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YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

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24 YEARS Osprey OBSERVER Your Community Newspaper POSITIVE NEWS

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HOLIDAY FUN ARRIVES AT BASS PRO FOR A SEASON OF FAMILY MEMORIES

By Marie Gilmore



Santa Claus is making his festive return to Santa's Wonderland at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's, where family holiday traditions come to life and Christmas memories are made.

Santa makes his grand arrival on Saturday, November 7, at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's locations across the U.S. and Canada, kicking off the Christmas season. Beginning Sunday, November 8, and continuing through Christmas Eve, Santa's Wonderland will feature free studio-quality photos with Santa, kids' crafts and holiday giveaways.

Santa's Magical Arrival Celebration

With sleigh bells ringing and excitement filling the air, Santa will make his grand entrance at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's locations on November 7 at 5 p.m. local time. Families are invited to share in the wonder of the season at this free outdoor Christmas celebration featuring seasonal treats, festive holiday cheer and a free mini reindeer plush giveaway while supplies last.

Since 2008, Santa's Wonderland has become a beloved holiday tradition at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's, providing millions of free holiday photos and creating countless happy memories for kids of all ages. Now entering its 18th season, Santa's Wonderland continues to be the ultimate destination for free holiday magic, joyful memories and family fun.

Starting Sunday, Nov. 8, families can visit Santa's Wonderland in-store to receive a free 4-by-6 studio-quality photo with Santa, as well as a free shareable video. Additional photo packages are available for purchase, with CLUB members receiving 20 percent off.

Visitors can enjoy special holiday giveaways during weekday visits while supplies last, including: Santa Ornament Crafts, from Monday, November 9, through Friday, November 27.

Bass Sticker-By-Number Sheet, from Monday, November 30, through Friday, December 18.

Santa's Wonderland offers plenty of ways for youngsters to embrace the holiday spirit. Kids can enjoy festive crafts and interactive activities, then drop off a letter in Santa's mailbox. Those who include an email address with their letter will receive a merry message back from Santa.

Families can take advantage of free reservations, available up to seven days in advance. By reserving a time online at www.basspro.com/santa or www.cabelas.com/santa, guests can enjoy a smoother holiday experience and spend more time creating lasting Christmas memories. Walk-ins are always welcome and will be accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis.

At 5 p.m. on Tuesdays from November 10 to December 22, experience story time with Santa and Mrs. Claus as they read Christmas classics to families. Following story time, Santa will take a photo with all participating families. Separate reservations are required and open seven days in advance.

Merry Morning Breakfast

At 9 a.m. on Saturday, December 5, gather for a festive breakfast with Santa and his helpers. Separate reservations are required, with a maximum of four individuals per family. Each family will take home a free Santa hat cup and a 4-by-6 photo. Reservations open on Saturday, November 28.

Bass Pro Shops Brandon is located at 10501 Palm River Rd. For reservations, visit the website at www.basspro.com.

LEE ROY SELMON'S LEGACY LIVES ON THROUGH THE SELMON EXPRESSWAY

By Nick Nahas



The Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA) celebrated Hall of Fame Buccaneers' player Lee Roy Selmon on what would have been his 71st birthday on October 20.

The Lee Roy Selmon Expressway was named after the Tampa icon in 1999. According to its website, the Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA) is an independent state agency that owns, maintains and operates four facilities within Hillsborough County: the Selmon Expressway, the Brandon Parkway, Meridian Avenue and the Selmon Greenway.



Lee Roy Selmon, a former Oklahoma football standout, was the first-ever draft pick for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers expansion team in 1976.

Selmon, a former Oklahoma football standout, was the first-ever draft pick for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers expansion team in 1976. During his nine-season NFL career, he earned six consecutive Pro Bowl selections, recorded 78.5 career sacks and helped lead the Bucs to their first NFC Central Division championship in 1979. In 1995, Selmon became the first Buccaneer inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Selmon's commitment to Tampa Bay continued long after his playing career. He served as associate athletic director and later athletic director at the University of South Florida, helping establish the university's football program.

"When I first moved to Tampa Bay, I knew Lee Roy Selmon as a hall of fame football player. What I came to learn was that his impact on this community went far beyond football," said THEA CEO and Executive Director Greg Slater.

THEA commissioned an 8-foot, 800-pound, hollowed bronze Lee Roy Selmon statue along the Selmon Greenway. It depicts him forming the University of South Florida (USF) Bulls gesture with his left hand. It also offers a STEM internship program in his name.

"He was someone who genuinely cared about people and wanted to make a difference in their lives. That is why his legacy means so much to THEA and why we are proud that the Lee Roy Selmon Expressway carries his name. From the statue along the Selmon Greenway to our USF STEM internship program, we are committed to honoring not just his accomplishments but what mattered most to him: creating opportunities for others, especially young people," said Slater.

Although Selmon died in 2011, his legacy lives on today through the Lee Roy Selmon Expressway. According to its website, THEA carrying Selmon's name is about honoring more than a football legend. It is about celebrating a leader who embodied perseverance, service and a commitment to making his community stronger.

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LAWN CARE COMPANY LAUNCHES HOA NOTICE FIX, STORM-READY AND LISTING-READY YARD SERVICES

By Marie Gilmore









Hedges to Edges LLC, a family-run, women-owned lawn care and landscape maintenance company based in Riverview, has launched three new services built around problems local homeowners run into: HOA violation letters, the hurricane season and getting a home ready to sell.

The HOA Notice Fix is for homeowners who receive a violation letter over overgrown hedges, weedy beds, ragged edging, thin mulch or a stained driveway. The crew fixes the items on the letter and sends the homeowner before-and-after photos to forward to the HOA.

"A lot of our customers live in HOA neighborhoods, and those letters are stressful," said Chris Hedges, lead technician. "We wanted to make it simple: Send us the letter, we take care of the yard and you get photos showing it's done.

The Storm-Ready Yard Check covers trimming hedges and shrubs back from windows, rooflines and AC units; hauling away loose debris and yard junk that could blow around in high winds; and checking fences and gates. After a storm, the company also handles cleanup.

The Listing-Ready Yard Reset is a one-visit refresh for home sellers and realtors ahead of listing photos and showings: mowing, edging, hedge trimming, weeding, fresh mulch, power washing and junk hauling.

Hedges to Edges is owned by Rennaye Hedges, who launched the business in July. The company works seven days a week in Tampa, New Tampa, Brandon, Riverview, FishHawk, Lithia, Apollo Beach, Ruskin and Sun City Center; is licensed and insured; and offers free estimates.

For more information, call or text 813-446-5813, email hedgestoedgesllc@gmail.com or visit https://hedgestoedges.com/.

10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY AND REBRAND OF FLYLOCK SECURITY SOUTH

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly celebrated the 10-year anniversary and exciting rebrand of FlyLock Security Solutions Tampa South, formerly known as The Flying Locksmiths, with a special ribbon cutting ceremony held on October 6 at the company's location at 6619 S. 78th St., Ste. 120, in Riverview.

The celebration brought together chamber members, business leaders and community supporters to recognize a decade of service and an exciting new chapter for the company. Guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, refreshments and networking while learning more about FlyLock Security Solutions and its continued commitment to protecting local businesses.

BRCC President Amber Aaron welcomed attendees and thanked everyone for coming out to support this important milestone. She then introduced Michael Broussard, owner of FlyLock Security Solutions Tampa South, who shared remarks about the business, its 10-year journey and the significance of the company's rebrand.

FlyLock Security Solutions provides comprehensive commercial security services designed to help businesses protect its employees, customers and property. The company specializes in electronic access control, security camera systems, commercial doors and hardware, intercom systems, locks and keys, locksmith services and safes.

Serving businesses of all sizes, FlyLock develops customized security solutions ranging from securing individual entry points to managing comprehensive security systems across multiple locations. With locally operated teams supported by a nationwide network, the company combines personalized customer service, industry experience and modern security technology to meet the evolving needs of its clients.

The transition from The Flying Locksmiths to FlyLock Security Solutions reflects the company's expanded focus on comprehensive commercial security solutions while continuing the trusted service and relationships established over the past decade.

Following the official ribbon cutting, BRCC Ambassador Melissa Canfield read a special proclamation declaring October 6, 2026, as FlyLock Security Solutions Day in recognition of the company's 10-year anniversary, continued growth and contributions to the local business community.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Broussard and the entire FlyLock Security Solutions Tampa South team on this significant milestone and wishes them continued success as they begin this exciting new chapter.

For more information about FlyLock Security Solutions, visit the company website at www.flyinglocksmiths.com.

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METHODICA NOTARY & SIGNING SERVICES HOSTS RIBBON CUTTING

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly celebrated the grand opening of Methodica Notary & Signing Services with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony on October 1. Chamber members, ambassadors and community supporters gathered to congratulate owner Dayrin 'Day' Acosta and welcome her business to the chamber community.

BRCC President Amber Aaron opened the ceremony by welcoming attendees and introducing Acosta, who shared information about her new business, the services she offers and her commitment to providing professional, reliable and convenient notary services to individuals, families and businesses throughout the Tampa Bay area.

Methodica Notary & Signing Services specializes in mobile notarization and certified loan signing services, bringing the convenience of a professional notary directly to clients at their preferred locations. With a focus on professionalism, precision and discretion, the company assists clients with a variety of important documents, including powers of attorney, affidavits, estate planning documents, real estate transactions, certified copies and loan signing packages.

As a Florida notary public and certified notary signing agent, Acosta serves individuals, families, attorneys, title companies and real estate professionals. Methodica also offers bilingual services in English and Spanish, helping make the notarization process more accessible to the diverse communities of Hillsborough, Polk, Manatee and Pinellas counties.

For attorneys and title companies, Methodica provides additional support services, including offsite document execution, witness coordination, document scanning, packaging and courier assistance. With evening and Saturday appointments available, the business strives to accommodate clients who need flexibility beyond traditional business hours.

Following the ceremonial ribbon cutting, BRCC Ambassador Joseph Brace presented a special proclamation officially declaring October 1, 2026, as Methodica Notary & Signing Services Day, recognizing this important milestone and celebrating the business' commitment to serving the community.

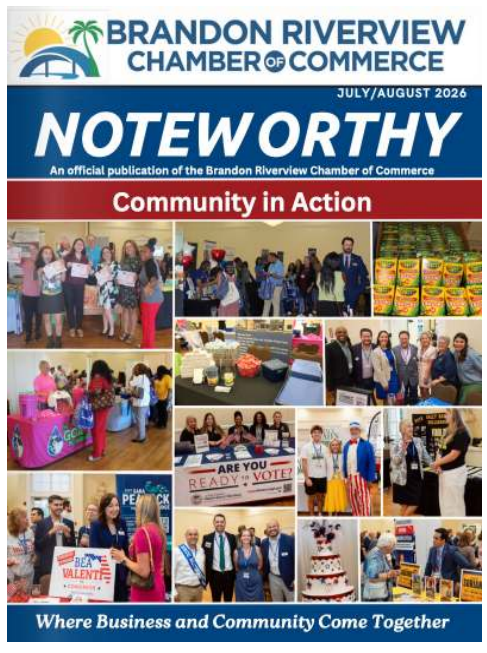
The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Acosta on the opening of Methodica Notary & Signing Services and looks forward to supporting her continued growth and success. The chamber also extends its appreciation to the members, ambassadors and community supporters who attended the celebration and demonstrated the power of local businesses supporting one another.

For more information about Methodica Notary & Signing Services, visit https://methodicanotary.com/ or contact 305-968-1376.

Methodica's service area includes FishHawk, Lithia, Riverview, Brandon, Valrico and surrounding Tampa Bay communities.

MORE THAN A MEMBERSHIP: CHAMBER BUILDS BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

Staff Report



In today's competitive business environment, success is about more than offering a great product or service. Building relationships, earning trust, increasing visibility and becoming an active part of the community can be just as important. The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) provides local businesses with opportunities to do all of that while connecting with a network of approximately 700 businesses.

Chamber membership offers more than a referral. It provides a platform for visibility, credibility, education, networking and community involvement designed to help businesses build relationships that can lead to long-term growth.

Businesses can increase their visibility through member spotlights, ribbon-cutting ceremonies, social media promotion, sponsorship opportunities, networking events and the chamber's online business directory. These opportunities help keep businesses in front of potential customers, fellow business owners and community leaders.

Chamber involvement can also help businesses establish credibility. By participating in local events and activities, members demonstrate their commitment to the community and create opportunities to build a positive reputation among consumers and other businesses.

Connections are another important part of membership. Through weekly networking groups, monthly membership luncheons, educational workshops, councils and special events, members can meet professionals from a variety of industries. Those relationships can lead to referrals, strategic partnerships, collaborations and mentorship opportunities.

The chamber also provides educational and professional development opportunities designed to help businesses stay informed and strengthen their skills. Whether a business is newly established or has served the community for decades, members can access resources and relationships that support continued growth.

The impact extends beyond individual businesses. When local companies collaborate, support one another and become engaged in their communities, they contribute to a stronger local economy and a more connected community.

For businesses looking to increase exposure, expand their professional network and become more involved locally, chamber membership can be an investment in long-term success.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is located at 6437 Watson Rd., Lower Level, in Riverview. For more, call 813-234-5944 or visit www.centralhillsboroughchamber.com.

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NOVA FURNITURE OPENS IN BRANDON WITH RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY

Staff Report



NOVA Furniture celebrated its grand opening on October 2 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce. Chamber President Amber Aaron and community supporters joined the NOVA Furniture team for the celebration and officially proclaimed October 2, 2026, as NOVA Furniture Day.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly celebrated the grand opening of NOVA Furniture with an official Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on October 2. Chamber members, local business professionals and community supporters gathered to congratulate the NOVA Furniture team and welcome the business to the Brandon community.

BRCC President Amber Aaron congratulated the NOVA Furniture team on this exciting milestone and recognized the company's investment in the local business community. Following the ribbon cutting, Aaron presented a special proclamation officially declaring October 2, 2026, as NOVA Furniture Day.

Attendees enjoyed refreshments, giveaways and networking opportunities while exploring the store's extensive selection of furniture, mattresses and home decor. The celebration provided an opportunity for guests to learn more about NOVA Furniture and show their support for a fellow chamber member.

NOVA Furniture is a Florida-based furniture and mattress retailer dedicated to helping customers create comfortable, stylish living spaces at affordable prices. With locations in Brandon, Cape Coral, Fort Myers and Stuart, the company offers a wide variety of living room, bedroom, dining room, office and outdoor furniture, along with mattresses and home accessories.

Customers can choose from a large in-stock inventory featuring popular furniture brands, flexible financing options, convenient pickup and statewide delivery. With an emphasis on affordability, selection and personalized customer service, NOVA Furniture strives to make furnishing a home a simple and enjoyable experience.

NOVA Furniture is located at 225 W. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon, and its website is www.novafurnitureusa.com.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates the entire NOVA Furniture team on their grand opening and wishes them continued growth and success. The chamber also extends its appreciation to the members, ambassadors and community supporters who attended the celebration.

