremony on June 9 at New York City's historic James A. Farley Post Office Building. USPS officials say the collection honors the shared values and enduring spirit that have united Americans since the nation's founding.

The American Icons stamps will be sold in panes of 13 and, as Forever stamps, will always be valid for the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce rate.





RESCUE PETS ISSUES URGENT PLEA FOR FOSTERS AS SHELTERS REACH CAPACITY

Staff Report

Rescue Pets of Florida, a volunteer-driven nonprofit that recently celebrated over 25,000 adoptions in its first 10 years, is issuing an urgent plea for foster homes as shelters and rescues across the Tampa Bay area reach dangerous overcrowding levels during kitten season.

The rescue currently has zero available foster homes for incoming kittens, while county shelters and rescue partners throughout the region continue to operate at or beyond capacity. According to the organization, local shelters have already begun euthanizing animals for space.

"We are at a critical point," said Jeanine Cohen, director and cat division lead for Rescue Pets of Florida. "Every single foster home directly translates into lives saved. Right now, we are being forced to make heartbreaking decisions simply because we do not have enough homes available to safely place more animals."

Founded in 2015, Rescue Pets of Florida began as a small cat rescue originally known as Rescue Cats of Florida. Over the past decade, the organization has grown into one of the region's largest volunteer-based rescues, operating five adoption centers throughout Tampa Bay and expanding its mission to save cats, dogs, neonatal kittens and farm animals in need.

The rescue relies entirely on volunteers and foster families rather than a traditional shelter facility. Foster homes provide temporary care for animals until they are medically cleared and adopted into permanent homes.

"We provide everything," said Tara Pisano, director and dog division lead for Rescue Pets of Florida. "Food, medical care, supplies, support — we just need people willing to open their homes temporarily. Even fostering for a few weeks can literally save lives."

In addition to rescue and adoption efforts, Rescue Pets of Florida has become known for its regional impact through spay/neuter initiatives and shelter partnerships. The organization also sponsors rescue and partner-rescue spay/neuter clinics aimed at reducing overpopulation before animals enter shelters. Since 2023, Rescue Pets of Florida and its rescue partners have completed thousands of sterilization surgeries, helping reduce intake pressure across multiple counties.

Rescue Pets of Florida is currently seeking foster homes throughout St. Petersburg, Valrico, Wesley Chapel, Spring Hill, Plant City and surrounding Tampa Bay areas. Community members interested in fostering can apply at www.rescuepetsofflorida.org/volunteer.

Donations to support medical care, food, and emergency rescue efforts can be made at www.rescuepetsofflorida.org/donate.

About Rescue Pets of Florida

Founded in 2015, Rescue Pets of Florida is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to rescuing, rehabilitating and rehoming homeless animals throughout the Tampa Bay area.

TGH/GREENBROOK SENIOR CENTER OPENS NEW LOCATION IN BRANDON

By Libby Hopkins



The TGH Senior Center powered by Greenbrook Medical recently celebrated the grand opening of its new senior center in Brandon. The new center is located at 427 S. Parsons Ave., Ste. 120, in Brandon.

Greenbrook Medical has served the Tampa Bay area since 1991 with a mission to help seniors live their healthiest, most fulfilling lives by delivering an outstanding, concierge-like care experience. Its partnership with Tampa General Hospital in 2024 was a natural extension of that commitment. Thus, the TGH Senior Center powered by Greenbook Medical was born. It recently opened its new location in Brandon.

"We are thrilled to partner with Tampa General Hospital to establish its first senior center," said Neil Machhar, CEO of Greenbrook Medical. "This collaboration is an innovative way for health systems to partner with community providers to transform the delivery of care and achieve better patient outcomes for the communities we serve."

Dr. Raj Machhar, chief medical officer of Greenbrook Medical, added, "Combining our holistic approach to care with the resources of Tampa General Hospital, we're confident we can improve the lives of seniors across the Tampa Bay Region."

The TGH Senior Center powered by Greenbrook Medical is built around high-touch, relationship-based primary care designed to feel personal again.

"Our full-service clinics are designed to provide seniors with personalized care focused on their unique needs," said Jordan Gray, marketing director for Greenbrook Medical. "We are physician-led, coordinated and intentionally structured to support healthier lives over time through more time with patients, stronger care coordination and a personalized approach so you can live your best life."

The new center's care model is based on strong patient-doctor relationships that provide the same time, convenience and respect.

"Our patients can expect an experience that feels steady, respectful, and clear," Gray said. "The goal is for patients to leave appointments with fewer unanswered questions, more confidence in the plan and care that reflects their full health story. Patients will benefit from extended visits with their primary care physician and a specialized senior care team to help manage chronic conditions and support long-term wellness goals. You'll see your same doctor on every visit and be able to receive convenient, on-site diagnostic and treatment services so that you can get more care in fewer places."

If you're interested in becoming a patient or would like to schedule a meet and greet with a physician near you, call 813-725-1904 and its onboarding team will assist you. The TGH Senior Center powered by Greenbrook Medical is located at 427 S. Parsons Ave., Ste. 120, in Brandon. There is also a Riverview location at 10453 Stelling Dr.

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NEW HORIZONS GROUP HOMES PROVIDES MORE THAN SHELTER: HOSTS LUNCHEON

By Brad Stager

Ensuring the well-being of those who are at risk of marginalization or exploitation because of a disability is a principle wholeheartedly embraced by New Horizons Group Homes in its mission to provide safe, sustaining shelter for adults with special needs.

The genesis of New Horizons was in 1992, as a community of people concerned about a lack of resources for residents dealing with ability challenges came together in a partnership with the special needs ministry of First Baptist Church of Brandon. Its mission from the outset has been to support the notion that independence, dignity and respect are essential to a fully lived life, and that a home is an important part of making this possible for those whose disability makes daily living difficult.

From that beginning in 1992 grew a village, starting with the Mary Lou Creamer home, which opened in 1999 on the property located at 109 E. Clay Ave. in Brandon. That first structure was home for six women residents and was followed in 2002 with the opening of the Alice Storms home, which housed six men. A grant from Hillsborough County allowed for construction of the Peter and Brenda Watkins home, which opened to six men in 2017. Creamer, Storms and Watkins are among the names of New Horizons' founders.

The homes are operated as assisted living facilities licensed by the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration, with much of the funding derived from residents' Social Security benefits as well as through special events, like barbecues and luncheons, and developing supportive relationships with businesses and individuals in the community who wish to help.

As a partner with First Baptist Church's special needs ministry, New Horizons emphasizes Christian values in creating the homes' environments. Residents are encouraged to develop their full potential as human beings, and New Horizons draws upon community connections and resources to provide them. Many residents hold jobs and all are expected to do chores to keep the homes operating smoothly. Outings to local events and attractions also keep residents busy.

"It's a Christian, family-centered home to be all that they can be," said Brenda Watkins.

To learn more, including how to take a tour for interested families, visit www.newhorizonshomes.org or call 813-571-2690.

SPECIAL NOTE: On Saturday, June 13, New Horizons Group Homes will host its annual luncheon from 12 Noon-2 p.m. at First Baptist Church Brandon, located at 216 N. Parsons Ave. in Brandon.

Tickets are $25 each, or $175 to sponsor a table for eight. Call 813-653-2466 for more information about tickets and sponsorships.

LIEUTENANT GOV. JAY COLLINS ANNOUNCES OPERATION F3

Staff Report

Recently, decorated Green Beret, Lieutenant Gov. and gubernatorial candidate Jay Collins announced 'Operation F3, Florida Families First: Education on Florida's Terms' in Tampa.



Lt. Gov. Jay Collins (Photo / X)

"Florida's families need a governor who truly understands the classrooms, the challenges and the dreams of Florida's children," said Jay Collins. "Florida doesn't need more Washington-style bureaucracy. We need bold, practical leadership rooted in our values, and that's exactly what I'll deliver as your next governor."

Jay Collins emphasized the importance of building an education system on Florida's terms, respecting parental rights and ensuring Florida's education is practical, not bureaucratic.

Operation Florida Families First has three main pillars: 1. Cybersecurity and Protecting Our Kids: We cannot put our children's education solely in the hands of artificial intelligence. There must be humans in the education and security loops. As governor, Jay Collins will direct immediate investments into cybersecurity, training and partnerships with Florida's world-class defense and technology sectors.

2. Rejecting One-size-fits-all Bureaucracy: Children must have the option to customize their education tailored to their career goals, whether they choose to go to college, learn a trade or join the military. Every child is unique and our education system should reflect that. However, giving each child an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a bureaucratic nightmare. 3. Trade Opportunities and Agricultural Training: Florida is home to many industries, including agriculture. Our education must prepare students for good-paying jobs and make all industries accessible to them.

Jay Collins was joined by Second Lady Layla Collins and Bernadette Pello, president and co-founder of Livingstone Academy, who shared their firsthand experience in education policy to support Jay Collins' approach. They emphasized the importance of integrating workforce education and ensuring each student has the ability to customize their education. See the biographies of the guest speakers below:

Layla Collins, Second Lady, State of Florida: Layla Collins has had a storied career in the United States Army which began in 1994 and spanned over two decades. Layla Collins served in multiple SOF units with a wide range of focus. Layla Collins was selected to be a core member of a Special Actions Team that evaluated security protocol at the highest levels of our government. She collaborated to develop curriculum and courses to train and educate other service members on sensitive skills and best practices. Working within the SOF community allowed

Layla Collins is the proud wife of Jay Collins, and mom of two precious boys, Gabe and Colt. Bernadette Pello, President and Co-founder, Livingstone Academy

Jay Collins is a 23-year veteran of the U.S. Army Special Forces, having served in combat around the world defending our nation. He currently serves as Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' lieutenant governor. For more information, visit www.jayforflorida.com.







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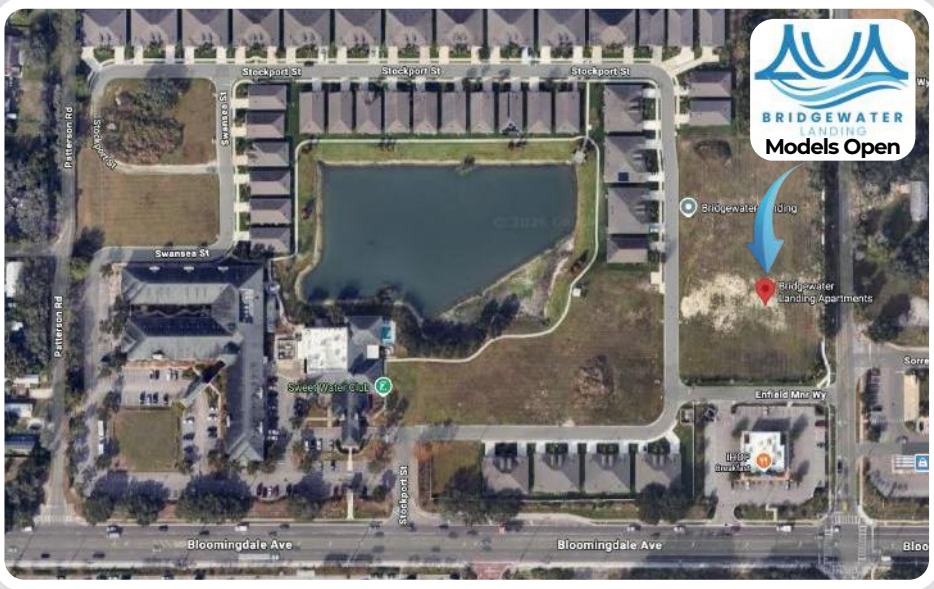
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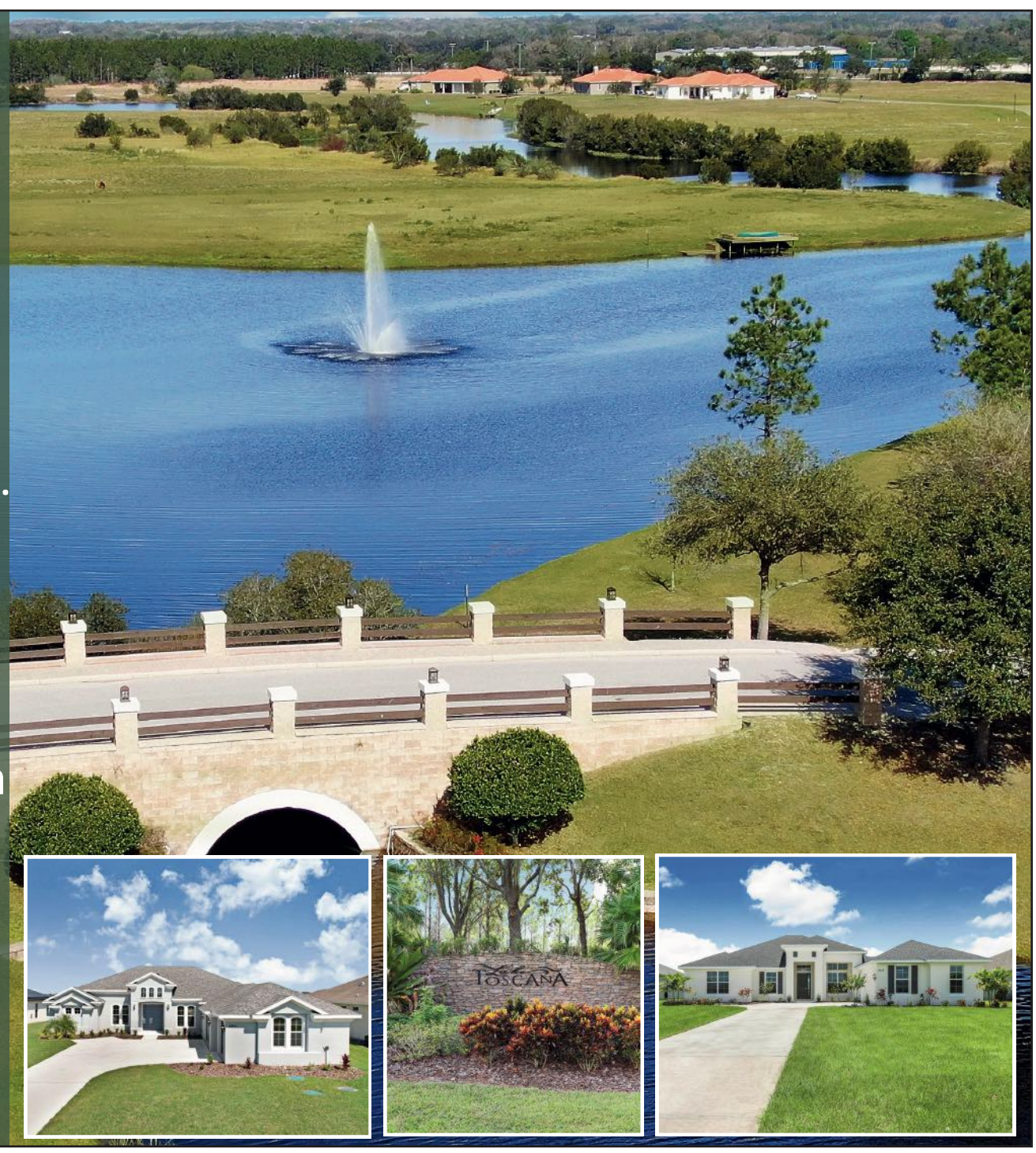
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EYE ON BUSINESS



Edited by: Jenny Bennett

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

Fast Casual Italian Restaurant Opens

Mister Pasta's Build-Your-Own Pasta Bar is a fast-casual Italian experience where you're in control. Start by choosing your favorite fresh-made pasta, pick from its house-made sauces, load up on unlimited fresh vegetables, add your choice of proteins like grilled chicken, meatballs, steak, shrimp or lobster and then watch as your custom creation is cooked to perfection right in front of you. Fresh, fast and made just the way you like it. It also does catering for weddings, parties or corporate events. Mister Pasta is located at 11681 Boyette Rd. in Riverview. Visit www.misterpasta.com.