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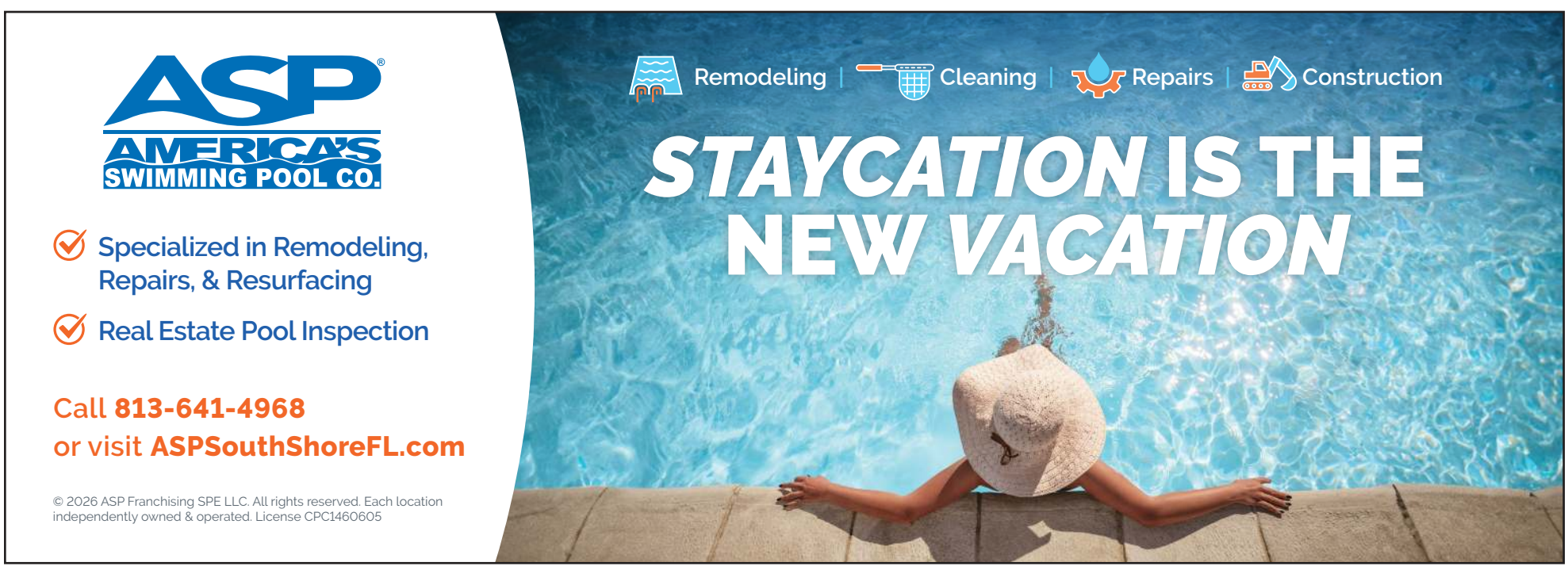


2ND ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING WITH A TRIBUTE TO A LOCAL HERO

Staff Report



The magic of Christmas returns to Apollo Beach on Saturday, December 5, at 7 p.m., as Salty Shamrock Irish Pub hosts the second annual Official Apollo Beach Christmas Tree Lighting, bringing families, friends and neighbors together for an unforgettable evening of holiday cheer.

Standing 26 feet tall along U.S. 41 in front of Salty Shamrock, the beautifully decorated Christmas tree has become a festive centerpiece for the community. Surrounded by whimsical gingerbread houses and gingerbread characters, the display offers wonderful family photo opportunities throughout December.

This year's ceremonial lighting will hold special meaning as the community honors Matthew Murray, a retired U.S. Marine Corps major, combat veteran and ATF special agent, along with his wife, Courtney, and their two children, Wyatt and Parker.



Murray dedicated his life to serving and protecting others, completing three deployments during Operation Iraqi Freedom and 20 years of Marine Corps service. In December 2024, while attempting to de-escalate a violent confrontation and protect others, Murray was tragically shot and suffered a devastating spinal cord injury that left him paralyzed. His extraordinary courage, sacrifice and commitment to service embody the true spirit of community and giving.

The Murray family will be honored during this year's tree-lighting ceremony, reminding everyone of the strength, resilience and love that bring communities together.

Guests can enjoy real snow in Florida, visits and photographs with Santa and Mrs. Claus, festive holiday cocktails and live entertainment from the Shakes Society Band from 7-10 p.m. The official tree lighting takes place at 7 p.m.

Now in its second year, this family-friendly celebration has taken the place of the former Apollo Beach Golf Cart Parade, continuing the tradition of bringing the community together during the holiday season.

Everyone is invited to celebrate, create memories and experience the magic of Christmas in Apollo Beach.

Salty Shamrock Irish Pub is located at 6186 N. U.S. 41 in Apollo Beach.

Visit www.saltyshamrock.net or follow Salty Shamrock on Facebook.

RIBBON CUTTING MARKS GRAND OPENING OF SHARKEY'S CUTS FOR KIDS

By Marie Gilmore



Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly celebrated the grand opening of Sharkey's Cuts for Kids with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony on October 2. Chamber members, community leaders and guests gathered to welcome the new business and celebrate its commitment to providing a fun, family-friendly haircut experience for children throughout the Riverview community.



BRCC President Amber Aaron welcomed attendees and congratulated owner Joni Borawski on this exciting milestone. Aaron invited Borawski to share information about the business and the unique experience Sharkey's Cuts for Kids brings to local families.

Sharkey's Cuts for Kids is a children's hair salon designed to transform an ordinary haircut into a memorable adventure. Featuring themed vehicle chairs, video games, cartoons and special treats, the salon provides an entertaining and welcoming environment where children can feel comfortable and excited about their visits. With an emphasis on quality service and customer satisfaction, Sharkey's strives to create positive experiences for children while building lasting relationships with parents and families.

The grand opening celebration reflected the salon's playful and family-oriented atmosphere, with guests enjoying balloon twisting, face painting and opportunities to connect with fellow chamber members and community supporters.

Following the official ribbon cutting, BRCC Ambassador Lawrence Barnes presented a special proclamation declaring October 2, 2026, as Sharkey's Cuts for Kids Day, recognizing the business' grand opening and its addition to the local business community.

Sharkey's Cuts for Kids is located at 13163 U.S. 301 in Riverview, and its website is https://sharkeyscutsforkidsriverview.com/.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Borawski and the entire Sharkey's Cuts for Kids team on their grand opening and looks forward to supporting their continued growth and success.

"We are excited to welcome Sharkey's Cuts for Kids to our chamber community and celebrate another business investing in the Riverview area," said the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce.

THE GALLERY TAMPA CREATES AN UPSCALE COMMUNITY TO CALL HOME AT EVERY STAGE OF SENIOR LIVING

By Brian Bokor







A favorite chair, a treasured collection or cherished keepsakes can help a new residence feel like home. At The Gallery Tampa, residents are encouraged to bring those personal touches with them as they settle into an upscale community designed around comfort, convenience and care.

"We don't care how many holes they put in the walls," Executive Director Launa Moore said, highlighting the community's openness to residents personalizing their new homes.

That sense of belonging extends beyond each residence. Shared gathering spaces, dining venues and activities are designed to bring neighbors together, encouraging new friendships and helping residents feel at home within the community.

The community is centrally located at 930 Experience Loop along Bell Shoals Road in Valrico, south of Bloomingdale Avenue and north of the FishHawk Boulevard/Boyette Road intersection.

The first resident moved in on November 1, with several more having arrived the following day. The 17-acre community brings independent living, assisted living and memory support together on one campus. Moore said residents can move between levels of care while staying at The Gallery, and couples can live in different care areas within the community.

The community features 202 residences: 115 independent living homes, including six villas and 24 flats; 45 assisted living residences; and 42 memory support residences.

Interiors were created by Senior By Design, a Dallas, Texas-based interior design firm, around The Gallery's art theme. The team selected high-end materials and furnishings shipped from its Dallas warehouse.

Comfort guided the choices, especially for the chairs. Designers considered seat height, cushion firmness and supportive armrests to make sitting down and getting up more comfortable. Tastefully selected art complements the interiors throughout public spaces and residential corridors. Large windows and natural materials connect the interiors with the campus' mature trees.

Other design details came from abroad. Moore said the curtains were hand-stitched in Portugal and the mirrored ceiling was inspired by a design found in Barcelona. A custom teal Yamaha piano stands in the independent living lobby alongside areas for residents and guests to gather.

That attention to detail continues in memory care, which has an open, bright design; high ceilings; and nurses on staff. Meals are thoughtfully tailored to help residents feel comfortable and enjoy a familiar sense of home.

Dining is another part of daily life. The five venues include the Golden Marlin Bar, Little Marlin Restaurant, Gulfstream Restaurant, a cocktail bar and bistro, and a specialty raw bar. Private dining rooms are also available, and The Gallery offers a continental breakfast.

Moore said executive chef David Dunn came from Meat Market, while chef de cuisine Corey Pitts previously cooked for the Buccaneers and Detroit Pistons. The team also includes line cooks from Bern's Steak House and Meat Market.

Residents also have access to a salon with a men's barber section and pedicure chairs, a theater, activity rooms, an art studio, a media room, a fitness center, a resort-style pool and a pickleball court.

Outside, the campus includes a dog park, an outdoor kitchen and grilling area and a 5-acre nature preserve offering opportunities for birdwatching. Residents may bring pets of any size, provided they are friendly with people and other animals.

The team also includes Nick McLaughlin, director of sales; Michele Rivard, lead resident services; and Shannon VanderKooy, leasing counselor.

Many residents are local people looking to downsize while staying close to the places and routines they know, Moore said. Chauffeured and scheduled trips help residents stay connected to favorite restaurants, shops, churches and other familiar destinations, making it easier to maintain the everyday connections that make the area feel like home. Wesley Elias, director of resident experience, coordinates events and outings, giving residents opportunities to enjoy familiar favorites and discover new ones.

The leasing center is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and by appointment on weekends.

For more information or to schedule a tour, call 813-642-4430.





EISENHOWER BASKETBALL GOES UNDEFEATED FOR SECOND SEASON

By Nick Nahas



The Eisenhower Middle School boys basketball team has been dominant the last two seasons, winning every game and claiming two county championships. They beat Farnell Middle School 44-33 in the county championship, going 9-0 in the process.

"I was excited and proud of our team because all of our hard work paid off," said team captain Amare Young. "I enjoyed playing with my teammates, competing together and building a bond as a family."

The program has seen a huge turnaround under fifth-year Head Coach Otis White. In his first two years they went 2-4, and in his third year they went 5-0 and lost in the first round of the playoffs. They have gone undefeated and have won two straight county championships in his fourth and fifth seasons. He was assisted by coach Jamon Cox. The program has never won back-to-back championships until now. The last championship the Generals won before 2025 was in 2016.

"I was happy and excited, but it didn't feel like last year because last year was harder and more challenging, which made it better," said team captain Aiden Daniels. "I enjoyed the people and being with my friends and having coach White as a coach again and playing as a team."

White said that his team worked hard and his players were coachable and willing to learn, which made his job much easier. He said that the team's full-court press led to many fast-break scoring chances.

"They are all good kids. I tried to build a culture of a real student athlete, with the emphasis being on the student part, and the fact that they all are very respectful and good kids, for them to be willing to listen to me when I'm very passionate and intense –– I can yell and get on them and hold them accountable, they all can take it and understand that it comes from a place of love," said White. "They don't complain, they don't talk to the refs and they don't show any emotion, they just handled their business. I'm proud of the fact that they are all hard-working kids."

The roster includes Kolton Adkins, Dahmani Cox, Memphis Culbertson, Aiden Daniels, Stephen Fray Jr., Ricky Huynh, Terry Johnson Jr., Sean Kinsey, Jabniel Pacheco Maldonado, Sebastian Ramirez, Rick Salmon Jr., Jonathan Segura, Joseph Taylor, Kallum Tyler Jr., Amare Young and Kyson Young.

"I was excited that we went back–to–back," said team captain Salmon. "I will remember how we had fun practices, and we were serious when we needed to be."

The team is going on a victory tour this offseason with many exciting upcoming events, such as the Orion180 Tip-off Classic at the Benchmark International Arena. "We accomplished something that these young men are going to remember for the rest of their lives, and I just want to get them promoted as much as possible," said White.

LOCAL VETERANS SUPPORT WOMEN MONUMENT WITH $500 DONATION

Staff Report



KeishaMarie Douglas with Roland Tiso, Jr., and Connie White

A weekly gathering of local veterans recently became an opportunity to support an important piece of Hillsborough County veterans' history.

At the October 28 breakfast meeting of Bob's Vets Brandon, Valrico resident, veteran and author Roland Tiso presented a $500 check to Connie White, one of the local veterans helping lead fundraising efforts for the Women Veterans Monument planned for Hillsborough County's Veterans Memorial Park.

The monument is being created to honor the women who have served in the United States military. A dedication ceremony is planned for June 2027.

Tiso, who has previously shared his experiences as a veteran and author with the local community, is currently completing his second book, Soldiering in Hard Times. His $500 contribution came as an advance connected to the book and was donated in support of the monument project.

White and the fundraising team at AMVETS Post 44 have also been actively working to raise awareness and financial support for the monument. The group received another check during the October 26 monthly meeting of the Veterans Council of Hillsborough County. Veterans Council President Joe Muhlberger was on hand for the presentation.

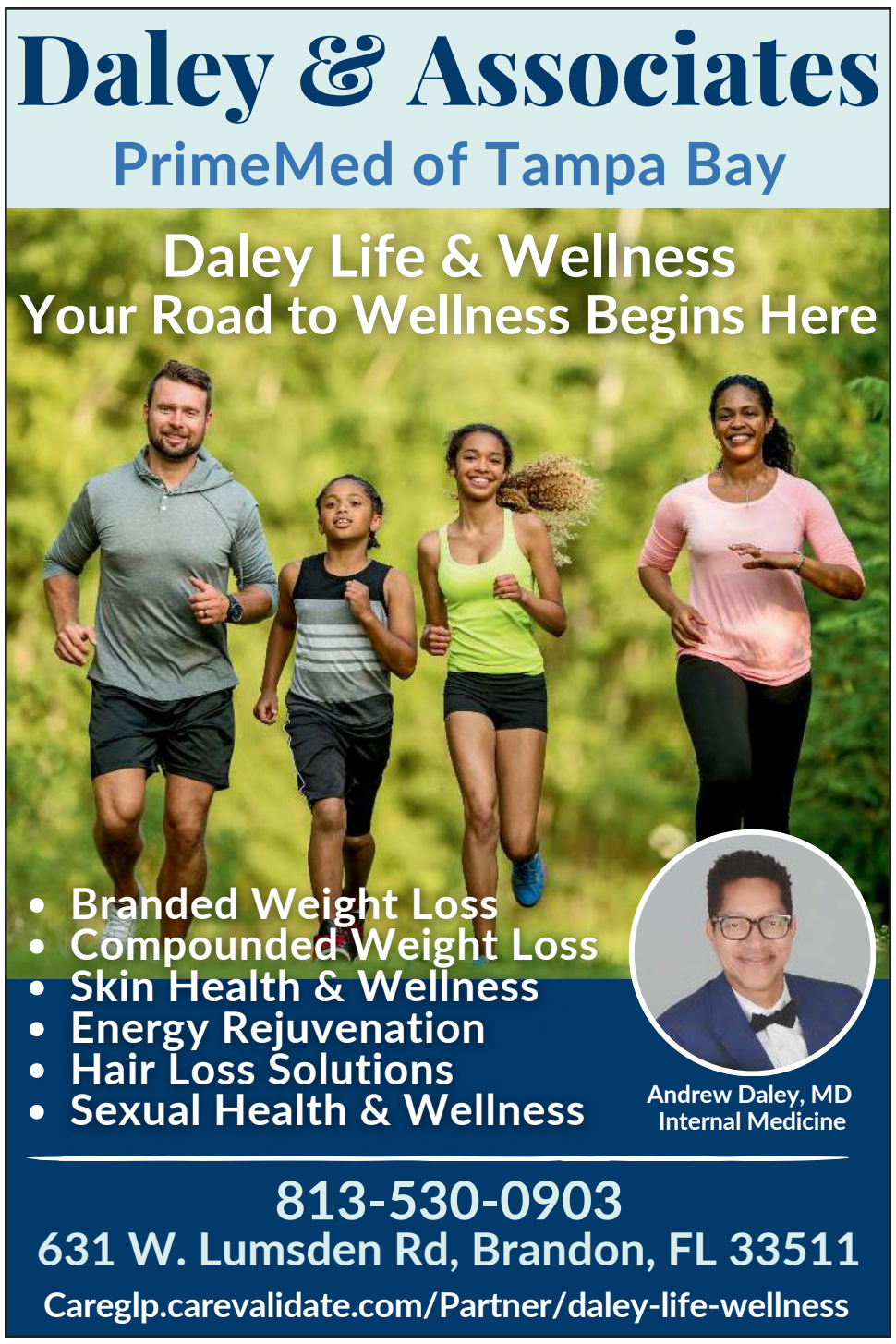
The support reflects the strong network of veterans and community members working together to recognize the contributions of those who have served.

Bob's Vets Brandon is approaching its eight-month anniversary and has become a regular gathering place for veterans, active-duty service members and community supporters. Hosted by KeishaMarie Douglas, Bob's Vets Brandon meets every Wednesday at 7 a.m. at Bob Evans, located at 10119 Horace Ave. in Brandon.

The informal weekly breakfast provides an opportunity for veterans to connect, share experiences and hear from guest speakers and local organizations. There are no membership fees, dues or attendance requirements, and veterans and community supporters are welcome to attend.

KeishaMarie's Veterans Wing Women, which has also been active in supporting local veterans, recently received nonprofit status.

With the Women Veterans Monument now moving toward its planned 2027 dedication, local veterans continue to demonstrate that service and community support extend well beyond military duty.







27NORTH REALTY MARKS FIRST YEAR WITH $110 MILLION IN PRODUCTION

By Shawna Calvert



One year ago, 27North Realty was an idea built around a simple question: What would a real estate brokerage look like if we created it around what agents and clients actually need?

Gregg and I have always tried to live by the Go-Giver philosophy of giving more in value than we expect to receive in return. It is how we approach our lives, our business and our relationships, and it became the foundation for 27North.

Our first year has been about turning that idea into something real. Before opening our Apollo Beach office, we remodeled the building and chose a location with highway frontage so 27North would be visible in the community we serve. We also launched an extensive marketing campaign to build brand awareness and make sure people understand who we are, what we stand for and how we are different.

That investment has produced results faster than we expected. As of October 7, 2026, 27North Realty ranks as the No. 1 brokerage in Apollo Beach by total volume, with more than $110 million in 2026 production (source: Stellar MLS, 1/1/2026 to 10/7/2026). We are proud of that accomplishment, but we are even more proud that it has come while building the kind of company we set out to create.

Sometimes, people assume success like that must come from shortcuts. It doesn't. It comes from hard work, from doing things the right way even when an easier way is available and from giving more than we receive.

We have focused heavily on helping agents grow through support, leads, education, mentorship and technology. Artificial intelligence has become a major part of that mission. We love finding the newest tools and teaching agents how to use them to better understand their businesses, market more creatively, communicate more effectively and connect at a deeper level with their clients. To us, technology should never replace relationships. It should help strengthen them.

One of the most rewarding parts of this year has been hearing from agents who have asked to join us. Like attracts like, and the people finding their way to 27North share the belief that how you do the work matters just as much as the results.

For year two, our goal is not simply to become bigger, it is to become better. Better education. Better technology. Better marketing. Better support.

We are proud of what we built in year one, but it still feels like we are just getting started. 27North is located at 6138 N. U.S. 41, Apollo Beach, visit online at www.27northrealty.com or call 813-645-4663.

Visit www.relocatingtoparadise.com, a guide for people moving to South Shore, with info on flood zones, canal depths and the commute to Tampa and MacDill.

WATERSET CONCERTS FOR A CAUSE — GOOD VIBES. GREAT CAUSE

Staff Report

Bring your friends and family to enjoy live music while supporting a great cause in the Waterset community. Admission to the concerts is free, and the event is open to the public — just bring a nonperishable food donation to support Feeding Tampa Bay. All donations go directly to a local food bank, The Community Cupboard, to help area families in need.

Concerts take place on select Saturdays in the fall from 6-9 p.m. at The Lakeside, located at 7250 Parkshore Dr. in Apollo Beach.*

Each concert will be accompanied by a tasty line-up of local food trucks sure to satisfy! Food trucks will be on-site at 5 p.m.

The Can't-miss Lineup

On Saturday, October 24, Stella Beat brings the vibrant energy of Latin music to the stage with infectious rhythms and lively performances. Whether you're dancing all night or simply soaking in the fun atmosphere, their high-energy show is a celebration of music, culture, and fun.

On Saturday, November 7, 501 Band brings the soulful sounds of blues, funk and jazz to the stage with a unique blend of groove-driven music rhythms and captivating musicianship. Based in Orlando, this talented group delivers dynamic live performances filled with energy and feel-good vibes.

On Saturday, November 14, Summer Breeze brings the smooth sounds of yacht rock and classic soft rock to the stage with timeless hits from the '70s and '80s. Their laid-back grooves and nostalgic melodies create the perfect soundtrack for an evening of great music and good vibes.

The Cause

Music feeds the soul and food feeds our potential. One hundred percent of every donation you bring goes directly to The Community Cupboard. This local initiative feeds over 500 families every week. Let's give back, together.

All donations are greatly appreciated! Enter your first name and last name both as Waterset when donating. Feeding Tampa Bay and the Community Cupboard need our help, especially with the holidays coming up soon. All donations will go to helping families in need within our community.

The Community Cupboard and Feeding Tampa Bay would be extremely grateful to receive:

- Pasta/pasta sauce.
- One lb. white rice.
- Canned vegetables (corn, peas, green beans).
- Canned fruit.
- Canned red or black beans.
- Mac and cheese.
- Packaged cookies.

For more information, visit www.watersetfl.com/concert/ or call 813-235-0154.

*Dates subject to change due to inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances.



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LIBRARY CARD OPENS THE DOOR TO FREE FLORIDA ORCHESTRA TICKETS

By Kelly Wise Valdes



A Hillsborough County library card now offers free orchestra vouchers, along with other cultural freebies across Tampa Bay.

The Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative is partnering with The Florida Orchestra to give residents a chance to enjoy live symphonic music free of charge during the orchestra's 2026-27 season.

The library announced that a limited number of free concert vouchers will be available on a firstcome, firstserved basis at local library branches beginning this month. Each person may receive up to two vouchers while supplies last.

The Florida Orchestra, founded in 1968, performs more than 100 concerts each year and serves as one of the region's major cultural institutions. Library officials expect interest in the vouchers to be high and encourage early pickup at any Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative location.

Library officials said the partnership supports its mission to expand access to the arts and create new opportunities for cultural engagement. The Florida Orchestra's 2026-27 season includes a mix of traditional masterworks, contemporary pieces and special event concerts intended to appeal to both longtime patrons and new audiences.

Residents can claim vouchers by visiting any participating Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative location. Library staff will distribute them until all are claimed, with no reservations or holds permitted.

In addition to the new orchestra vouchers, library cardholders can also take advantage of the county's popular Discovery Pass program, which provides free onetime admission to a variety of local museums and attractions. Participating venues include the Tampa Bay History Center, Glazer Children's Museum, Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, American Victory Ship & Museum, Florida Holocaust Museum, Imagine Museum of Contemporary Glass Art, Tampa Museum of Art, Henry B. Plant Museum and others. Reservations are digital, limited in number and typically valid for a seven-day checkout period.

Residents seeking more information about free cultural programs, museum access or voucher availability can visit their local library or check the library system's website at www.hcplc.org or call 813-273-3652. You can also contact the library via text messaging at 813-352-1603.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HIKING SPREE RETURNS FOR 11TH YEAR

By Marie Gilmore



Hillsborough County residents are invited to lace up their hiking shoes and explore the area's parks, preserves and natural spaces during the 11th Annual Hillsborough County Hiking Spree, taking place from November 1 through March 31, 2027.

The annual program encourages residents of all ages and fitness levels to get outside, stay active and discover the natural beauty found throughout Hillsborough County. Participants can choose from a variety of trails and experiences, making the Hiking Spree accessible to both experienced hikers and those who are new to the trails.

The Hiking Spree officially kicks off on Saturday, November 7, from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at Keystone Park and Recreation Center, located at 17928 Gunn Hwy. in Odessa. The free celebration will feature guided hikes, live presentations, interactive exhibitors, family-friendly activities and local food trucks.

No registration is required to attend the kickoff, providing an opportunity for returning hikers to reconnect with fellow trail enthusiasts while newcomers can learn more about the program and begin planning their Hiking Spree adventure.

To complete the Hiking Spree, participants must hike a minimum of eight designated trails, including at least one "choice" trail. Those who complete the requirements can earn rewards including an annual patch, a walking stick medallion or a bandana for their hiking companion.

The Hiking Spree offers trails ranging from easy, paved pathways to more strenuous routes through natural areas. Neighborhood park and recreation center trails are generally shorter and paved, with many offering water, restrooms and other amenities. These trails are also a good starting point for people who are new to hiking.

Conservation park trails provide a more immersive nature experience, with many featuring primitive paths through habitats such as upland pine flatwoods, wetlands and forests. Nature preserve trails take hikers even farther into natural areas, with unpaved paths, rougher terrain and fewer amenities.

Local hiking opportunities featured in past Hiking Sprees have included FishHawk Creek Nature Preserve, Alderman's Ford and Rhodine Scrub Nature Preserve, giving residents in the eastern portion of the county opportunities to participate close to home.

Hikers are encouraged to bring a trail map, compass or GPS, plenty of water, appropriate shoes, sun protection, snacks and bug spray. Trail conditions can vary, so participants should select routes that match their experience and fitness level.

For more information, including trail locations, maps and reward details, visit the website at https://hcfl.gov/.







LOCAL CEMETERIES HONOR VETERANS WITH WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

By Marie Gilmore



Local communities will come together on Saturday, December 19, for National Wreaths Across America Day, for which volunteers will gather at cemeteries across the country to remember and honor veterans by placing remembrance wreaths on their graves.

Two local locations participating in this year's program are Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell and Serenity Meadows Memorial Park, Funeral Home & Crematory in Riverview.

Wreaths Across America carries the year-round mission to "Remember, Honor and Teach," with volunteers coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies at thousands of locations across all 50 states, at sea and abroad. The national effort provides an opportunity for families, veterans' organizations, community groups and individuals to honor those who served.

At Florida National Cemetery, located at 6502 SW 102nd Ave., the National Wreaths Across America Day ceremony and wreath distribution will take place at 10 a.m. on December 19. The cemetery will also host a Friends & Family Day event on Saturday, December 12, giving community members an additional opportunity to learn more about the program and support the effort.

Community members can participate by sponsoring a wreath in honor of a veteran or volunteering during the wreath-laying event. Each sponsorship helps provide a wreath for a veteran's grave while supporting Wreaths Across America's mission of remembrance and education.

Serenity Meadows Memorial Park, Funeral Home & Crematory, located at 6919 Providence Rd., will also participate. The cemetery has 750 veteran graves and is working toward its goal of placing a wreath on every veteran's grave.

The ceremony at Serenity Meadows will begin at 10 a.m., with wreath placement immediately afterward. Volunteers will have the opportunity to participate in laying remembrance wreaths and saying the name of each veteran aloud, creating a personal tribute to those who served.

Serenity Meadows is accepting volunteers, and community members interested in participating can call 813-677-9494. Wreath sponsorships are $17.

National Wreaths Across America Day is more than a wreath-laying ceremony. It provides an opportunity for generations to come together, share stories of military service and ensure the sacrifices of veterans are remembered.

For more information about Wreaths Across America and opportunities to sponsor a wreath or volunteer, visit www.wreathsacrossamerica.org.

THE BLOOM EXCHANGE: COFFEE, FLOWERS AND PLANTS COME TOGETHER

By McKenzie Brown



The Bloom Exchange owners Kish and Shannon Patel offer a wide variety of houseplants, fresh flowers, plant care items and a small coffee bar.

For plant lovers and coffee enthusiasts, The Bloom Exchange in Riverview offers a place where two passions come together under one roof.

Located at 13438 Boyette Rd., The Bloom Exchange is a neighborhood plant shop, floral boutique and coffee bar owned by Shannon and Kish Patel. The welcoming space was created as a place where customers can shop for plants and flowers, enjoy a specialty coffee and take a moment to slow down and reconnect with nature.

The shop carries a wide selection of houseplants, ranging from beginner-friendly varieties to unique tropical plants sought after by experienced collectors. New selections arrive regularly, including monthly restocks, giving customers a reason to return and discover something different.

Customers can also find everything they need to care for their plants, including pots, planters, specialized soil, plant-care tools and other accessories.

Fresh flowers are another highlight at The Bloom Exchange. Fresh-cut flowers arrive each weekend, with grab-and-go bouquets and arrangements that change with the seasons. Customers can also build their own floral selections or choose from specialty Bloom Boxes, which pair coffee with a mini floral arrangement displayed in a glass vase.

At the coffee bar, visitors can enjoy hot or iced specialty drinks made with beans from local Banyan Coffee Co. The menu includes Americanos, cappuccinos, lattes and mochas, with options for syrups and alternative milks. A selection of TeBella teas is also available, including Florida Orange Blossom, Moroccan Mint, Pumpkin Chai, Masala Chai and Sweet Banana Crème.

The Bloom Exchange is also preparing to offer creative workshops designed to bring the community together. Upcoming classes will include floral arranging, terrarium building and other plant-inspired projects. The workshops will give participants an opportunity to learn something new while creating something they can take home.

"The Bloom Exchange was created to share our love for plants, flowers and creativity," Shannon said. "We wanted to build a warm, welcoming space where plant lovers can share plant tips, exchange knowledge and inspiration and celebrate the joy of greenery."

The shop is open Wednesday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. It is closed Monday and Tuesday. For more information, email fhbloomexchange@gmail.com.



CHABAD INVITES WOMEN AND GIRLS TO "J'ADORE" CHALLAH BAKE & BRUNCH

Staff Report



Chabad of Brandon & SouthShore is excited to invite women and girls ages 10 and up to a beautiful afternoon of tradition, inspiration, and community at its upcoming J'adore Challah Bake & Brunch, taking place on Sunday, November 22, at 12 Noon at the Chabad House, located at 11412 McMullen Rd. in Riverview.

This special event will bring women and girls of all backgrounds and levels of experience together to discover the joy and meaning of baking challah, the traditional braided bread enjoyed at Jewish Shabbat and holiday meals.

Participants will enjoy a hands-on challah-baking experience, learning how to prepare and braid their own challah dough while exploring the spiritual significance of this cherished Jewish tradition. The afternoon will also feature a delicious brunch and opportunities to connect with friends, meet new people and enjoy a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

More than simply a baking workshop, the J'adore Challah Bake & Brunch is an opportunity to celebrate Jewish womanhood, strengthen community bonds and experience the beauty of traditions passed down through generations.

"Challah baking is so much more than preparing bread. It is a meaningful tradition that connects Jewish women across generations and around the world," said Tzippy Rubashkin of Chabad of Brandon & SouthShore. "We hope every participant leaves feeling inspired, connected, and uplifted."

All baking supplies and aprons will be provided; no prior baking experience is necessary.

Admission is $36 per person, or $25 for CAA (Chabad Active Adults) members. The RSVP deadline is Sunday, November 15.

Community members also have the opportunity to sponsor the event in honor or memory of a loved one for $360.

Advance registration is required. To reserve a spot or learn more, visit www.jewishbrandon.com/rsvp or call 813-461-4505.

About Chabad of Brandon & SouthShore

Chabad of Brandon & SouthShore is dedicated to creating a welcoming and vibrant Jewish community through educational, cultural, religious and social programs for individuals and families of all ages and backgrounds. Through meaningful experiences and community gatherings, Chabad strives to make Jewish traditions accessible, relevant and inspiring.