Sunset Estate Liquidations

Founded in 2026, Sunset Estate Liquidations was created to support seniors and their families during important life changes, particularly during estate transitions. Recognizing a need for trustworthy, streamlined services for estate sales, it built the company to provide guidance every step of the way. Sunset Estate Liquidations takes a personalized approach to every project, tailoring its services to meet the unique needs of each client during their estate transition, whether it involves conducting an estate sale or managing a professional estate liquidation.

Sunset Liquidations is located at 4057 Forecast Dr. in Brandon. Call 813-460-1647 or visit www.sunsetestateliquidations.com.

Canine Cabana Celebrates 18 Years With Ribbon-Cutting

Since 2008, Canine Cabana has been a trusted haven for pets, offering award-winning care in a state-of-the-art facility spanning over 3 acres. It decided to celebrate this landmark with a multichamber of commerce ribbon-cutting event. With a mission to enhance the lives of both dogs and their owners, Canine Cabana provides a safe, active and healthy recreational environment.

Premium services include overnight accommodations, enriching dog day care, positive training and professional grooming. Canine Cabana believes in providing the best and safest activities in the area.

Located at 9708 Carr Rd. in Riverview, Canine Cabana offers day care, lodging, training, grooming and bathing services. Visit www.caninecabana.biz or call 813-672-9663.



Center For Prestige Skin Innovations

The Center for Prestige Skin Innovations, located at 915 S. Parsons Ave., Ste. B, in Brandon, recently celebrated joining the Brandon and Riverview Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon cutting. The Center for Prestige Skin Innovations provides a soothing escape from the stresses of daily life that'll leave you feeling recharged and refreshed. From the moment you walk through the doors, you'll be embraced by a calm, peaceful atmosphere that allows you to unwind, recharge and be refreshed. It offers a wide array of luxurious treatments to renew your body and spirit, including facials, massages, permanent makeup and others. Visit https://prestigeskininnovations.com/ or call 813-543-6636 for additional information and to make an appointment.



Steller Notary Services Two-year Anniversary Ribbon Cutting

Stellar Notary Services is a nationwide mobile and online notary company deeply rooted in service to the community. It works with clients across multiple industries including legal, real estate, construction and business services, helping people navigate important documents and major life moments with professionalism, care and reliability. It is especially passionate about remote online notarization (RON) because it allows fast, efficient and reliable notary services to people anywhere in the world. This year, Stellar Notary Services is proudly celebrating its two-year anniversary with a ribbon-cutting ceremony from the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce. Steller Notary Services is located at 11232 Boyette Rd., Ste. 1144, in Riverview. For additional information about the services it performs, visit its website at https://stellarnotaryservices.net or call 833-403-5601.



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COUNTY SPRING ACADEMIC CHAMPS: COMPTON WINS 4A STATE TITLE

By Nick Nahas

Hillsborough County recognized several individual athletes and teams for academic and athletic success during this past spring season.

Lennard High School won the girls flag football Class 4A State Championship, defeating Park Vista 12-6 to claim the school's first-ever state championship.



Hayden Compton from Durant High won the 4A Para-Athlete Division – 400 Meter Dash (1:12:15).

"It means everything to me to help bring the first state championship to Lennard High School," said running back Willow Rager. "Being able to make history with this team is such a special feeling because we knew we were representing our school and community every time we stepped on the field. It's something we've worked toward all season, and I'm so proud of what we accomplished together."

The Newsome High School baseball team earned the FHSAA Class 7A Academic State Championship with a 3.59 cumulative team GPA. The FHSAA Academic Team Champion program recognizes teams with the highest cumulative grade point averages in each classification. To qualify, teams must achieve at least a 3.0 unweighted GPA.

Hayden Compton from Durant High School won the 4A Para-Athlete Division – 400 Meter Dash Wheelchair (1:12:15).

"I'm proud of the accomplishment, but I'm also focused on continuing to improve my times and compete at bigger meets," said Compton. "For me, it's proof that the hard work is paying off and that I'm continuing to improve as an athlete. I will remember how much I improved from last season to this season, including taking 21 seconds off my 800m time, and the hard work it took to get there."

Luca Torres-Sigler of Spoto High School claimed the 3A Boys Tennis – Singles title.

"I felt a sense of accomplishment knowing that all of my hard work had finally paid off," said Torres-Sigler. "Winning this title makes me feel very proud of what I have accomplished. In addition, not too many fellow tennis players can say, 'I am a state singles champion.' That is very cool."

Torres-Sigler prepared for this tournament by training three times a week at the Eric Dobsha Tennis Academy with high-level juniors and collegiate-level athletes. He also played in several warm-up tournaments leading to the state finals.

"My goals for next season are to be competing at a level that high collegiate division schools take an interest in and hopefully get recruited to play in a Division I or Division II school, Another goal of mine is to lead my team to the state championships next year."

BUCHANAN ANNOUNCES 2026 SERVICE ACADEMY APPOINTMENTS

Staff Report



Recently, Congressman Vern Buchanan announced that 16 of the students he nominated have received an appointment to a U.S. Service Academy.

"I would like to congratulate these exceptional young men and women on earning appointments to our nation's prestigious U.S. Service Academies," said Buchanan. "This achievement reflects their hard work, leadership, character and commitment to serving our country. It is a tremendous honor for these students, their families, their mentors and our entire community. I wish them continued success as they begin this important journey in service to our nation."

Each year, members of the U.S. House and Senate nominate high school seniors in their districts and states for admission to the U.S. Air Force, Merchant Marine, Military and Naval academies. Applicants who meet strict qualifications are interviewed and recommended by a nonpartisan Service Academy Board appointed by the congressman. The U.S. Coast Guard Academy does not require a nomination to be accepted.

The following students nominated by Buchanan received an academy appointment for the fall:

Hillsborough County:

- Caine Cokkinias, Newsome High School, appointed to the U.S. Military Academy.
- Reid Freda, Lakeland Christian High School, appointed to the U.S. Air Force Academy.
- Tyler Stargardt, Newsome High School, appointed to the U.S. Air Force Academy.
- Hunter Wilk, Newsome High School, appointed to the U.S. Military Academy.
- Caitlin Nguyen, Riverview High School, appointed to the U.S. Merchant Marines Academy.
- Micah Pubillones, homeschooled, appointed to the U.S. Air Force Academy.
- John Wheaton, Newsome High School, appointed to the U.S. Merchant Marines Academy.
- Rory Jones, Newsome High School, appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy.
- Lazariyah Rashae Aranda, Naval Academy Prep School, appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy.
- Levi Ward, Georgia Military College, appointed to the U.S. Air Force Academy.

The U.S. Service Academies are four-year post-secondary institutions that combine educational excellence with military officer training. Students accepted to the academies receive a free four-year education in return for a commitment to serve five years in the active-duty military after graduation.

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TAX COLLECTOR INTEGRATES TOLL CLEARANCE INTO ONLINE REG. RENEWAL

Staff Report



The Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office and Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA) recently announced a new partnership that allows customers to clear outstanding THEA tolls and renew their vehicle registrations in one seamless online transaction.

The integration, available through the Hillsborough County Tax Collector's website, eliminates the need for customers to contact multiple agencies or make repeat trips to complete their registration renewals.

Previously, customers with unpaid THEA tolls faced a multistep process. They had to contact THEA by phone or online, pay the outstanding balance, wait for the payment to process and then return to the tax collector's website or visit an office to complete their registration renewal. The process often resulted in delays, multiple attempts and additional office visits.

Now, customers can resolve outstanding tolls and renew their registrations immediately through a single online transaction.

"This partnership with THEA is a great example of how collaboration between agencies drives innovation in government service delivery," said Hillsborough County Tax Collector Nancy Millan. "By working together, we've eliminated unnecessary barriers and made it as easy as possible for customers to do business with us. No more phone calls, no more juggling multiple websites, no more driving to an office — just one seamless online transaction."

Millan noted that the tax collector's office already offers a similar integration with Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX), creating a comprehensive solution for customers who need to clear tolls from either agency.

Greg Slater, executive director and CEO of THEA, said many drivers are unaware they have unpaid toll balances until they attempt to renew their vehicle registrations.

"This innovative partnership with the Hillsborough tax collector streamlines the process so customers can quickly resolve unpaid tolls and complete their registration without delays," said Slater.

The integration was made possible through collaboration between the Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office, THEA and technology partner GrantStreet Group. Once a toll payment is processed, registration renewal holds are automatically removed, allowing customers to complete the process without waiting.

Key benefits include immediate toll clearance and registration renewal, 24/7 online access, elimination of multiple websites and phone calls and fewer trips to tax collector offices.

The new service reflects the tax collector's continued focus on improving customer service through technology and partnerships. Customers can access both THEA and CFX toll clearance services while renewing vehicle registrations online at www.hillstaxfl.gov. For more information, visit the website or call 813-635-5200.





SOUL CIRCUS COWBOYS COME HOME TO BRANDON FOR CHARITY FESTIVAL

By Brian Bokor





Inside Morrisound Recording Studio: Frank J. Myers, Rick Morgan, Billy McKnight, and Jim Morris during a recent recording session in Tampa. (right)

Before the Billboard-charting albums, national tours and collaborations with Grammy-winning songwriters and platinum-record producers, Billy McKnight was playing quarterback and middle linebacker for the Brandon Broncos while attending Nativity Catholic School in East Hillsborough County.

Years later, the Soul Circus Cowboys frontman became a familiar face at Nativity Novemberfest, where the band regularly drew large hometown crowds and helped create what McKnight once described as a "complete Brandon reunion."

Now, McKnight is bringing that same spirit to the upcoming Chris Rocks the Vote Music Festival benefiting Forgotten Angels and ECHO.

The festival is scheduled for Saturday, June 27, at the Forgotten Angels ranch, located at 3604 Little Stearns Rd. in Valrico, as part of Chris Ciulla's honorary mayor campaign supporting the two nonprofits. The honorary mayor race is a community fundraising competition where donations and ticket purchases count as votes supporting local charities.

Forgotten Angels supports young adults aging out of foster care, while ECHO assists local families and individuals facing financial hardship throughout the Brandon area.

"We couldn't be more grateful for having the Soul Circus Cowboys supporting Forgotten Angels and the kids we work with," said Cindy Tilley, founder of Forgotten Angels. "The funds they are helping us raise will help save the lives of youth in our community."

Forgotten Angels and ECHO work closely together to support local individuals and families facing difficult situations throughout the community.

The event will feature live music, food trucks and family activities, including performances by Wade Williams, Sidney O'Sullivan, Clay Bo, Sons of the South and Soul Circus Cowboys.

Despite years of touring and recording, McKnight said his connection to Brandon and Valrico has remained constant throughout his career, especially his longtime relationship with Raccoons Bar & Grill, where he performed even before moving to Nashville, Tennessee, in the 1990s.

"Three times a year, I always go back to where I came from," McKnight said. "I play there Thanksgiving Eve, once in the spring and again near the end of the year."

McKnight said football was originally his main focus growing up in Brandon before eventually turning his attention toward music after his athletic plans changed.

Soon afterward, he auditioned for a friend's band.

"His band wound up going with me and we got on Star Search," McKnight said.

That early exposure helped lead McKnight to Nashville in 1994, where he spent nearly a decade learning the music business.

"Nashville was like a college to me," McKnight said.

After returning home to Florida, McKnight formed Soul Circus Cowboys in 2009.

The band has since become one of the region's most recognizable country rock acts, sharing stages with nationally known artists, including Big & Rich.

Their 2016 album, Tailgate Country, reached No. 25 on Billboard's Top Country Albums chart.

Soul Circus Cowboys also gained regional attention during the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' 2020-21 Super Bowl season after releasing the fight song "We're Going to Buc You Up."

Along the way, McKnight built relationships with respected music industry veterans, including Grammy-winning songwriter Frank J. Myers, who won the 1995 Grammy Award for Best Country Song for co-writing the hit "I Swear."

McKnight said Myers first took interest in him after hearing him perform the song "High and Low."

"He heard me sing 'High and Low' and said, 'We want to meet him,'" McKnight recalled. "Then we met, and he said, 'OK, we're going to develop you.'"

"If you want to be the best, you've got to work with the best," McKnight said.

That philosophy eventually led to collaborations with additional respected music industry names, including Jim Morris of Morrisound Recording, the internationally recognized Tampa recording studio associated with multiple platinum-certified records.

The band recently released its newest single, "Something Stronger," and did a May 18 music video premiere on the American Country Network (ACN).

Despite the success, McKnight said giving back locally still comes first.

"Let's make this a Brandon reunion," McKnight said. "Come out and do some good for our neighborhood like we always do. When a Brandonite goes down, or one of our bikers goes down, we get together and put things like this event together to help out.

"Quote me — it's something I've said for years: Come on out and let's help other people out. This is more than just a concert for us."

Tickets for the June 27 festival are scheduled to go on sale on Monday, May 25, with general admission tickets priced at $25 and VIP tickets available for $50.

For event details, follow the Chris for Mayor 2026 Facebook page www.facebook.com/chrisformayor2026. Visit https://linktr.ee/chrisformayor to find ticket information and purchase.

Questions can also be directed to Forgotten Angels at ctilley@forgottenangelsflorida.org or by calling 813-812-0120.



ASSET LOCATION: THE OVERLOOKED LEVER IN TAX-EFFICIENT INVESTING

Staff Report



The team at Payant Wealth Management in Sun City Center encourages clients to align investment and tax strategies for long-term financial success.

When it comes to building long-term wealth, most investors focus on what they own—stocks, bonds, funds, and alternatives. But an equally important question is where those assets are held. This concept, known as asset location, can have a meaningful impact on after-tax returns, yet it's often overlooked in portfolio construction.

Asset location refers to strategically placing investments across different account types—taxable accounts, tax-deferred accounts (like traditional IRAs or 401(k)s), and tax-free accounts (such as Roth IRAs). Each type carries its own tax treatment, and aligning investments accordingly can help reduce unnecessary tax drag.

For example, income-generating assets like bonds or high-turnover funds may be better suited for tax-deferred accounts, where interest and short-term gains are sheltered from annual taxation. Meanwhile, growth-oriented investments—such as equities with potential for long-term appreciation—can be ideal for taxable or Roth accounts, where capital gains benefits or tax-free growth may be realized.

The difference may seem incremental year to year, but over time, tax efficiency can significantly improve overall portfolio performance. In fact, minimizing taxes is one of the few "controllable" factors investors have, alongside costs and discipline.

Yet many investors unknowingly hold tax-inefficient assets in the wrong accounts, creating avoidable tax liabilities. This is where comprehensive planning—and ongoing coordination between investment strategy and tax considerations—becomes essential.

Ask yourself: Does your advisor talk to you about asset location?

Are your investments positioned with taxes in mind, or simply allocated based on risk alone?

How tax-efficient is your plan?

True financial planning goes beyond selecting investments—it involves integrating tax strategy, retirement goals, and portfolio design into one cohesive approach. Reviewing asset location regularly, especially as tax laws or personal circumstances change, can help ensure your portfolio is working as efficiently as possible.

In today's environment, where every basis point counts, thoughtful asset location isn't just a technical detail—it's a strategic advantage.

Payant Wealth Management is located att 1653 Sun City Center Plaza, Sun City. Visit www.payantwealthmanagementgroup.com or call (813) 633-7333.

'ART OF READING' PROGRAM OPENS CHALLENGE FOR ALL AGES

Staff Report



The Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative is inviting residents of all ages to turn the page on summer boredom by joining its annual Summer Reading Challenge, with registration now open.

Part of the 'Art of Reading' initiative, the program encourages children, teens and adults to log their reading throughout the summer while earning prizes and digital badges along the way. Participants can begin tracking their progress starting Monday, June 1, using the Beanstack Tracker app or website.

Jason Rogers, programming manager, said the challenge is designed to combat the 'summer slide,' a common learning loss students experience when school is out.

"It is intended to keep families and the community reading throughout the summer, when reading and learning tends to slow down a bit," Rogers said.