ALIGN RIGHT EVOLVES INTO ELEVATED REALTY WITH FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

By Libby Hopkins



This August, Align Right Realty went through a rebranding and became Elevated Realty. While its name is changing, the foundation of its company remains the same. Elevated Realty continues under the ownership and leadership of broker/owner Lisa Tackus, with the same trusted leadership and committed agents, unwavering commitment to excellence, and dedication to customers and the Tampa Bay community.

The rebrand reflects the company's continued growth and long-term vision while honoring the relationships built over the past seven years as a brokerage and more than 21 years of real estate experience. Rather than making a departure from that history, the Elevated Realty name connects the company's established foundation with its aspirations for the future. It brings the focus back to the people at the heart of the business: customers seeking exceptional service, agents who need support and communities that benefit from lasting relationships.

"This rebrand represents who we have become and where we're going," Tackus said. "Our mission has always been to provide exceptional service, support our agents and positively impact the communities we serve. Elevated Realty reflects our commitment to raising the standard in every customer's experience."

Her words underscore the purpose behind the new identity: growth grounded in the same relationships and service commitments that helped shape the brokerage. The name signals a forward-looking vision while keeping those priorities at the center of the company's next chapter.

Customers, agents and business partners can expect the same personalized service, local expertise and trusted relationships that have defined the brokerage's success. For those who have come to know the company, the new name does not mean starting over; it represents a continuation of the connections already established. The office location, leadership and office number remain unchanged, offering familiar points of contact as the brokerage moves forward under its new identity. That continuity places the emphasis on maintaining relationships rather than simply introducing a new brand.

"We are deeply grateful for the trust and support of our customers, agents, referral partners and community," Tackus said.

Elevated Realty is a locally owned, independent real estate brokerage serving Tampa Bay and the surrounding communities. Guided by the philosophy of "Raising the standard," the company is committed to delivering exceptional service.

Tto learn more, visit its www.elevatedrealtyfl.com or call 813-563-5995. Its office is located at 11962 Balm Riverview Rd. in Riverview.

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BUSINESS PANELS HELP STUDENTS EXPLORE CAREER PATHS

By Brian Bokor



High school seniors across East and South Hillsborough explored jobs and training options through Future Career Academy Business Panels held at their schools. The events brought local employers and community partners into schools to help students plan for life after graduation.

Workforce Development Partners organized the panels as the first major Future Career Academy experience of the 2026-27 school year. The program helps graduating seniors learn about jobs, training and career paths available within their communities.

East Hillsborough's schedule included Newsome, Bloomingdale and Spoto high schools on October 14. Brandon, Riverview and Pepin Academies' Riverview campus followed on October 15.

South Hillsborough's schedule included East Bay, Lennard and Morgan high schools on October 28. Sumner and South County Career Center followed on October 29.

At Riverview High School, the October 15 panel brought together representatives from health care, construction, banking, utilities, retail, public safety and other career fields. Students also learned about apprenticeships, which combine paid work with training.

Health care and banking were represented by Julie Linde of BayCare and Kendra Dock of Regions Bank. Fred Lay of Construction Service Inc. and Will Fike of Mattamy Homes represented construction.

Other panelists included Stephen Foster of TECO, Donnie Fesser of Publix and Billy Wilkerson of Hillsborough County Public Schools Apprenticeships. Deputy Cumba represented the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, while Wendy Foster represented MacDill Air Force Base.

The discussion addressed questions many seniors face, including what jobs are available after high school, whether employers provide training and how a first job can lead to a career. Speakers also discussed starting positions and opportunities for advancement.

At Riverview High School, English teacher Christina Friend handed out "Business Panel Bingo" worksheets. Students identified industries, starting jobs, career growth opportunities and companies offering training or hiring workers with a high school diploma.

The activity encouraged students to consider benefits beyond pay, including paid time off, retirement savings, tuition assistance, health insurance, mentoring, apprenticeships and extra pay for bilingual skills. Students also considered workplace expectations such as good attendance and a positive attitude.

Each student developed a question for a panelist and shared the most important thing they learned and whether a company or career interested them. Afterward, students could speak with guests and ask additional questions.

The panels began a three-part series of career experiences. Business tours were planned for January and February. Visit www.workforcedevelopmentpartners.com.

LIONS CLUB CONTINUES HOLIDAY TRADITION WITH LUMINARIA PROJECT

Staff Report



Brandon Lions Club members prepare for the annual Luminaria Project, a holiday tradition that began in 2002. The $9 kits include 15 bags, candles, cups and sand.

For more than two decades, the Brandon Lions Club has been helping local families brighten Christmas Eve while supporting charitable causes through its annual Luminaria Project. The tradition began in 2002 and continues this year with luminaria kits available throughout the Greater Brandon area.

Each year, residents, neighborhoods and community groups participate by lining walkways and driveways with glowing, white luminaria. Traditionally displayed on Christmas Eve, the simple lights create a warm and festive atmosphere while supporting the Brandon Lions Club's charitable work.

Each luminaria kit includes 15 white paper bags, 15 long-burning votive candles, 15 candle cups and a bag of sand to provide a stable base for each candle. The kits are available for $9 each.

Orders must be placed by Sunday, November 15. No payment is required when placing an order. All orders are cash on delivery and may be picked up or, for orders of 15 kits or more, delivered to participating neighborhoods.

Orders will be available for pickup or delivery on Saturday, December 19, at the Brandon Lions Club, located at 610 Limona Rd. in Brandon.

To order, contact Joe Kuebler at 813-263-2522 or email brandonlionsclub@gmail.com.

Proceeds from the Luminaria Project benefit Brandon Lions Charities, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that supports eyesight and hearing programs at the state and national levels. Locally, the organization supports Dogs Inc., ECHO, Family Promise, the Brandon High School Don Bishop Track Meet, Selah Freedom Inc. and other community needs.

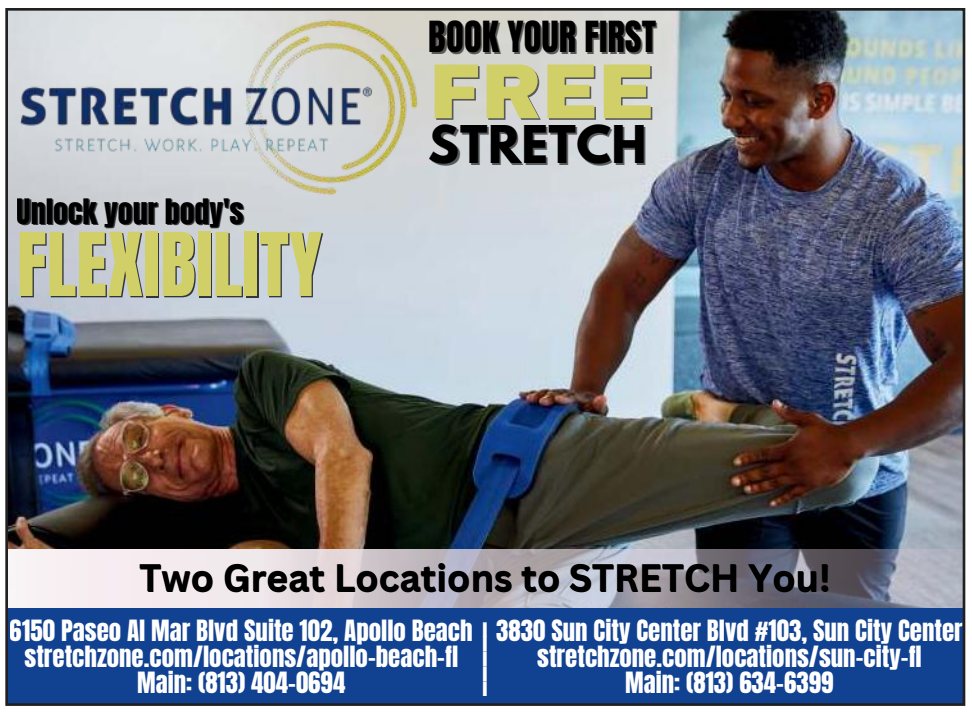
The Brandon Lions Club, chartered in 1954, is the area's oldest community service organization. While Lions Clubs are known for their commitment to sight conservation, prevention of blindness and assisting those experiencing vision loss, the Brandon club supports a variety of charitable and community programs.

The annual Luminaria Project reflects the club's long-standing commitment to combining community service with opportunities for residents to come together and celebrate the holiday season.

The Brandon Lions Club meets on the first and third Thursdays of each month at its clubhouse. Dinner begins at 6:15 p.m., followed by the meeting at 7 p.m.

For more information about the Luminaria Project, Brandon Lions Club activities or membership opportunities, contact the club or attend an upcoming meeting.







MRS. ROPER ROMP EVENT RETURNS TO SUPPORT FORGOTTEN ANGELS

By Marie Gilmore



Members of the GFWC Brandon Junior Woman's Club and Charity Chicks invite the community to dress in their best Mrs. Roper-inspired outfits for the second annual Mrs. Roper Romp on Saturday, November 14.

The GFWC Brandon Junior Woman's Club and Charity Chicks will bring colorful costumes, community spirit and a little Mrs. Roper flair to Valrico on Saturday, November 14, when they host the second annual Mrs. Roper Romp benefiting Forgotten Angels.

The themed community walk and charity event will take place from 9:30-11:30 a.m. at Valrico Park, located at 707 S. Miller Rd. in Valrico. Participants are encouraged to dress in colorful, Mrs. Roper-inspired outfits and take part in games, prizes, opportunity baskets, a 50/50 drawing, a best-costume contest and a scavenger hunt.

Following the morning activities at the park, participants will head to Voodoo Brewing Co., located at 3432 E. SR 60 in Valrico, from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. for lunch and more Mrs. Roper-themed fun.

Registration is $25 per person. Participants can register using the QR code on the event invitation or register and pay on-site at either the park or Voodoo Brewing Co.

Proceeds from the event will benefit Forgotten Angels and its efforts to address food insecurity and support young people who have aged out of foster care.

The event reflects the Brandon Junior Woman's Club's longstanding commitment to serving the community. The GFWC Brandon Junior Woman's Club was established in 1955 and has supported a wide range of local initiatives throughout its history, including the Brandon Civic Center, the School of Hope for Exceptional Children, preschool vision screenings, the Special Olympics, CPR equipmen and the Nettles Group Home.

The club also continues to care for its historic clubhouse, located at 129 N. Moon Ave. in Brandon. Originally built in 1928 by the Brandon Woman's Club, the building has served the community in numerous ways over the decades, including as a polling place, driver's licensing facility, World War II draft board, health clinic and library. The historic building is designated as a Hillsborough County landmark and was later deeded to the Brandon Junior Woman's Club.

Today, the organization continues its mission of improving the community through volunteer service and financial support. Its programs focus on areas including children, domestic and sexual violence awareness, arts and culture, civic engagement, education, environmental efforts, health and wellness and literacy.

Contact Kori Hamilton at 813-720-6101 or treasurerbjwc33509@gmail.com. Visit www.gfwcbrandonjuniors.org for additional information.

UNIQUE GIVING MACHINE OFFERS GIFTS FOR THOSE IN NEED

Staff Report



This holiday season, Tampa Bay residents are invited to share the joy of giving in a unique, hands-on way. Have you ever purchased warm meals, essential medical care, clothing for a child, or livestock for a family in need from a vending machine? From Monday, November 16, through Monday, December 7, visitors to Regency Square in Brandon can experience instant generosity through the Light the World Giving Machine.

Located in the central courtyard next to the AMC Theatre at Regency Square (2400-2478 W. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon), these vibrant red vending machines replace traditional snacks and sodas with tangible charitable items. Visitors use an interactive touchscreen to choose essential goods and services that benefit local nonprofit organizations and global humanitarian programs. An official launch event and ribbon-cutting ceremony will take place on Tuesday, November 17, at 11 a.m.

"We were very excited to be selected to participate in the Giving Machine. We were drawn to the concept because it offers our community a simple way to make a meaningful difference in a child's life. At Joshua House, children and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment need opportunities to feel safe, supported and hopeful about their future. We're grateful to be part of this effort, and excited for the care and generosity it will bring to the foster children we serve," said DeDe Grundel, executive director of Friends of Joshua House Foundation.

Every item purchased at the Light the World Giving Machine at Regency Square directly benefits one of four participating Tampa Bay area charities and two global charities: Joshua House, Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services, kidsPACK, Unicef (global), Coptic Orthodox Charities, CWS Global (global).

Items in the machine will range from $10-$100, making giving accessible for individuals and families of all ages. For those looking to maximize their community impact, the 777 Challenge allows donors to enter '777' on the Giving Machine touchscreen to purchase one of every available donation item for a total of $1,280, supporting every nonprofit represented in the machine.

One hundred percent of every donation made at the Giving Machine goes directly to the participating charities.The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints fully covers all operational and administrative costs as a gift to the community.

Since launching in 2017, the Light The World Giving Machine initiative has expanded to over 120 cities worldwide, raising more than $70 million in humanitarian aid and providing lifelines to hundreds of thousands of individuals worldwide.

To learn more about the Light The World Giving Machine and view event schedules, visit www.givingmachine.org or follow @GivingMachineFlorida on Instagram and Facebook.

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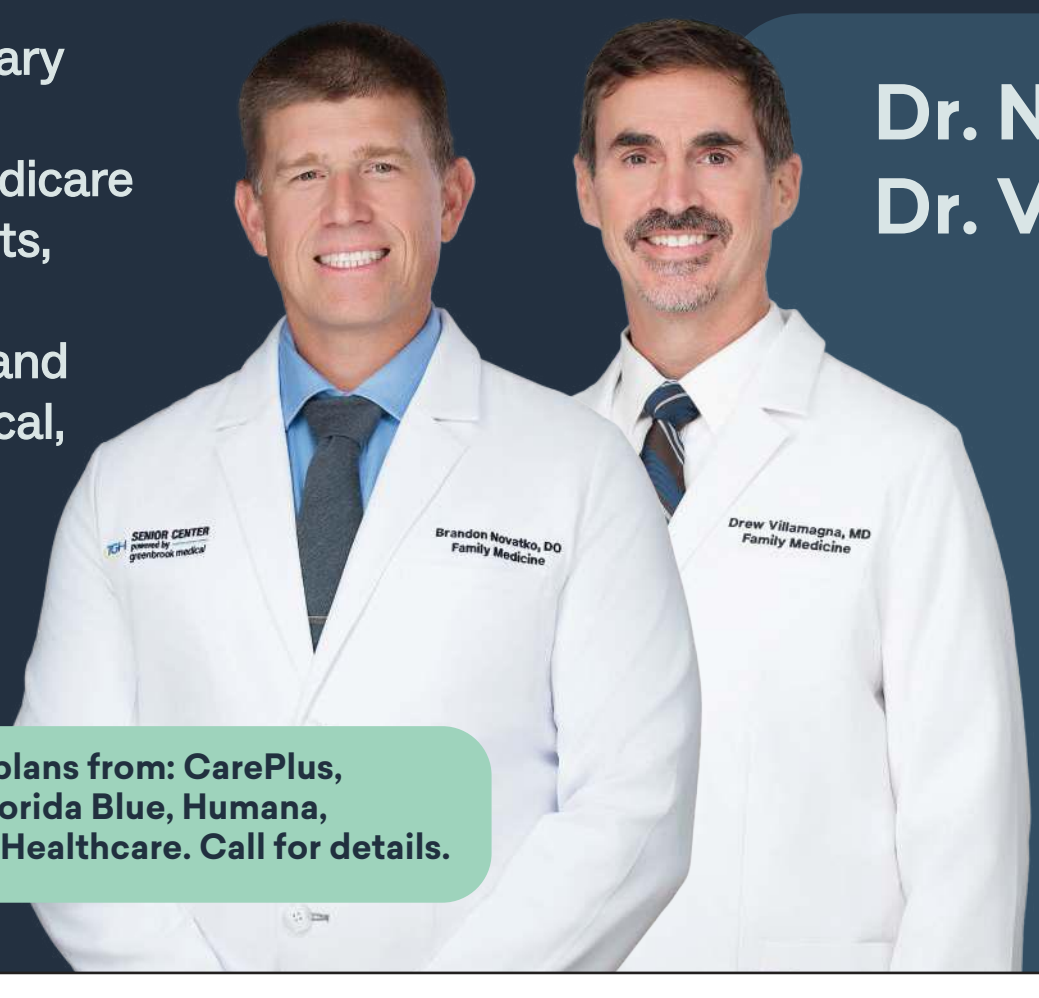

Dr. Novatko & Dr. Villamagna

Are both accepting new patients now at the TGH Senior Center of Brandon!