Children and teens, ages 0-18, are challenged to read for a total of 24 hours, while adults are encouraged to complete four books. Along the way, participants can earn incentives at registration, midway and upon completion, including books, badges and themed items. Some prizes have been provided by the Tampa Bay Sun Football Club.

In addition to milestone rewards, participants will be entered into grand prize drawings for items such as tickets to ZooTampa at Lowry Park and tech prizes, including AirPods Pro, a Nintendo Switch Lite and an Echo Show. Prize drawings will take place on Saturday, August 1, with winners having until Monday, August 31, to claim their items.

The program also includes partnerships like 'Reading with the Rays,' where youth can pick up a game card at their local library branch to track reading progress baseball-style. Completed cards can be redeemed for prizes and a savings voucher at Suncoast Credit Union locations.

Additionally, readers can participate in 'Score Through Stories,' another incentive-based program that rewards reading time. Rogers noted that hours logged count across all programs, giving participants more chances to win.

While the program emphasizes youth literacy, Rogers said adults play a critical role.

"It's so important for us to keep our minds engaged so that we are constantly learning," he said. "We're constantly making a better community and a better society."

To sign up and learn more, visit https://hcplc.org/summer.

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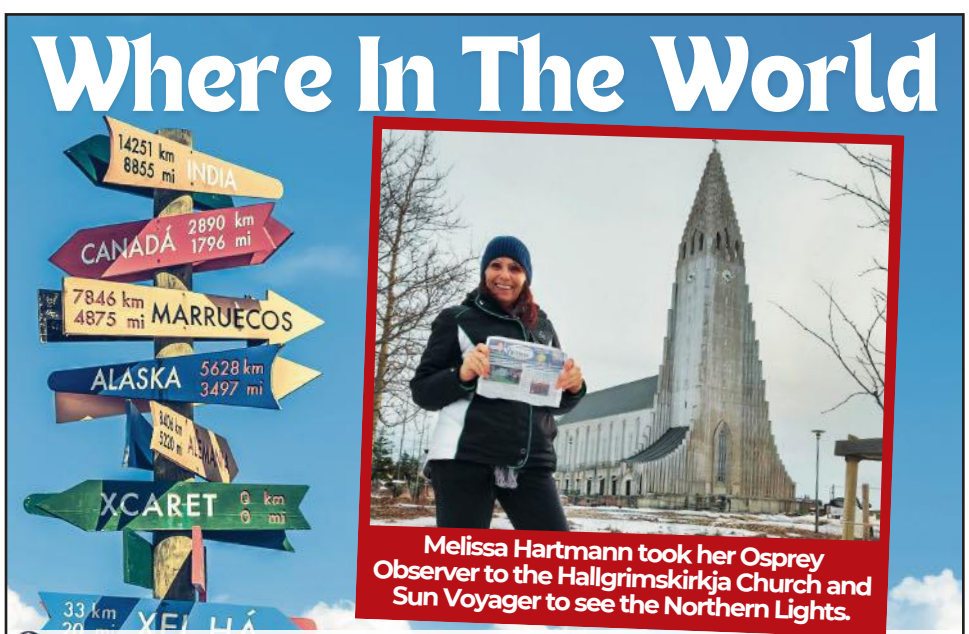
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Where In The World



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

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BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY UNVEILS ACTION-PACKED SUMMER

Staff Report



Summer is coming in hot at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. The park today unveiled its can't-miss summer lineup, including Summer Nights, offering extended hours from now through Sunday, August 9, with an all-new drone show, themed dance parties, returning fan-favorite entertainment and seasonal food and beverage offerings. Plus, the all-new Lion and Hyena Ridge opens soon. The best part: Access to all events and attractions is included with park admission.

Summer Nights, Bigger and Better

From now through August 9, guests can experience the park after dark nightly with Summer Nights, offering extended park hours, electrifying entertainment and nighttime thrills, including:

• The all-new Wild Skies Drone Show & Fireworks Spectacular with two shows. On select nights, visitors can enjoy a nighttime spectacular featuring 400 drones and fireworks, during two all-new shows: a patriotic-themed show for America's 250th birthday and a drone show, starting Friday, July 10, showcasing designs unique to Busch Gardens.

• The all-new Beach Bash show, which is filled with retro, high-energy fun the whole family will love and takes place in Gwazi Plaza, and the Boom Box Dance Party returns with energetic vibes in Stanleyville.

• Nighttime rides, which offer a whole new experience, enjoying Busch Gardens' nine world-class roller coasters after dark.

Back by popular demand, these fan-favorite shows are held indoors when guests want to beat the heat:

• Cirque Electric — This acrobatic show features new thrilling, world-class, cirque-style performers to the Stanleyville Theater beginning Thursday, June 11. Guests can witness their extraordinary talent alongside an electric ensemble of dancers.

• Animal Tales — During this educational presentation, guests learn more about the park's diverse collection of more than 200 animal species and meet some of the animal ambassadors in person.

• Icons — This fan-favorite live performance features hits inspired by musical legends.

• Rhythm of Nature — Audiences embark on a spellbinding ice adventure following the journey of a brave young hero into a magical dream realm to uncover the wonders of the animal kingdom and embrace their destiny. This ice spectacle dazzles guests with the beauty, danger and wisdom of nature.

America's 250th Celebration at Busch Gardens

This patriotic summer event is packed with all-American excitement throughout the park. From now through Sunday, July 5, guests can experience special military appreciation offerings, shop patriotic merchandise and indulge in festive summer treats. To cap it off, a dazzling patriotic-themed drone show will captivate audiences.

For more information, visit https://buschgardens.com/tampa/. Follow Busch Gardens Tampa Bay on Facebook and Instagram for the latest summer details and information.

FLORIDA POLY TIPS OFF WOMEN'S BASKETBALL WITH HEAD COACH

Staff Report



Nikki Jessee has been named the first head coach of Florida Polytechnic University's women's basketball program.

Florida Polytechnic University has named Nikki Jessee as the first head coach of its women's basketball program, adding another experienced leader as the University continues to build Florida Poly Athletics.

Jessee brings extensive experience in college basketball and a track record of building successful programs. The Lakeland native joined Florida Poly earlier this year as an academic success coach and said the opportunity to help launch women's basketball was one she had been eager for.

"I started here because I knew we were going to start athletics, so I was hoping that something would open up," Jessee said. "I've been in college athletics, specifically basketball, my whole life, and it was intriguing to start something literally from ground zero."

Before arriving at Florida Poly, Jessee led successful women's basketball programs at Warner and Saint Leo universities and helped turn around teams at Lynn University and Martin Methodist College.

Derek Lower, Florida Poly's athletic director, said Jessee is a strong fit in establishing the university's new program.

"Nikki is a phenomenal coach with a proven record of building up programs and creating championship-caliber teams," Lower said. "She has a strong focus on student success and building relationships with every member of her team."

Jessee said working on campus before stepping into the coaching role gave her a stronger understanding of what makes Florida Poly unique and the kind of student athlete who will thrive at the university.

"I'm thankful because my time as a success coach helped me understand it is a different type of university," she said. "When we say high academics and STEM university, we really mean it."

That academic focus is already shaping her recruiting approach. Jessee said she looks first at whether prospective players are the right fit for Florida Poly's rigorous STEM environment, then at how they can contribute on the court.

"The first thing I ask when I get information on a player or I see someone with potential is what are they interested in studying," Jessee said. "We can't just take anybody; I want to make sure they can also make it academically."

Recruiting is already underway, and Jessee said she is encouraged by the early response. As the team forms, she will focus on establishing standards early and cultivating a culture of excellence and responsibility.

"If you're not good off the court, you're not going to be good on the court," she said. "How you do anything is how you do everything."

For the most recent university news, visit https://floridapoly.edu/news/.

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Compiled by Taylor Wells



Valedictorian
Mariel Custodio
Bell Creek Academy
GPA 8.98
Plans to Attend
University of Florida



Salutatorian
Sofia Acebedo Ciro
Bell Creek Academy
GPA 8.36
Plans to Attend
Columbia University



Valedictorian
Samantha Perkins
East Bay High School
GPA of 7.29
Plans to Attend
Kansas State University.