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FOOD BANK EXPANDS PROGRAMS TO HELP SENIORS AND STUDENTS FIGHT HUNGER

By Libby Hopkins



The mission of United Food Bank and Services in Plant City is to help those in need by moving them from a "state of hunger" and "impoverishment" to self-sufficiency, empowerment and self-reliance.

The organization is succeeding in this mission through two unique programs: Feeding Our Legacy, which helps local seniors, and Feeding Our Future, which helps local school and college students.

"Our Feeding Our Legacy program helps local seniors access food and essential household resources closer to home," said Mary Heysek, United Food Bank and Services' president and CEO. "We visit two off-site locations each month, one in Bealsville and the other at Plant City Towers in downtown Plant City, to serve seniors who may have difficulty traveling to our main facility or lack reliable transportation. We currently have 376 seniors registered and served through this program, and that number continues to grow. Our goal is to make nutritious food and essential supplies more accessible while helping seniors maintain their independence and quality of life."

Seniors are an increasingly vulnerable population, with older adults representing one of the fastest-growing segments of the homeless population. Too often, seniors must make difficult choices between purchasing nutritious food and paying for medications or other essential expenses.

"Through our Feeding Our Legacy program, we work to ease some of that burden, improve access to food and resources and help our seniors maintain their health, independence and dignity," Heysek said.

The organization's college hunger program, part of Feeding Our Future, partners with 26 local schools to provide 1,300 weekend food bags each week during the school year and 1,500 break bags each week during nonschool time.

"We also partner with two colleges to help address food insecurity among students at Hillsborough College by providing food assistance each week," Heysek said. "We currently serve approximately 35 students weekly. United Food Bank and Services stocks an on-site student food pantry at the University of Florida IFAS, extending our support to students beyond our immediate community."

United Food Bank and Services is looking to build partnerships in the Valrico, Brandon and Lithia areas to extend its reach and make food assistance more accessible to families and individuals who can't travel to its Plant City location.

"As our community continues to grow, it is important that we look at where additional support may be needed and how we can work with local organizations to reach people closer to where they live," Heysek said.

For more information, visit ufbpc.org or contact Heysek at 813-764-0265. The office is located at 702 E. Alsobrook St. in Plant City.

11TH ANNUAL WATERSET TURKEY TROT SUPPORTS FOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS

By Marie Gilmore



Join in for the 11th annual Turkey Trot at Waterset on Thanksgiving morning on Thursday, November 26, at 9 a.m. Proceeds of the Turkey Trot will benefit our local public schools: Doby Elementary, Eisenhower Middle School, East Bay High School and the Dorothy C. York Innovation Academy.



The race is chip-timed and a flat course. Want to participate virtually? No problem. Just sign up for the virtual 5K. However, virtual participant race packets are not guaranteed to arrive prior to Thanksgiving morning.

Registration is required. Register at https://runsignup.com/race/events/fl/apollobeach/turkeytrotatwaterset.

The 5K participants will each receive a race bib, race T-shirt and finisher's medal.

The Kids' Fun Run participants will each receive a race bib, race T-shirt and medal.

The 5K and Kids' Fun Run will start at approximately 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., respectively.

The 5K race route will be the same route as years past: north and south on Waterset Blvd. starting by The Lakeside, located at 7250 Parkshore Dr. in Apollo Beach.

The Kids' Fun Run routes will be the same as last year: 1-mile, half-mile and, for the little ones, a special mini route.

Strollers are welcome, but guests are asked to please go to the back of the starting line so the competitive participants can start first.

Pets are not allowed due to the growing size of the race. This new rule is simply to ensure the safety of all participants.

If you'd like to keep your distance when you walk/run, feel free to stay back and let participants start, and then you can start your race. Since it's chip-timed, your time won't start until you cross the starting line.

Online sign-up is available through November 26; however, shirts and specific sizes may not be available and are not guaranteed after Wednesday, November 4. The 5K Dri-FIT T-shirts are available in adult and youth sizes. The Kids' Fun Run T-shirts are also Dri-FIT this year, with youth sizes available.

For more information or to register for the event, visit https://runsignup.com/race/events/fl/apollobeach/turkeytrotatwaterset. The 5K registration prices will increase on Sunday, November 1, and then again on Monday, November 23. Kids' Fun Run registration will also increase on November 1.







TAMPA THEATRE CELEBRATES 100 YEARS OF MOVIE MAGIC

Staff Report



A Tampa landmark that has entertained generations of moviegoers celebrated a major milestone on October 15 when Tampa Theatre officially marked its 100th anniversary.

Located at 711 N. Franklin St. in downtown Tampa, the historic theater opened its doors on October 15, 1926 as a grand movie palace designed by renowned theater architect John Eberson. A century later, the theater remains a vibrant cultural destination for movies, concerts, comedy, special events and community programs.

Tampa Theatre was designed in an ornate atmospheric style intended to make guests feel as though they were sitting outdoors in a Mediterranean courtyard. Its elaborate architecture combines Baroque, Greek Revival and Italian Renaissance influences, while its signature ceiling recreates a nighttime sky complete with twinkling stars.

The building also made Tampa history as the city's first commercial building with air conditioning, a major attraction when it opened.

The theater celebrated its centennial with a 1920s-themed birthday celebration that recreated elements of its original opening night. Festivities included swing dancing, live jazz and red-carpet photos beneath the historic marquee.

Inside, the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and Tampa Theatre's 1,400-pipe Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ provided live music for a screening of Buster Keaton's silent comedy *Sherlock Jr.* The celebration concluded with Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, which was also part of the theater's original opening program, paired with modern special effects.

The anniversary comes following a $24.5 million restoration project designed to preserve the theater's historic character while preparing it for its second century.

The 1,238-seat Duncan Auditorium underwent extensive restoration, including repairs to its original plaster, cleaning of decorative elements and preservation of historic fixtures. The iconic starry ceiling was also refreshed.

The project also included improvements to backstage rigging, infrastructure and HVAC systems, along with construction of the new 3,000-square-foot Jackie Price Education Center for year-round educational programming and events.

Tampa Theatre's history includes a major preservation effort in the 1970s, when local citizens and city leaders worked to save the building from demolition. That community support helped transform the theater into the nonprofit cultural venue it remains today.

Now, 100 years after its opening, Tampa Theatre continues to serve as a gathering place for the community while preserving a unique piece of Tampa's history.





NEW BRANDON FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER HONORS JUDGE KATHERINE ESSRIG

Staff Report



Families in Brandon have a new, expanded resource for support, parenting guidance and children's developmental services with the opening of the Katherine Essrig Children's Board Family Resource Center.

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County will officially dedicate the center on Monday, November 16, recognizing the longtime service and advocacy of the Honorable Judge Katherine G. Essrig. The new facility provides a welcoming place where families can connect with services and find support to help their children thrive.

Named in honor of Essrig, a Tampa native and longtime champion of children and families, the center recognizes her more than two decades of service on the Children's Board of Hillsborough County Board of Directors. Throughout her more than 30-year judicial career and community involvement, Essrig has advocated for stronger child welfare systems and improved outcomes for children and families throughout the county.

The expanded Brandon location builds on the Children's Board's commitment to helping families access resources within their own communities. The center is funded by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County and operated by Lutheran Services Florida.

Services include family support, developmental screenings, parenting assistance, community referrals and other designed to help children remain healthy and safe, stay on track developmentally and resources prepare for learning and success.

The center also provides opportunities for families to build connections and identify support systems that can make a difference as children grow. By bringing services together in a welcoming community setting, the resource center helps parents and caregivers find assistance and guidance when they need it.

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County invests in quality programs that support the success of children and families throughout the county. Its work focuses on ensuring children are healthy and safe, developmentally on track, supported by strong families and ready to learn.

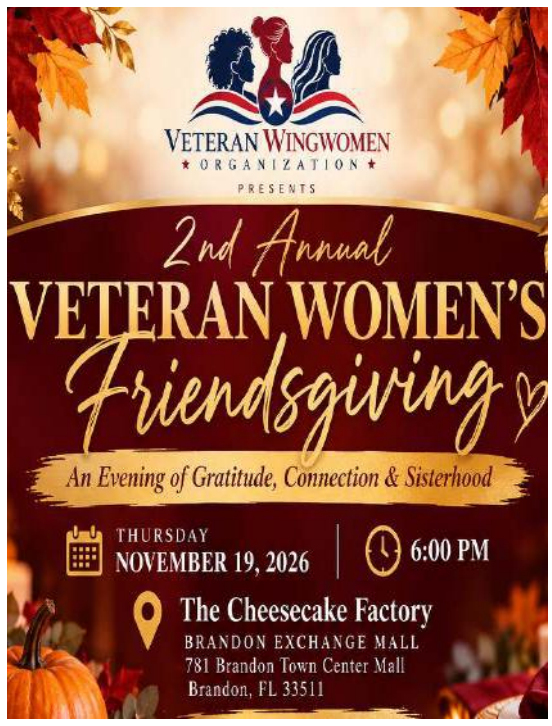
In 2025, the Children's Board invested $60 million in grants supporting more than 80 nonprofit organizations and 152 programs serving children and families.

The new Brandon center expands access to those efforts locally while honoring Essrig's lasting contributions to the community. Its dedication celebrates both the opening of a larger resource for area families and the legacy of a leader whose work has helped shape services and advocacy for children across Hillsborough County.

Families seeking support can visit the Katherine Essrig Children's Board Family Resource Center at 308 W. Robertson St. in Brandon.

VETERAN WOMEN INVITED TO SECOND ANNUAL FRIENDSGIVING IN BRANDON

Staff Report



Women veterans in Brandon and surrounding communities will have an opportunity to connect, share stories and celebrate the spirit of Thanksgiving during the second annual Veteran Women's Friendsgiving on Thursday, November 19.

Hosted by Veteran WingWomen Organization founder KeishaMarie Douglas, a retired U.S. Air Force veteran, the gathering will take place at 6 p.m. at The Cheesecake Factory at Brandon Exchange mall, located 781 Brandon Town Center Dr. in Brandon.

The event was created to provide women who have served in the military with a welcoming space to build friendships, strengthen connections and enjoy time with others who understand the unique experiences of military service.

For Douglas, the idea is rooted in a Thanksgiving memory from 2001, when she was deployed overseas with the Air Force. Although her military role was as a dental assistant, she was temporarily assigned to work in a dining facility during the holiday.

She remembers walking from table to table in a makeshift dining tent, talking with fellow service members and checking on how everyone was doing.

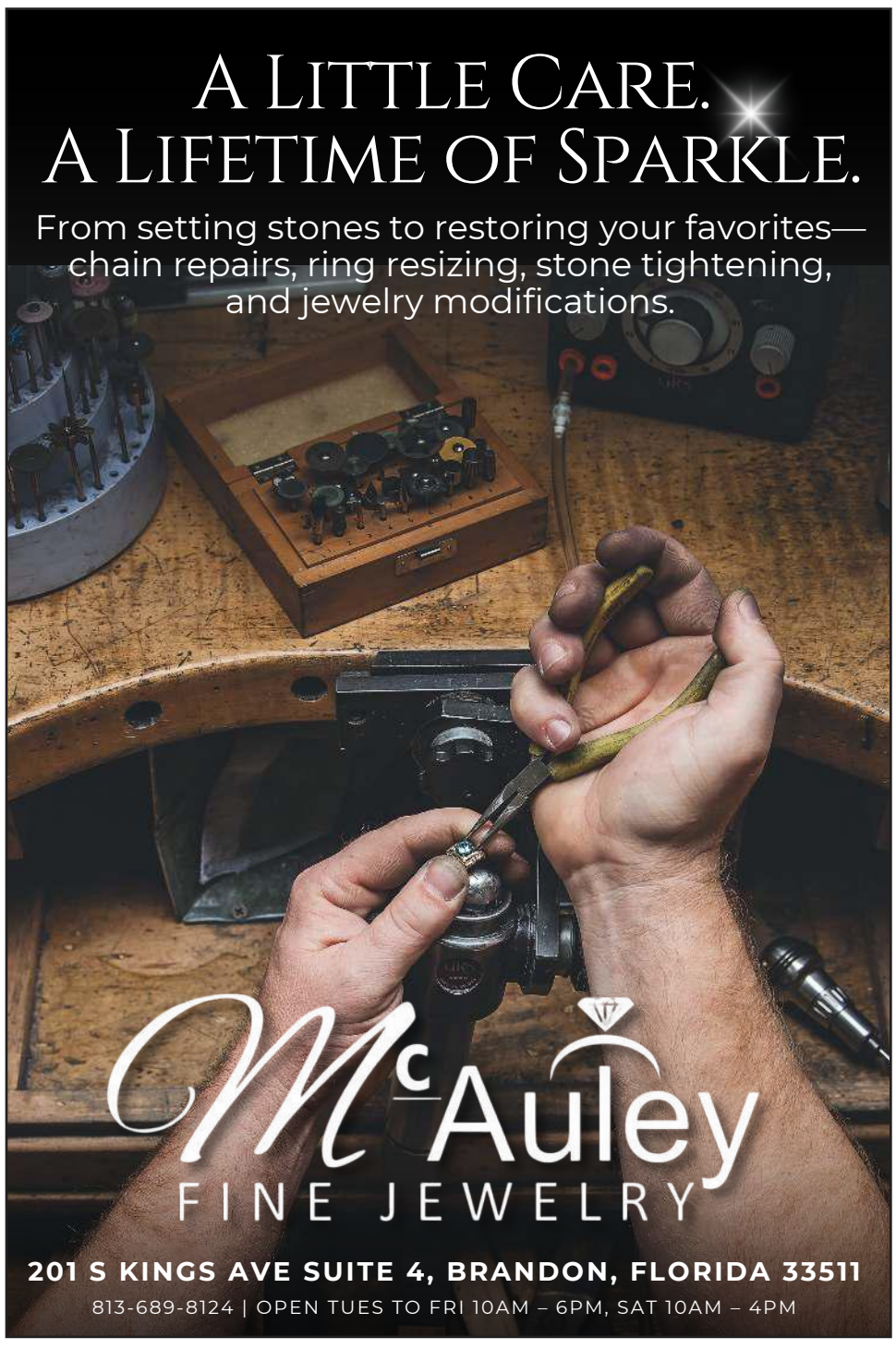
Twenty-five years later, that experience continues to influence her desire to bring people together and help others feel welcomed, valued and connected. That mission is especially meaningful during the holiday season, when some veterans may find themselves far from family or without a strong support network nearby.

Douglas hopes Friendsgiving will offer more than a shared meal. It is an opportunity for women veterans to spend time with others who understand military life, exchange experiences and develop relationships that can continue long after the gathering ends.

Through Veteran WingWomen Organization, Douglas works to create opportunities for women veterans to find community and support as they navigate life during and after military service.

The organization's Friendsgiving event reflects that mission by encouraging camaraderie and reminding participants that they do not have to navigate their experiences alone. Women veterans interested in attending the second annual gathering must register by Sunday, November 15. Space is limited, and advance registration is required.

To register, visit https://forms.gle/e6veQhLcLo2dw2GN7.





HOPE SERVICES EXPANDS JOB AND LIFE SKILLS TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

By Libby Hopkins



Hope Services is a workforce development organization dedicated to helping individuals overcome barriers to employment and achieve sustainable careers.

Hope Services was founded in 2003 to help individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment build brighter futures. Since then, it has grown to offer personalized employment services and a Life Skills and Vocational Training Center with programs in culinary arts, construction, retail and hospitality.

"Our goal is to help each person gain the skills, confidence and support needed to enjoy a meaningful career and greater independence," said Hope Services' Founder and CEO, Cindy Bray. "The greatest reward is seeing someone gain confidence, find a job and build independence."

Hope Services' mission is to provide personalized vocational services that enable its clients to realize their career potential.

"At our company, we know that disabilities do not undercut a person's value or potential, and we've found that these individuals carry with them unique giftedness that can enrich a company's culture," Bray said. "As the company has grown tremendously throughout West-Central Florida, our passion and core beliefs stay the same — we care, we help and we give hope."

Hope Services offers personalized job coaching, career guidance, job placement, on-the-job training and work-based learning experience to help individuals find and succeed in meaningful employment. Its Life Skills and Vocational Training Center provides hands-on training in culinary arts, construction, retail and hospitality.

"We help people build practical skills, confidence and independence, with support tailored to their individual goals," Bray said. "In 2025, we served 689 individuals and helped 423 people find jobs. Behind those numbers are lives changed, families strengthened and local employers connected with capable workers. To me, our greatest impact is giving people hope and a positive future."

Bray and her team are excited to expand into Hudson with a second Life Skills and Vocational Training Center.

"We anticipate renovations beginning in January 2027, with a hopeful grand opening in spring," Bray said. "The center will offer training in culinary arts, construction, health care skills and retail. A future second phase may include a thrift store and coffee shop, creating additional opportunities for hands-on learning and meaningful employment."

Bray knows that community support makes Hope Services' work possible.

If you would like to learn more about Hope Services, you can visit its website at https://hopegetsjobs.org/ or call 813-907-3731. Its office is located at 5426 Land O' Lakes Blvd. in Land O' Lakes.

BUSCH GARDENS UNWRAPS HOLIDAY MAGIC WITH CHRISTMAS TOWN

Staff Report



The holiday season is coming to life at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay as Christmas Town returns from Friday, November 13, through Monday, January 4, on select dates, transforming the park into a festive destination filled with dazzling lights, holiday entertainment, seasonal treats and family-friendly experiences.

Christmas Town is included with park admission and features millions of lights throughout the park, along with more than 70 miles of illuminated displays. This year also brings several new experiences designed to add even more holiday excitement.

New attractions include Lights of Wonder, a nighttime drone show featuring dazzling drones synchronized to classic holiday music, and A Very Merry Cirque, an acrobatic holiday production. The new Christmas Town Market will also feature local artisans and festive shopping opportunities.

Returning favorites include the award-winning Christmas on Ice, Mrs. Claus' Storytime, Three Kings Journey and the Holly Jolly Express. Families can also visit Rudolph's Winter Wonderland, meet Rudolph and his friends and experience Santa's North Pole, where children can share their holiday wishes and take photos with Santa.

For those looking for a little more excitement, many of Busch Gardens' popular attractions and coasters, including Iron Gwazi and Phoenix Rising, will be operating during the event. The Skyride will also be illuminated with holiday lights, offering guests a festive view of the park.

Seasonal food and drinks are another highlight, with holiday-inspired menu items, hot chocolate and freshly baked cookies available throughout the event. Christmas Town Sampler Lanyards start at $35, while a new five-punch Dessert Sampler includes a reusable hot chocolate mug.

The holiday celebration continues through New Year's Eve, when guests can enjoy live entertainment and fireworks. Families can also celebrate with a kid-friendly Noon Year's Eve event.

"Christmas Town is Tampa Bay's best holiday tradition that allows families to celebrate and create long-lasting memories," said Brian Bacica, park president at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay and Adventure Island.

With lights, live entertainment, holiday characters, rides and seasonal treats, Christmas Town offers families plenty of opportunities to make new holiday traditions.

For dates, hours and tickets, visit www.christmastown.com.

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INSPIRA SUPPORTS NEURODIVERGENT AND AT-RISK CHILDREN

By Libby Hopkins



At Inspira Tampa Bay, it embraces community development and a cultural humility approach that fosters inclusion for marginalized, vulnerable and historically underserved individuals.

At Inspira Tampa Bay, it embraces community development and a cultural humility approach that fosters inclusion for marginalized, vulnerable and historically underserved individuals.

Founded by speech language pathologists, occupational therapy practitioners and dedicated community volunteers, their organization exists because every child deserves access to resources, opportunities and a community that believes in their potential.

"Like the butterfly, every child develops at their own pace, and with the right support, every child can flourish," said Jennifer Torres, program director of Inspira Tampa Bay Inc. "We inspire families to strive for a better tomorrow by equipping neurodivergent and at-risk children throughout Southern Hillsborough County with high-quality programs, meaningful resources and inclusive opportunities while educating and empowering the community to create lasting change."

Recognizing the growing need for comprehensive support beyond traditional services, Inspira Tampa Bay Inc. was born from the compassionate vision and community commitment of Southshore Bilingual Therapy Inc. Established as a nonprofit organization, Inspira was created to expand access to meaningful resources, therapeutic support, education and opportunities for children and families throughout Southern Hillsborough County.

"The name 'Inspira,' derived from the Spanish word for inspire, reflects the heart of our organization: to inspire hope, encourage possibility and empower individuals and families to strive for a better tomorrow," Torres said. "We focus on expanding opportunities and improving outcomes for vulnerable and underserved populations, including at-risk and neurodivergent children, parents and caregivers, aspiring minority professionals and professionals who serve these communities."

Inspira partners with many local business and churches to host community events.

"Our current book drive is in collaboration with The United Methodist Church of Sun City Center to support our Sensory Santa event on December 12," Torres said. "This year will be our fifth annual Sensory Santa event for the community. The church is collecting books through a book drive both in person and online."

"Children can take their time exploring holiday activities, enjoying sensory-friendly play, creating crafts, participating in adapted games and meeting Santa in a way that feels comfortable for them." Torres said.

To learn more, visit its website directly at https://inspiratampabay.org or call 813-323-5783. They are located at 707 W. Lake Dr. in Wimauma.

CHAMBER CELEBRATES INSURED AMERICAN FAMILY'S 10 YEARS

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) recently celebrated Insured American Family with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony recognizing the veteran-owned, family-run insurance agency for more than 10 years in business.

Chamber members, community leaders, friends and supporters gathered to congratulate the Insured American Family team on this important business milestone. Guests enjoyed networking, a charcuterie spread, custom desserts, giveaways and the opportunity to learn more about the agency and the services it provides.

Insured American Family provides personalized insurance solutions for individuals, families and businesses, including health, Medicare, life, supplemental, dental, vision and small-business coverage. Licensed in 36 states, the agency works with major insurance carriers to compare available plans and help clients identify coverage options that fit their individual needs and budgets.

BRCC President Amber Aaron welcomed those in attendance and thanked the community for coming together to support a fellow chamber member. She then introduced Insured American Family owner Craig Gruenbaum, who shared more about the company, its history and its commitment to serving clients.

Following the official ribbon cutting, BRCC Ambassador Lawrence Barnes presented a special proclamation recognizing the occasion and declaring the day 'Insured American Family Day.'

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Gruenbaum and the entire Insured American Family team on more than a decade in business and wishes them continued growth and success in the years ahead.







WINTER VILLAGE IS RETURNING TO CURTIS HIXON PARK

Staff Report

Real-ice skating, local shopping and festive entertainment highlight annual tradition

Tampa's Downtown waterfront will transform into a festive holiday destination when Winter Village, presented by the Tampa Bay Lightning, returns to Curtis Hixon Park from Friday, November 20, through Sunday, January 3, 2027.

The annual event will bring the community together for real-ice skating, holiday shopping, seasonal food and beverages, live entertainment and family-friendly activities along the Tampa Riverwalk.

"Winter Village is a celebration of what makes Tampa's Downtown special: our community, our local businesses and the public spaces that bring us together," said Kenyetta Hairston-Bridges, president and CEO of the Tampa Downtown Partnership. "Each year, Winter Village creates opportunities for residents and visitors to connect, support local businesses and make lasting holiday memories."

The real-ice skating rink will once again serve as the centerpiece of the event. Skating sessions last 75 minutes and include skate rental. Tickets cost $17 for skaters over age 12 and $15 for children under 12. College students with valid identification can receive $2 off skating rentals on Thursdays from 5-9 p.m.

Winter Village will feature weekly programming throughout the season, including silent discos, Saturday night entertainment from 7-8 p.m. and seasonal character visits on select Sundays from 1-4 p.m. Guests may encounter Frosty, Elsa, Olaf, the Grinch and the Gingerbread Man. Special ice-skating performances will also take place on select dates.

Visitors can explore The Shops of Winter Village, delivered by PODS, featuring eight full-season retailers, seven partial-season shops and 18 rotating vendors. Offerings will include handmade jewelry, apparel, home decor, candles, Tampa-themed gifts, baked goods and artwork.

Shop Small Weekend will take place Saturday and Sunday, November 28-29, from 1-4 p.m., highlighting young entrepreneurs. The first 100 shoppers at the Winter Village Shop will receive a free commemorative tote bag.

Food and beverage vendors, including Hot Dog Fever, Whatever Pops, Blind Tiger and Gourmet Crepes and Coffee, will offer everything from coffee and pastries to crepes, empanadas and frozen treats.

Visitors can reach the event through nearby scooter and bike rentals, DASH Tampa micro-transit service and the Pirate Water Taxi. The Winter Village Express will also return, offering a festive TECO Line Streetcar ride between Whiting Station and Ybor City for $10 per ticket. Advance reservations are required.

Skating reservations and Winter Village Express tickets are available online. For schedules, tickets and updates, visit wintervillagetampa.com.

GREATEST GENERATION CONFERENCE TO BRING WWII HISTORY TO TAMPA

Staff Report



World War II history will come to life this December when the VBC Greatest Generation Live World War II Conference brings veterans, historians, authors and military enthusiasts together in Tampa from Wednesday through Sunday, December 2-6.

The four-day conference will explore some of the most significant campaigns and personalities of World War II while providing opportunities for attendees to hear directly from veterans and experts. December 6 is the departure day and will have no formal programming.

The conference opens on December 2 with registration and a welcome reception, followed by dinner and an opening program. The keynote address will be presented by Michael S. Bell, executive director of the Jenny Craig Institute for the Study of War and Democracy at The National WWII Museum. His presentation, 'The American Liberators: The U.S. Army and Germany's Concentration Camps,' will examine the role of American soldiers in the liberation of concentration camps.

Thursday's sessions will begin with 'Masters of the Air: The Bloody 100th and the Air War Over Europe,' featuring 100th Bomb Group historian Mike P. Faley, author Rebecca Crosby Hutchinson and Luftwaffe historian Colin Heaton, a consultant to the Apple TV+ series Masters of the Air.

The afternoon session, 'Turning the Tide: Guadalcanal and Buna, New Guinea,' will focus on the Pacific War and feature historians and authors Jeff Ballard, Dave Holland, James Campbell and Chris Kolakowski.

Friday will continue with 'Winning the War: America's High Command,' examining the leadership of figures including George Patton, Mark Clark and Dwight Eisenhower. Speakers will include Helen Patton, granddaughter of General George S. Patton, retired Lt. Col. Roger Cirillo and author Michel Paradis.

The afternoon session, 'Coming Home: The Hidden Legacies of World War II,' will explore the lasting effects of the war on veterans and their families. Authors David Nasaw, Carol Schultz Vento and Richard Sherman will participate.

Friday evening will feature a film tribute honoring attending World War II veterans, followed by a veterans dinner featuring conversations and interviews.

The conference will conclude on Saturday with an excursion to the Zephyrhills Museum of Military History for Pearl Harbor remembrance activities, guided tours and a closing luncheon. Transportation will be provided.

The conference offers attendees an opportunity to learn from those who have dedicated their lives to preserving the history and stories of the Greatest Generation. For more information, visit https://veteransbreakfastclub.org/wwii-tampa-2026/.

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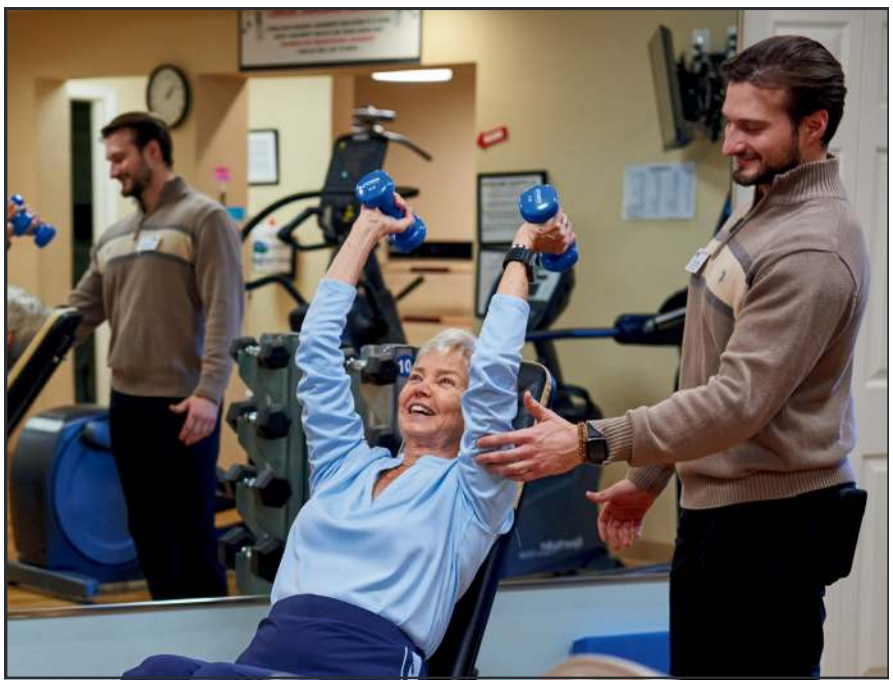
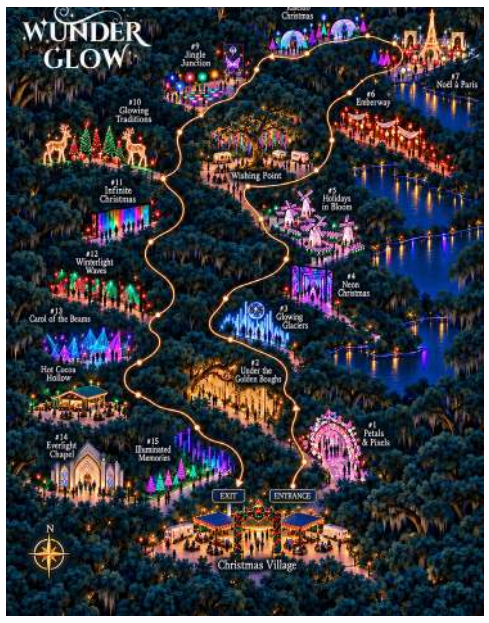


WUNDER GLOW BRINGS A MILE OF HOLIDAY LIGHTS TO DADE CITY

Staff Report



Wunder Glow will open Saturday, November 21, bringing more than a mile of holiday music and light scenes to 50 acres of Florida's majestic oaks in Dade City. At a cost of over $10 million, the new holiday music and light show walk-through experience has been built by the same team behind Snowcat Ridge and TreeHoppers Aerial Adventure Park.