Salutatorian
Shane Hollywood
East Bay High School
GPA of 7.27
Plans to Attend
University of South
Florida



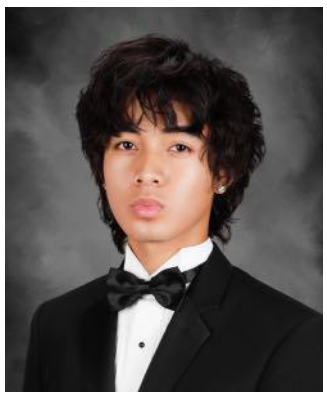
Valedictorian
Hao Tran
Lennard High School
(Traditional):
GPA 8.58
University of Florida or
Georgia Tech



Salutatorian
Nicolas Salas
Lennard High School
(Traditional):
GPA of 8.10
Plans to Attend
Yale University



Valedictorian
Izabel Wiltz
Lennard High School
(Collegiate Academy):
GPA of 8.39
University of South
Florida Honors College



Second Highest GPA
Gabriel Raymond Cacho
Lennard High School
(Collegiate Academy):
GPA of 7.95
University of Florida.



Valedictorian
Daniella Portillo-Sorto
Riverview High School:
GPA of 8.36
Still deciding on a college
to attend



Salutatorian
Amanda Rojas
Riverview High School:
GPA of 8.10
Plans to Attend
University of Central
Florida



Valedictorian
Hazuki Donna Sykes
Sumner High School
GPA of 8.89
Still deciding on a college
to attend



Salutatorian
Alexis Samantha Burdwise
Sumner High School
GPA of 8.00
Still deciding on a college
to attend









Christian Voice



Grace Notes

Wildflowers Or Weeds
By Debora Coty

One of my favorite childhood memories is frolicking in the open field just down the dirt road from our rural yard on sunny summer mornings. The field was like a fairyland to me, filled with hundreds of vibrant yellow buttercups that were oh-so beautiful when gathered into a bouquet and delivered to my delighted mama as a fistful of love.

While she carefully slid their clumsily child-broken stems into a crystal flower vase, Mama always made a wonderful fuss over my sweetness that matched that of the 'wildflowers' I brought her, motivating me to gather another bundle the next day.

Ah, beloved memories surrounded those faithful buttercups. They were a precious part of my childhood.

And then one day I discovered that buttercups (and their magical, wish-granting cousins, the dandelions) were considered mere weeds by the rest of the world. Weeds! People actually mowed them down and considered them a nuisance to well-manicured lawns.

I was flabbergasted! What were they thinking? What loveliness and awe they were missing!

Even now, whenever I see buttercups as an adult, I get a warm, fuzzy feeling inside and can't help but smile at the blessing they bring me. Does it really matter whether they're called weeds or flowers if they're a blessing to you?

As a grown-up, I've learned that monikers can be incendiary if weaponized. Aren't we seeing that play out in our current society and political arenas? People are emphatically more complex than fauna, yet we tend to mentally sort them into simplistic categories and render judgment on their worth based on whether — in our opinion — they're weeds or flowers.

But to our Omnipotent Creator, each and every one of us is a unique flower of immeasurable value, whether we're in a tended garden or a wild unkempt landscape. None are worthless. All are beautiful in His eyes. And thankfully, He still pops up happy buttercups to spread beauty in unexpected places!

"Look how the wildflowers grow. ... God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields," (Matthew 6:28, 30 CEV).

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.

RICH AND BLESSED AND GENEROUS



"Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise. But the fool devours it." — Proverbs 21:20.

I am no expert in either architecture or design, but there is something about Orlando's 'The Mall at Millenia' that grabs me. I especially appreciate the way the light interacts with the space and the glass and the steel and the other materials.

The other thing about Millenia is the crazy concentration of classy, expensive, exclusive and beyond-expensive stores. All the major design labels, all the unaffordable jewelry and watches and handbags and perfumes, all the top-tier anchor department stores.

Just for fun, we wandered into Banana Republic. I picked out a pair of pants, a nice comfortable shirt, a light linen jacket and a pair of casual shoes. It was a relaxed and classy outfit but came in at well over a thousand dollars!

I am not denying this is high-quality clothing. But no, of course I didn't buy any of it! Regardless, we enjoyed sauntering around, window shopping and people watching, trying to decide if the couple who actually did purchase merchandise at the Banana Republic were also the ones who pulled up to valet parking in the Bentley.

We did make one purchase — it was a sandwich at the Chick-fil-A in the food court.

The verse from Proverbs talks about the difference between good stewardship and letting our resources go to waste (it's a useful prelude to Christ's teachings around abundant life). Not just money but also our talents and gifts and blessings. The sad thing about the character in the latter half of the proverb is how they don't realize that — if they are thoughtful and faithful — they can enjoy their blessings without losing them, and be generous too.

This is the invitation of the gospel. Not to asceticism but to abundance, abundance within the framework of faithful, generous, reasonable, Christ-centered living.

"Do good, be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for [your] selves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of the life that really is life." — 1 Timothy 6:18-19.

The life that really is life! — 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.









HIGH 5 INC. REOPENS OLYMPIC-SIZE POOL, EXPANDING AQUATICS OPPORTUNITIES IN BRANDON

By Olivia Clark



The newly reopened 50-meter Olympic-size pool at High 5 Inc. in Brandon provides space for competitive training, swim instruction and aquatic programs.

High 5 Inc., a community-based nonprofit in Brandon, has officially reopened its rehabilitated 50-meter pool, restoring a key asset for competitive swimmers, families and aquatic programming across the area. The Olympic-size facility is once again positioned to support training at the highest levels while also serving as a hub for local instruction and recreation.

The 10-lane, 50-meter pool is part of a broader aquatics complex that includes a 25-yard, temperature-controlled pool, a diving well with 1-meter and 3-meter boards and a dedicated lesson area for shallow water instruction. The outdoor setup ensures consistent air quality, while heated water allows for year-round use.

High 5 Inc.'s aquatics programming is anchored by its Blue Wave Swimming and Diving program, which utilizes the full scope of the facility for both competitive and developmental training. The organization also offers swim lessons for all ages, adult fitness swimming and specialized programming designed to build water safety skills. The facility also supports year-round conditioning programs for youth athletes preparing for regional and national-level competition events. Coaches emphasize technique, endurance and safety in all training sessions.

The reopening comes at a time when water safety remains a critical issue for families. High 5 Inc. will host the World's Largest Swimming Lesson on Thursday, June 25, from 10 a.m.-12 Noon. The free event is open to children ages 3 and older and aims to raise awareness about drowning prevention through hands-on instruction and community engagement.

As a nonprofit, High 5 Inc. focuses on impacting lives through educational and athletic programming that supports physical, mental and social well-being. Beyond aquatics, the 12-acre campus offers tennis courts, pickleball, youth camps and open recreational spaces, making it a central gathering place for families throughout the Greater Tampa area.

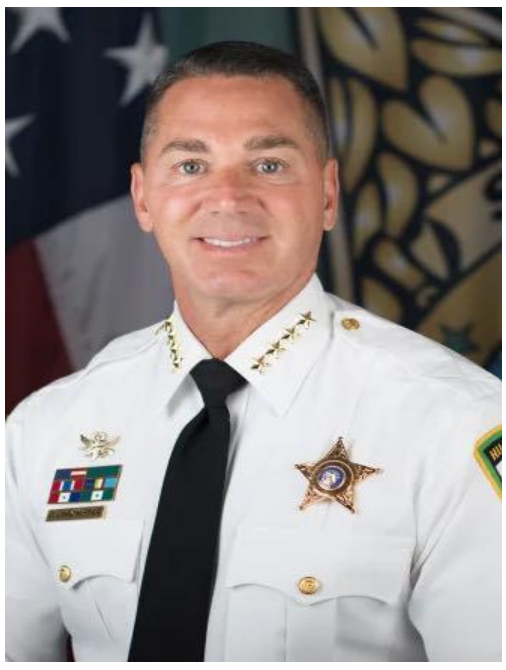
Facility rentals are also available for events, such as birthday parties, corporate outings and group gatherings, further extending the reach of the organization within the community.