Tickets are on sale now at https://wunderglow.com/, with general admission tickets starting at $18.95. The team also unveiled the first artist's renderings, previewing the music and light scenes guests will discover along the path. Guests can play with fog-filled bubbles, ride a butterfly swing and step across glowing floor pads. At Wishing Point, they can tie a ribbon to the wishing tree. Hot Cocoa Hollow offers hot cocoa and a glowing dance floor beneath falling snow effects.

Dozens of artists, designers and craftspeople have helped bring Wunder Glow to life, including concept artists, scenic designers, skilled painters and lighting designers. Their work combines detailed scenery, synchronized lighting and holiday music to create magical scenes throughout Florida's oak forest.

"We wanted to create an amazing experience where families could spend an entire holiday evening together," said Benjamin Nagengast, CEO of Wunder Glow. "From exploring the lights beneath the oaks to sharing hot cocoa and visiting Santa, our goal is to give our guests a holiday tradition to return to year after year."

Symphonies of Light & Sound will feature illuminated scenes synchronized to holiday music, including the golden canopy of Under the Golden Boughs, Glowing Glaciers, Noël à Paris and the mirrored Infinite Christmas. Along the way, Wunder Spots will offer photo opportunities with a giant sleigh, sculpted wings and a glowing heart arch.

Christmas Village will feature four food trucks, a biergarten, s'mores fire pits and a gift shop. Families can visit Santa and enjoy story time with Mrs. Claus through Thursday, December 24. Santa visits are included in admission, with photo packages sold separately.

The season runs through January 9, 2027, with closures on Thanksgiving Day and from January 4-7, 2027. Christmas Village opens at 5:15 p.m. on operating nights, followed by the holiday light and music path at 5:30 p.m. Closing times vary by date. Guests should allow two to three hours for their visit.

Ticket prices vary by date and entry time, and tickets cost $6 more at the box office. Children under 2 are admitted for free. For a limited time, use code WUNDER10 at https://wunderglow.com/ to save 10 percent on all ticket types during the preseason sale.

PELICAN PLAYERS PRESENTS *WHO'S IN BED WITH THE BUTLER?* FROM NOV. 13-15

Staff Report



A madcap comedy filled with slapstick, double-entendres and witty situations, *Who's in Bed with the Butler?* has been delighting audiences around the world since its debut in 2023.

A wealthy California billionaire passes away, leaving his fortune to his daughter, Constance, while willing massive assets (a yacht, art collection and cars) to three mysterious women. When the daughter and her lawyer arrive at the mansion to contest the will or buy the women off, they find the valuables have vanished. Orchestrating the confusion is the butler, who deftly juggles a whirlwind of mistaken identities, secret past romances, an inept private investigator and a deaf housekeeper with a pet rat.

Who's in Bed with the Butler? was written by Michael Parker, award-winning author of Sex Please, We're Sixty!, Money Matters and Sin, Sex & the CIA.

"Directing this wonderfully seasoned cast has been a joy," said Director Julie Ramsey. "Their experience, talent and willingness to embrace the crazy physical comedy and lightning-fast pace of farce make this production truly special. They prove that there is no barrier to laughter, creativity, or having a great time on stage."

Ruth Lake is the assistant director, and Kevin Steinke is the stage manager.

Jack Parry plays the part of Clifton, the butler; Susie Potratz is Agnes; Diane Keyes is Susie Legere; Alesia Bischoff is Connie; Steve Preuss is Vance; Wayne Keyes is William Davis Jr.; Carol MacAlister is Renee LaFleur; Lucy Malacos is Josephine Sykes; and Michele Horvath is Marjorie Merivale.

Audiences from Sun City Center and all surrounding communities will have four opportunities to see the play: Friday, November 13, at 6:30 p.m.; Saturday, November 14, at 1:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.; and Sunday, November 15, at 1:30 p.m.

Doors open 30 minutes before curtain. Tickets are on sale now at the Kings Point Box Office from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Evening performances are $18; matinee performances are $15. Tickets will also be sold at the door for each show; no credit cards will be accepted at the door, and correct change is appreciated.

Reserved, cabaret-style seating plus open bleacher seating are available. BYO drinks and snacks.

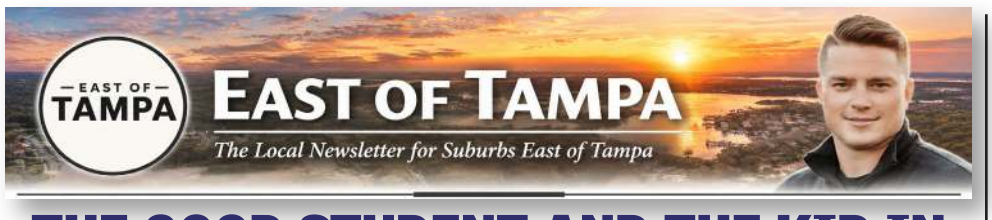
All performances are at the Kings Point Veterans Theater in the North Clubhouse, located at 1900 Clubhouse Dr. in Sun City Center.

Founded in 1981, the Pelican Players Community Theater, a 501(c)(3) organization run by volunteers, aims to promote the dramatic arts through the staging of productions and educational activities. All profits go toward the Pelican Players Scholarship Fund, handled by Community Foundation Tampa Bay, benefiting local students pursuing the arts.









THE GOOD STUDENT AND THE KID IN THE BACK ROW

By John Plumstead, The East Of Tampa Guy



Every class had a kid who did the reading, turned it in on time and got it right. And every class had a kid in the back who skipped the essay and raised his hand to ask the teacher how she ended up teaching in the first place.

Marie Gilmore was the first kid. I was the second.

In January 2002, Marie hand-delivered 750 copies of a brand-new newspaper to homes in FishHawk Ranch. By the second month, neighborhood kids were delivering it. By the third, it went out by mail. Today the *Osprey Observer* reaches more than 70,000 homes every month, and it's paid for entirely by local businesses who believe in it.

She's done that for almost 25 years. Every month, every fact checked, always about the people, places and things that make this community great. That's the good student.

I never saw myself as a writer. Articles were for the smart kids. I was the guy who took pride in a good joke or a good presentation, and who always had a question that got the teacher off track. I still do. How'd you build this? Was it hard?

So, I'm starting a podcast.

On the East of Tampa Podcast, I sit down with the business owners, coaches and neighbors who built East Hillsborough and ask the questions I've always wanted to ask.

Marie writes it down. I'd rather talk. If you've ever sat next to me at a chamber breakfast, you know I might like the sound of my own voice a little too much.

So, when it came time to pick a first guest, the kid in the back row went straight to the front of the class.

Marie and I talk about how the *Observer* got started, what it takes to put out five editions and more than 200 pages every month and what she's seen change around here since that first stack of 750 papers.

You can listen to the East of Tampa Podcast wherever you get your podcasts. Follow us on social and subscribe to the newsletter at https://eastoftampa.com/.

And the next time the *Osprey Observer* shows up in your mailbox, think about how it got there.

How awesome are Marie Gilmore and the *Osprey Observer* team?

IMPACT GAME NIGHT COMBINES FUN WITH A MEANINGFUL CAUSE

Staff Report



Impact Program Inc. Executive Director Angie Kagey invites the community to its annual Designer Purse Game Night Thursday, December 3 at The Regent in Riverview.

The Impact Program Inc. will host its popular Purse Game Night with a twist on Thursday, December 3, offering an evening of bingo, trivia, games, prizes, food and fellowship while raising funds to support local youth and families.

The event will take place from 6-9 p.m. at The Regent, located near Winthrop at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview. Doors open at 6 p.m., with games beginning promptly at 7 p.m.

Tickets are $55 per person and include food and beverages, as well as everything you'll need to enjoy a night of fun games! The event is alcohol-free. Guests who want additional chances to win can purchase additional game packs.

Participants will have the opportunity to win designer purses along with other prizes. The evening will also feature raffle opportunities and a silent auction, giving guests additional ways to participate while supporting Impact's programs.

"Impact has been serving the community for the past 23 years and is supported by businesses, individuals, civic and other organizations," said Angie Kagey, executive director of Impact. "The overwhelming support of the community allows our staff and volunteers to continue to make an 'Impact' in the lives of students and parents."

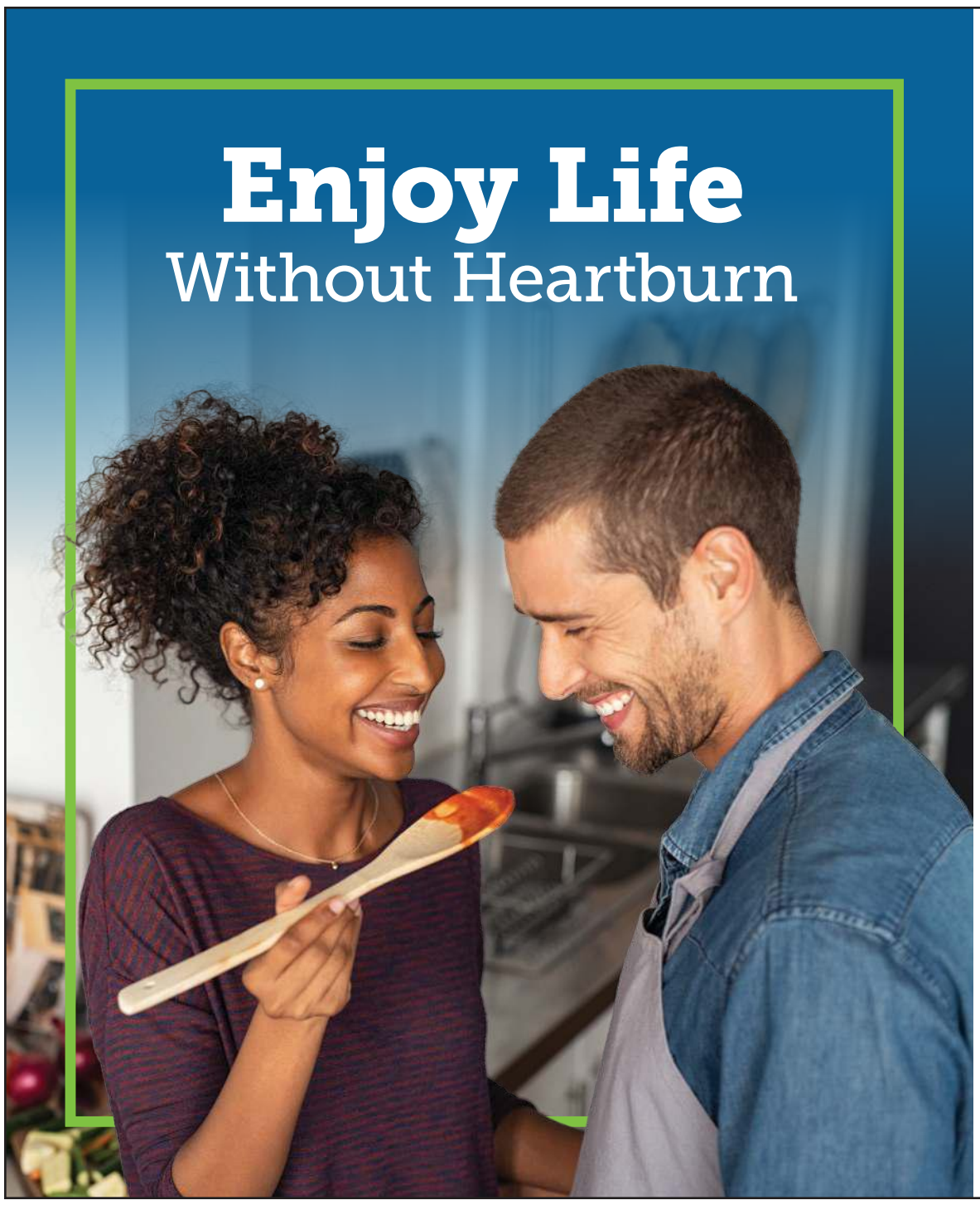
All proceeds from ticket sales and silent auction items will benefit Impact Program, a nonprofit youth development organization focused on educating, equipping and empowering young people to make positive life choices and avoid high-risk behaviors.

For more than two decades, Impact has provided classroom education and presentations for teens, parents, teachers and other youth leaders. Its programs emphasize healthy lifestyles and relationships while providing young people with information and resources to make informed decisions.

Funds raised will help support Impact's ongoing programs throughout Hillsborough County, including classroom education and presentations for parents and students.

Organizers encourage residents to gather their friends and enjoy a night out while supporting a local organization dedicated to strengthening youth and families.

Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available through Impact Program. For questions, contact Kagey at akagey@whatisimpact.com. More information about Impact and its programs is available at www.whatisimpact.com.



Expert Digestive Care for Lasting Relief

Heartburn, also known as acid reflux, can happen from time to time. But when it becomes frequent, it may be gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), a condition that can affect your esophagus, teeth, voice box and lungs.

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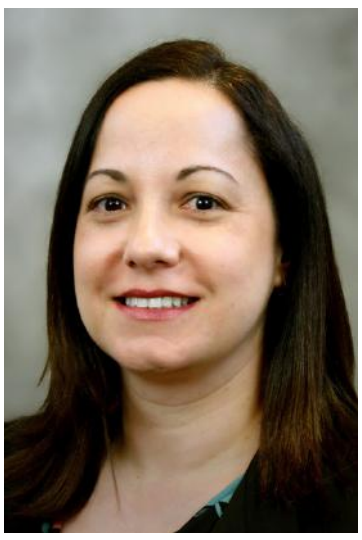
PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION FOCUSES ON SAFETY, COMMUNICATION AND TRAFFIC FLOW

By Maribel Medina



As Tampa Bay Water continues construction of the new South Hillsborough Pipeline, a choreographed sequence of preparation, installation, inspection and restoration helps keep traffic moving and residents, shoppers and drivers safe.

First, preparation work crews ready a specific area by locating utility lines in the pipeline's path, scraping asphalt from roads and removing landscaping. Dewatering systems are installed to ensure the ground is dry before excavation. Then, the installation crew installs the pipeline that can be up to 5 feet in diameter. After the pipe is welded together underground and every weld is inspected, a restoration crew follows behind to repave roads, install landscaping and make the work area as good as new.

To ensure the 26-mile pipeline is completed by the end of 2028, work simultaneously occurs at different locations along the route. At every stage, the overriding goal is to keep everyone informed and safe.

For example, there will be 17 tunnels under roads and bodies of water to keep traffic moving on major roads and to protect wildlife. One of those tunnels is under State Road 60 at West Robertson Street, where crews worked around the clock to install the pipe in a tunnel approximately 22 feet beneath the road as the traffic above continued to flow. Six tunnels along the route have been completed to date.

Communication and coordination are vital to keeping everyone safe and minimizing inconveniences. Two weeks before any digging, digital message boards alert drivers to upcoming changes in traffic patterns. Notifications are sent to nearby homes and businesses, which also can receive temporary signs reassuring customers they are still open.

Every step of the way, public safety officials, including fire and law enforcement, are kept informed so they know the quickest routes to provide help. So are local schools, school officials, hospitals and other medical providers. We are all working together to keep everyone safe as we work on this pipeline that will deliver drinking water vital to South Hillsborough's future.

Remember: Anyone can go to https://southhillsboroughpipeline.com/ to sign up for email alerts about pipeline construction or check upcoming construction dates, road closures and detours. Your safety is our top priority.

Maribel Medina is planning and projects director for Tampa Bay Water, which supplies wholesale drinking water to Hillsborough County, Pasco County, Pinellas County, New Port Richey, St. Petersburg and Tampa.

FITNESS FORGE COLLECTS HOLIDAY DONATIONS FOR LOCAL SENIORS

Staff Report



Fitness Forge in Riverview is inviting the community to help make the holidays brighter for local seniors through a special Christmas donation drive benefiting residents of Twin Creeks senior living.