With the return of its 50-meter pool, High 5 Inc. continues to strengthen its role as a leader in aquatic training and community wellness, offering expanded opportunities for residents to stay active, learn essential safety skills and connect through sports.

High 5 Inc. is located at 405 Beverly Blvd. in Brandon. For more information, call 813-689-0908 or visit high5inc.org.

SHERIFF RECEIVES 2026 ELLSWORTH G. SIMMONS GOOD GOV'T AWARD

Staff Report



The Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners presented the 2026 Ellsworth G. Simmons Good Government Award to Sheriff Chad Chronister in early May. The award's past winners include distinguished local leaders, such as Judge E.J. Salcines, former Gov. Bob Martinez, Lesley "Les" Miller, Jr., Dottie Berger MacKinnon, Dr. Earl J. Lennard, State Sen. Tom Lee, James L. Redman and last year's winner, Louis G. Betz Jr., who was awarded posthumously.

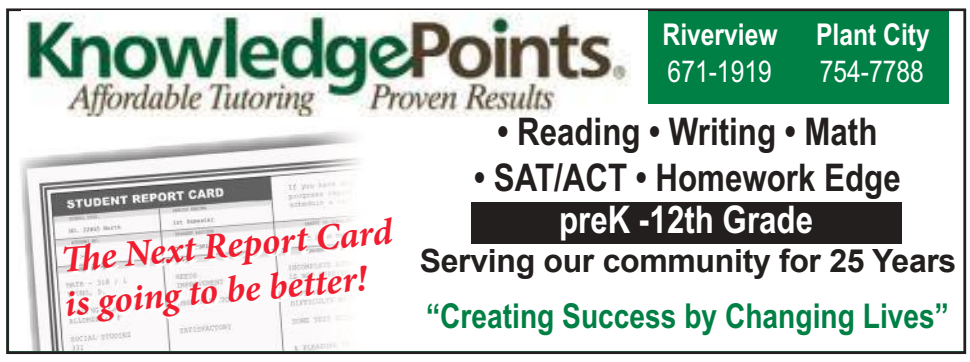
Chronister has served 34 years at the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office (HCSO). He has led the agency since 2017 and has won subsequent reelection three times. During his tenure, Hillsborough County has seen a sustained decline in crime, driven by his emphasis on proactive policing, intra-agency collaboration and data-driven enforcement strategies. Chronister has also led significant investments in advanced technology to improve deputy safety, public transparency and real-time crime analysis. He oversaw the development of a real-time crime center, an in-house firearms lab, a DNA lab and a digital forensics lab — each designed to streamline investigations, accelerate evidence processing and bring swift justice for victims. He currently serves as co-chairman of the Regional Domestic Security Task Force for Region IV Tampa Bay and is a council member of the Florida Attorney General's Statewide Council on Human Trafficking.

About the Ellsworth G. Simmons Good Government Award

In 1996, the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners established the Ellsworth G. Simmons Good Government Award, presented annually to an individual or group of individuals who played a significant role in improving government through leadership and vision.

The award was established in honor of Ellsworth G. Simmons, a respected government and civic leader who served 21 years on the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners. Through his leadership and guidance, new institutions and communities were created in Hillsborough County, including the University of South Florida and Sun City Center. He also helped spearhead the construction of Tampa International Airport, the founding of University Community Hospital and the expansion of the Florida Department of Health in Hillsborough County.

For more information, visit the Ellsworth G. Simmons Good Government Award webpage at https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners/county-awards/ellsworth-g-simmons-good-government-award.







BRANDON ROTARY DEDICATES HISTORICAL MARKER AT CLUB HOUSE

Staff Report



Thanks to our partnership with the Hillsborough County Historical Advisory Council, the Brandon Rotary Club dedicated a new historical marker at the Rivard-Simmons Rotary Event Center located at 3007 S Kings Ave, Brandon, FL 33511-7328 on May 5, 2026.

The Historical Advisory Council oversees Hillsborough County's historical marker program and supports efforts to preserve and recognize the region's significant historic sites. The Historical marker contains the following inscription.

Established 1890

Many communities in Hillsborough County were either established or experienced rapid growth following the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s. One such community was New Hope, which began to flourish after it was connected to other towns and cities by the new rail network. Victoria Brandon, second wife of John Brandon, asked civil engineer C.S. Noble to plat about 40 acres for a townsite, naming it "Brandon" after John, who came to this area in 1857.

At the turn of the century, Victoria Street and Moon Avenue was the "center of town." In close proximity were the train depot, Galvin's General Store, Varn's (citrus) Packing House, and the U.S. Post office that was established in September 15, 1890.

Pioneer families settled here, raised cattle, grew citrus and farmed their land. From these humble beginnings, Brandon emerged as we know it today.

The sign was originally erected in 1990 in Honor of the Brandon Centennial and replaced in 2026 by the Brandon Rotary Club in partnership with the Hillsborough County Historical Advisory Council

For more information about the Rotary Club of Brandon, please contact Liz Brewer, President at 813-299-6745. For more information about the Historical Marker Program, visit https://hcfl.gov/councils/historical-advisory-council.

MACBETH & CHEESE ANNOUNCES NEW THEATER HOME IN BRANDON

Staff Report

Brandon Performing Arts, also known as MacBeth & Cheese, is proud to announce its expansion into Brandon with the acquisition of a new performance space located at 225 E. Brandon Blvd., next to the Fox and Hound. Renovations are currently underway to transform the venue into an intimate and immersive theater space that will serve as the organization's primary home.

This new location marks a major milestone for the growing community theater, which will continue producing performances in Ruskin while establishing Brandon as its central hub for live entertainment, education, and creative programming.

"We've always believed in building something that truly belongs to the community," said Amy Windle, president of Brandon Performing Arts. "This new space allows us to expand that vision, bring more stories to life and create a place where people can experience theater in a powerful, up-close way."

Coming off its recent production of Detective Columbo and the highly successful run of A Few Good Men, the organization continues to build a reputation for high-quality, award-winning productions. Its performance of A Few Good Men earned multiple honors across the local community theater circuit, including Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, Best Co-Director, Best Costume Design and Best Production.

"With this new venue, we're not just growing, we're leveling up," said Camille Hashem, co-founder of MacBeth & Cheese. "We're excited to bring even more ambitious productions to the stage and give our audiences an experience that feels both professional and personal."

The upcoming season will feature the original thriller Murder Denied this September, followed by Murder on the Orient Express, It's a Wonderful Life for the holiday season and Romeo and Juliet, among others.

In addition to theatrical productions, the new Brandon venue will host acting classes and improv training led by Joe Davison, known for his work on Stranger Things and his current role in Sorority of the Damned. These programs are designed to support performers of all experience levels while fostering the next generation of local talent.

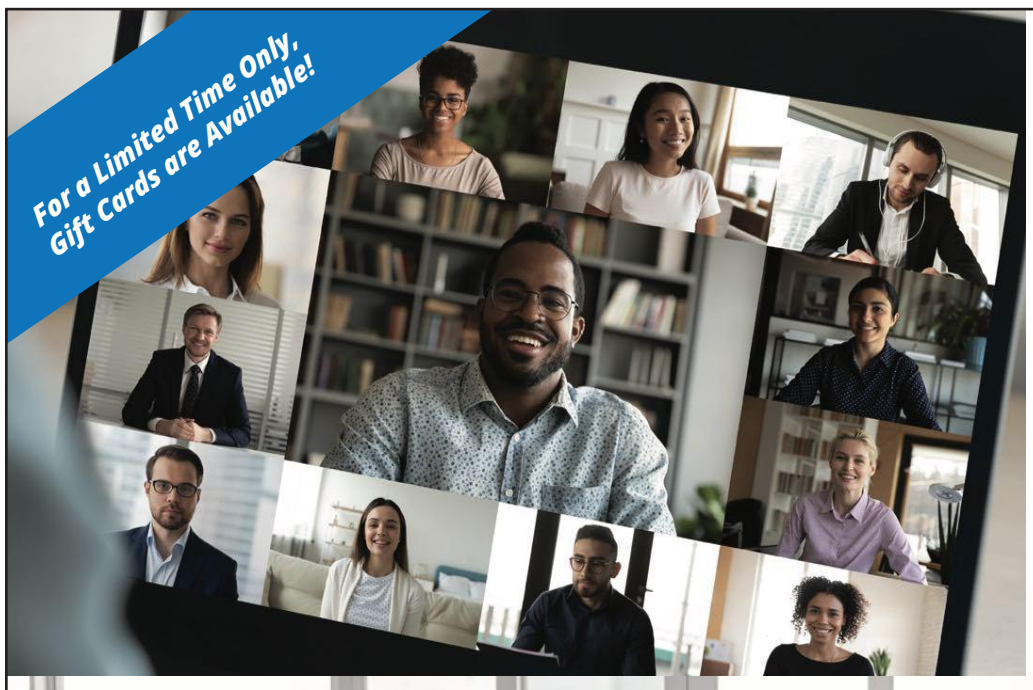
The space will also serve as a community-driven entertainment venue, offering comedy shows, open-mic nights and special events.

Enhancing the theatergoing experience, the neighboring Fox and Hound will provide food and beverage service, creating a unique dinner-and-show atmosphere for guests.

Brandon Performing Arts has a strong history of producing diverse and engaging performances, including Deathtrap, The Odd Couple, Alice's Wonderland, Murder on the Nile and Steel Magnolias, showcasing a wide range of storytelling that continues to resonate with audiences throughout the Tampa Bay area.

With renovations underway and an exciting season ahead, Brandon Performing Arts/MacBeth & Cheese is set to become a cornerstone of the Brandon arts community.

For updates, show announcements and ticket information, visit the website at https://macbethandcheese.com/.





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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.

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NEW SEASON, NEW POSSIBILITIES

Helping Buyers & Sellers Make Moves with Confidence!

THE #1 RESIDENTIAL RESALE AGENT HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY



51015 VENTANA DR
3BR/2BA/2CAR + GOLF COURSE & POND VIEWS
$439,000



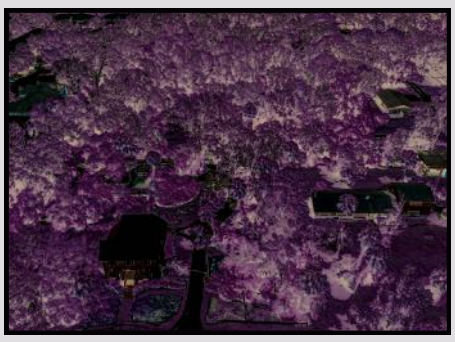
505 S BAY BLVD
5BR/5BA/2CAR + POOL + DOCK + WATERFRONT
$2,999,000



5056 RUBY FLATS DR
2BR/2.5BA/2CAR + DEN + POOL/SPA
$699,000



11306 GREEN HARVEST DR
3BR/2.5BA/2CAR + DEN + POND VIEWS
$425,000



10904 HACKNEY DR
6.13 ACRES + POND + ASC-1 ZONING
$887,000



10983 WINTER CREST DR
3BR/2.5BA + 1 PARKING SPACE
$239,000



219 MANGROVE SHADE CIR
3BR/2.5BA/1CAR
$295,000



984 PEMBROKE POINT WAY
3BR/3BA/2CAR + SCREENED PATIO
$425,000



16607 GOOSE RIBBON PL
4BR/3BA/2CAR + LOFT + FENCED YARD
$375,000



16158 AMETHYST KEY DR
3BR/2BA/2CAR + CONSERVATION LOT
$310,000



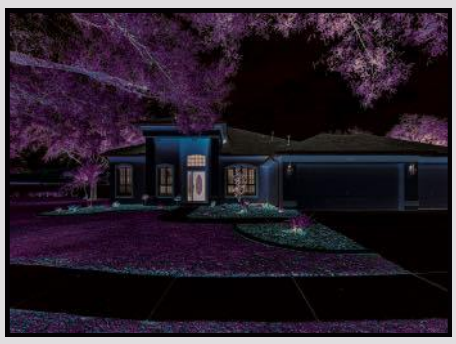
11474 CAPTIVA KAY DR
2BR/2BA/2CAR + POND VIEWS
$235,000



984 PEMBROKE POINT WAY
2BR/2BA/2CAR + DEN + FLORIDA ROOM
$375,000



10923 POND PINE DR
3BR/2BA/2CAR + DEN
$369,000



14112 CREEK RUN DR
4BR/3BA/3CAR + BONUS + POOL/SPA
$689,000



12105 ORCHID ASH ST
5BR/3.5BA/3CAR + BONUS + LOFT
$599,900



6416 LAKE SUNRISE DR
3BR/2BA/2CAR + WATERFRONT + DOCK
$550,000

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From all-day activities at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds to Tampa's Liberty By The Bay events along the river to any number of neighborhood gatherings with families & friends, we have many ways to mark our nation's celebration July 4th! For this one in particular, let's do it safely, peacefully, & with a commitment to keep working on "liberty & justice for all."

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



Ann Marie Vaughan, Realtor

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Before The 4th, Check Out These 4 Riverview Homes!

BEYOND THAT BIG FRONT YARD is a Florida pool home with more than you might think! Start with its nearly 1 acre, privacy-fenced in back with lots of space around a pavered pool deck. Surprise yourself with its guest or in-law suite -- a second "master" bedroom/bath at the opposite corner from the first. Those are 2 of the 4 bedrooms & 3 full baths in this 2,566-SF design that also features a 27-foot living room with brick fireplace. Improvements include a 2022 roof, granite counters & updated appliances. Utility savings come from a private well, septic & sprinkler systems. Plan for your RV, boat or other such extras, too, in Riverview's Shadow Run, a neighborhood that allows them! $575,000

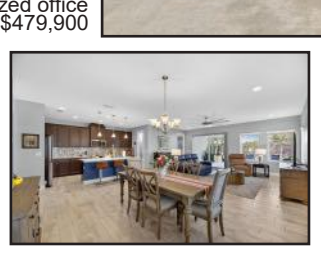
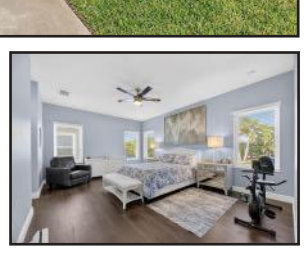


WHEN YOU KNOW, YOU KNOW! If you want & recognize quality upgrades beyond most in an upscale neighborhood, here is the home for you within wonderful Waterset! Inside & outside this Sandpiper by West Bay, you'll find improvements from a 400-SF screened lanai to $65,000 in casement hurricane-impact windows. Tile & LVP floors, decorator fans & fixtures, seamless gutters, salt-free water softener, 8-foot doors including full-glass French doors to the office & a frosted-glass entry with sidelight, security system with cameras front & back, even an electric vehicle charger in the garage await you. It's a 2,100-SF 3/2/2 with a customized office that can be a 4th bedroom. $479,900







A 1-YEAR-NEW ROOF crowns this water-view home, & with other recent upgrades it elevates the property above others in popular Triple Creek! The HVAC, water softener, paint, & key appliances are among those other improvements here, adding value to the 4-bed, 3-bath, 2-car garage home beyond its great location in this neighborhood with resort-style attractions! Lennar's 1,940-SF design arranges bedrooms & baths in a 3-way split so the owner suite is in 1 back corner opposite 2 secondary beds & bath on the other side of the home, leaving the 4th bed/3rd bath combo at the front for guests, teens, or even a home office. In the center are the kitchen with nook, living & dining rooms. $365,900



SAME STREET, SAME FLOOR PLAN as the home at left, but without the pond view & new roof so it's priced a bit lower. Both have no immediate rear neighbor, though! This home features a screened back lanai, stone patio with fire pit, & privacy-fenced view of woods! The view is southeast, by the way, so you're not facing the sun in Florida's late-afternoon heat. Triple Creek residents enjoy advantages such as pools & playground parks, clubhouse & fitness centers, tennis & basketball courts, picnic pavilions & more. You're also close to good schools, shops, restaurants, services, the area's big hospital, & major routes to downtown Tampa, St. Pete, Gulf Coast beaches or beyond. $350,000