Beginning November 1, the gym will collect donations of thoughtful gifts and everyday items to create holiday gift bags for residents. The collection will continue through Wednesday, December 16, at 7 p.m., giving community members plenty of time to participate in the seasonal initiative.

Brett Daven, co-owner of Fitness Forge, and co-owner Taylor Green will organize the donations, assemble the gift bags and deliver them to Twin Creeks during a special Christmas celebration planned for Friday, December 18, after lunch.

Daven and Green also plan to invite Fitness Forge members who wish to participate to join them for an afternoon of visiting and mingling with residents. The gathering will offer an opportunity to share holiday cheer and make personal connections with seniors in the community.

The donation list includes practical comforts and fun activities designed to bring enjoyment throughout the holiday season. Requested items include soft lap blankets, nonslip socks, easy-grip water bottles or mugs, large-print puzzle books, playing cards, coloring books and colored pencils. Easy-to-read calendars, picture frames, small toiletry organizers and gentle, unscented personal care kits are also welcome.

Community members can contribute medium and large Christmas gift bags and tissue paper to help prepare the packages. Greeting cards featuring handwritten messages are another requested item, offering donors a simple way to share a personal note of encouragement and holiday wishes.

Individually wrapped treats are also welcome, including regular chocolate, soft cookies and a variety of sugar-free options such as chocolates, hard candies, chewy candies, caramels and mints.

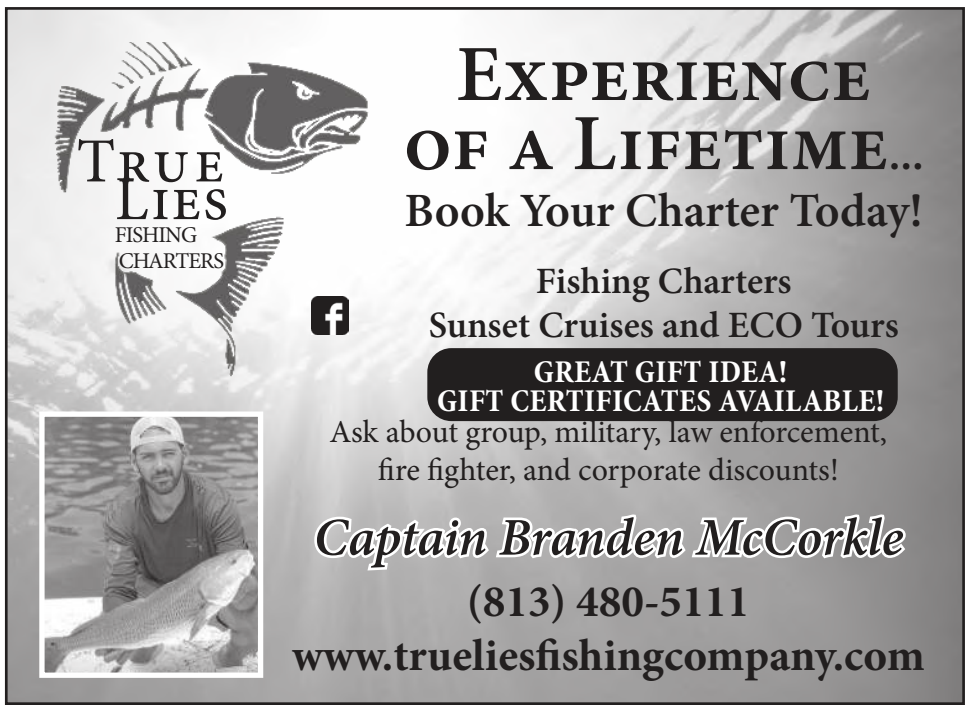
The initiative gives residents, gym members and other community supporters an opportunity to help make the season more meaningful for seniors. By combining useful gifts with personal messages and an in-person visit, the Fitness Forge team hopes to deliver more than presents — it wants residents to feel remembered and appreciated during the holidays.

Donations can be dropped off at Fitness Forge, located at 13456 Boyette Road in Riverview, near the corner of Boyette Road and FishHawk Boulevard.

For more information about the holiday donation drive, contact Fitness Forge at 813-654-1313 or email admin@fitness-forge2025.com. Community members are encouraged to contribute and help spread a little extra holiday happiness to Twin Creeks residents.







FROM SORTING TO SALE DAY, GENTLE TOUCH ESTATE SALES CAN HELP

Staff Report



If you have never been involved in an estate sale, you may wonder how the process works, what happens to household belongings and whether you should hire a professional estate sale company. An estate sale is an organized way to sell personal property when a family is downsizing, relocating, settling an estate or going through another major life transition.

What Happens During an Estate Sale?

The estate sale process typically begins with a consultation. The estate sale company evaluates the home, discusses the family's goals and explains its services and fees.

Before preparation begins, the family identifies items that should not be sold, including important documents, photographs, personal information, medications and sentimental belongings.

Next, the estate sale company sorts and organizes the household contents. Furniture, kitchenware, clothing, tools, collectibles, artwork, jewelry, electronics and other items are displayed so shoppers can easily browse.

Pricing and Research

Estate sale pricing is based on factors such as condition, brand, age, rarity, demand and current resale value. Professional estate sale companies may research unusual or collectible items to help establish appropriate prices.

Advertising and Sale Day

On sale day, shoppers browse the home and purchase items through a designated checkout area. Policies regarding payment methods, discounts, negotiations and furniture pickup vary by company.

Most estate sale merchandise is sold as-is, so buyers should carefully inspect items before purchasing.

What Happens To Unsold Items?

Not everything necessarily sells during an estate sale. Depending on the family's wishes and the company's agreement, remaining items may be donated, removed by the family or otherwise handled according to the agreed plan.

Why Hire an Estate Sale Company?

A professional estate sale company can manage much of the work, including sorting, pricing, staging, advertising, conducting the sale and coordinating postsale services.

For families dealing with an estate or preparing to downsize, professional assistance can make an overwhelming process more organized and manageable.

If you're considering an estate sale, contact Gentle Touch Estate Sales at 813-812-0780 or visit https://gentletouchestatesales.com/ to learn more about its estate sale services and how it can help you navigate the process from preparation through completion.

LOCAL SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED AS FLORIDA SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

By Marie Gilmore



Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is proud to announce that 38 schools have been designated as 2025-2026 Florida Schools of Excellence by the Florida State Board of Education on October 14. The designation recognizes schools whose sustained academic performance places them among the highest-performing schools in the state.

The Schools of Excellence designation is awarded by the Florida State Board of Education pursuant to Florida law and honors schools that demonstrate exceptional student achievement and academic outcomes.

"Being recognized as a Florida School of Excellence is a tremendous honor and a reflection of the hard work happening in classrooms across our district every day," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "This achievement belongs to our students, teachers, support staff, school leaders and families who work together to create outstanding learning environments for our students. We are incredibly proud of these schools and grateful for their commitment to excellence."

The recognition adds to a growing list of academic accomplishments across Hillsborough County Public Schools and highlights the district's continued focus on student achievement, high expectations and supporting each student's success.

The designation also celebrates the collaboration among educators, administrators, families and students that helps schools build strong academic foundations. From classroom instruction and individualized student support to family engagement and school leadership, these efforts contribute to an environment where students can reach their full potential.

For schools across Hillsborough County, the recognition serves as an opportunity to highlight successful practices and celebrate the dedication of the people who make a difference in students' lives each day. Teachers and staff play an important role in creating engaging learning experiences, encouraging students to set ambitious goals and helping them develop the skills needed for future success.

The 38 schools represent a significant achievement for the district and its school communities. Their designation reflects a commitment to maintaining high standards while continuing to provide students with opportunities to learn, grow and succeed.

HCPS continues to emphasize academic excellence throughout its schools, with a focus on ensuring students are prepared for the next steps in their education and beyond. The Florida Schools of Excellence recognition underscores the importance of continued teamwork and dedication in supporting positive educational outcomes across the district.

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MEN'S CHORUS HITS ALL THE RIGHT NOTES - AND WANTS YOU TO JOIN THE HARMONY

By Kelly Wise Valdes

The Sun City Center Men's Chorus is a nonprofit ensemble dedicated to educating, enriching and entertaining the community by providing vocal training and performance opportunities. The chorus is opening its doors to new members as it prepares for a busy performance season.



With holiday concerts approaching, the Sun City Center Men's Chorus is looking for new members ready to share in the music and the fun.

The group, which features 40 men singing four part accompanied harmony, welcomes anyone over age 18 who loves music and enjoys working as part of a team. Rehearsals are held on Thursdays from 3-5 p.m. at the Sun City Center United Methodist Church, located at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center, from September through April.

The chorus is currently gearing up for its fall 2026 concerts, scheduled for Sunday, December 6, at 3 p.m. and Monday, December 7, at 7 p.m. Spring performances will follow in the beginning of April 2027. Spring rehearsals begin on January 7, 2027, but newcomers still have time to join this season, with eight rehearsals remaining before the winter concert.

New singers will find a supportive environment where they can explore their voices and build confidence. Jeff Jordon, artistic director, is known for his ability to bring out the best in each performer.

As accompanist Misti Kai explained, "From your first rehearsal, you will find that Jeff has a gift for recognizing each person's talents and interests and allowing them to grow in their own way."

The chorus emphasizes enthusiasm, teamwork and a willingness to learn.

"A guiding principle for our team is that every voice matters. Together, we accomplish what none of us could achieve alone," said David Gwynne, chorus president.

Joining midseason is possible, though readiness depends on each singer's comfort level. Experienced vocalists may learn the program quickly, while beginners often benefit from attending rehearsals now and performing in the spring.

Audiences can expect concerts that blend familiar favorites with new selections, all presented with humor and personality.

"One of the special things about our chorus is that the experience goes beyond singing notes on a page," said Paul Kraack, chorus secretary. "Our artistic director brings humor and personality to his introductions, helping audiences connect with the music and the stories behind it. We want people to leave entertained, uplifted and eager to come back."

To join, interested singers may contact Gwynne at 854-222-5462.

RACE FOR EDUCATION MOVES TO USF FOR FIFTH ANNUAL RUN

By Jane Owen

The Race for Education benefiting Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) will take place on the campus of University of South Florida (USF) on Saturday, November 7.

The fifth annual event is a partnership between the Hillsborough Education Foundation (HEF), HCPS and USF and is being held at USF for the first time. The funds that are generated beyond the cost of the event will support HEF's school and classroom grants.

AnnMarie Courtney, the director of partnership engagement for HCPS, said the Race for Education provides a meaningful opportunity for students, families and staff to come together while promoting physical health, mental well-being and a strong sense of community.

"The Race for Education creates a culture of wellness by demonstrating that being active can be enjoyable and inclusive. Whether participants run, jog or walk, everyone can take part at their own pace. The shared experience promotes connection, school spirit and healthy choices that can extend well beyond race day," Courtney said.

HEF President and CEO Anna Corman said she is thankful for the way the race brings people together to celebrate public schools.

"Seeing so many people come out and participate is a powerful reminder of how much our community values its schools and the students and educators within them. We are very excited to bring this year's Race for Education to a new location at the University of South Florida, giving our community a new setting to come together and celebrate public education," Corman said.

In 2025, just over 1,200 community members participated in the event. Corman and Courtney are grateful for the participants, the business sponsors for the event and the new partnership with USF.

Genna Custard, a Florida Virtual School teacher and former HCPS educator, is a participant who runs the race every year.

"Year after year, I come back to the HEF run because I will use any opportunity to give back to teachers. I know teachers are the core and heart of our schools. They pour into our students every day. On a personal note, I enjoy seeing my fitness progress year after year. I do 99 percent of my runs solo and this is an opportunity to cheer on friends and colleagues and just have fun!" Custard said.

The Race for Education includes a 5K and 1-mile walk/run. There is on-course entertainment from HCPS student groups. The 5K is timed, and the top age-group 5K finishers will receive awards. Finishers of both the 5K and 1-mile walk/run will receive a race shirt and finisher's medal.

USF is located at 4202 E. Fowler Ave. in Tampa. To register for the race, visit https://runsignup.com/race/fl/tampa/hef5k.



Nautical Flea Market, ECHO Music Bingo & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

14th Annual Nautical Flea Market And Craft Show In Apollo Beach

Boaters, anglers and craft bargain hunters are invited to shop, eat and enjoy yourself on Saturday, November 21, from 7:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. at the Nautical Flea Market and Craft Show.

Hosted by Tampa Sailing Squadron in conjunction with U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 75, the annual event benefits TSS Youth Sailing Inc., a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit charity, and Sea Scout Ship 185, a branch of Scouting America. The event has grown every year to have over 40 vendors with nearly 1000 visitors. This is a fun morning with great bargains, great hamburgers and hot dogs from its grill team, a Donut-NV breakfast cart, a Doggie Style Hot Dogs cart, fresh baked goods and live music.

The Tampa Sailing Squadron is located at 1250 Apollo Beach Blvd. in Apollo Beach.

Memory And More Health Awareness Event

The Vitality Respite Center of St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, located at 3315 S. Bryan Rd. in Brandon, will recognize Alzheimer's Awareness Month this November by hosting Memory and More, a community event designed to provide practical information, helpful resources and greater awareness of memory health. This free event will take place on Saturday, November 21, from 9-11 a.m.

Attendees will hear from three expert speakers who will address topics related to Alzheimer's. Free memory screenings will also be available from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (must register at www.saumc.net; space is limited), giving community members an opportunity to take a proactive step in understanding their cognitive health or the health of loved ones.

Barrington Middle School

Support Barrington Middle School PTSA At Dave's Christmas Tree Lot

With the holiday season right around the corner, make Dave's Christmas Tree Lot part of your holiday tradition while giving back to Barrington Middle School. From fall favorites to Christmas cheer, there's something for everyone. When you shop at Dave's Christmas Tree Lot, located at the corner of Parsons Avenue and Lumsden Road, you can help support Barrington Middle School PTSA. Just purchase your Christmas tree, pumpkins, gourds, hay, mini pumpkins, corn stalks and firewood at Dave's Christmas Tree Lot and mention Barrington Middle School at checkout.

Bell Shoals Volleyball Promotes Breast Cancer Awareness

Bell Shoals Academy Volleyball teams hosted Dig Pink volleyball games and served up hope throughout October by participating in service projects supporting women battling breast cancer and survivors. The girls high school and middle school teams created special cards that were delivered to Lisa's Pink Petals of Hope in Brandon as well as delivered to friends and family. They promoted awareness at their Dig Pink games on October 5 by encouraging fans to wear pink and collected donations for the Side-Out Foundation.



ECHO Hosts Music Bingo

ECHO of Brandon will bring an evening of music, fun and community connection to Voodoo Brewing Co. on Tuesday, November 17, for a special music bingo fundraiser benefiting ECHO's mission to bridge the gap between crisis and stability for neighbors in need.

Doors will open at 6 p.m., with the music bingo game beginning at 7 p.m. at Voodoo Brewing Co., located at 3432 SR 60 in Valrico. Music bingo combines the excitement of traditional bingo with the fun of recognizing favorite songs and artists. Guests can enjoy an entertaining night out while helping support ECHO's work providing emergency food, clothing and life-stabilizing resources to individuals and families throughout the community. Visit www.echofl.org/music-bingo to register. Seats are limited and expected to fill quickly. Guests are encouraged to reserve their spots in advance.

South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting

The Tuesday, November 17, South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting will be held at the South Hillsborough Elks Lodge 2672, located at 1630 S. U.S. 41 in Ruskin. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., there will be an optional roundtable discussion, followed by a sit-down luncheon at 12 Noon. Following the luncheon, at 1 p.m., its guest speaker, Karen Fortin, will present 'Meet the Neighbors: Neighborhood Analysis Using Census Records.' The cost is $18 per person, which includes the meal and presentation. It now offers regular, vegetarian and lactose-free choices. For reservations and meal choice, please call Vicki at 360-608-1647.

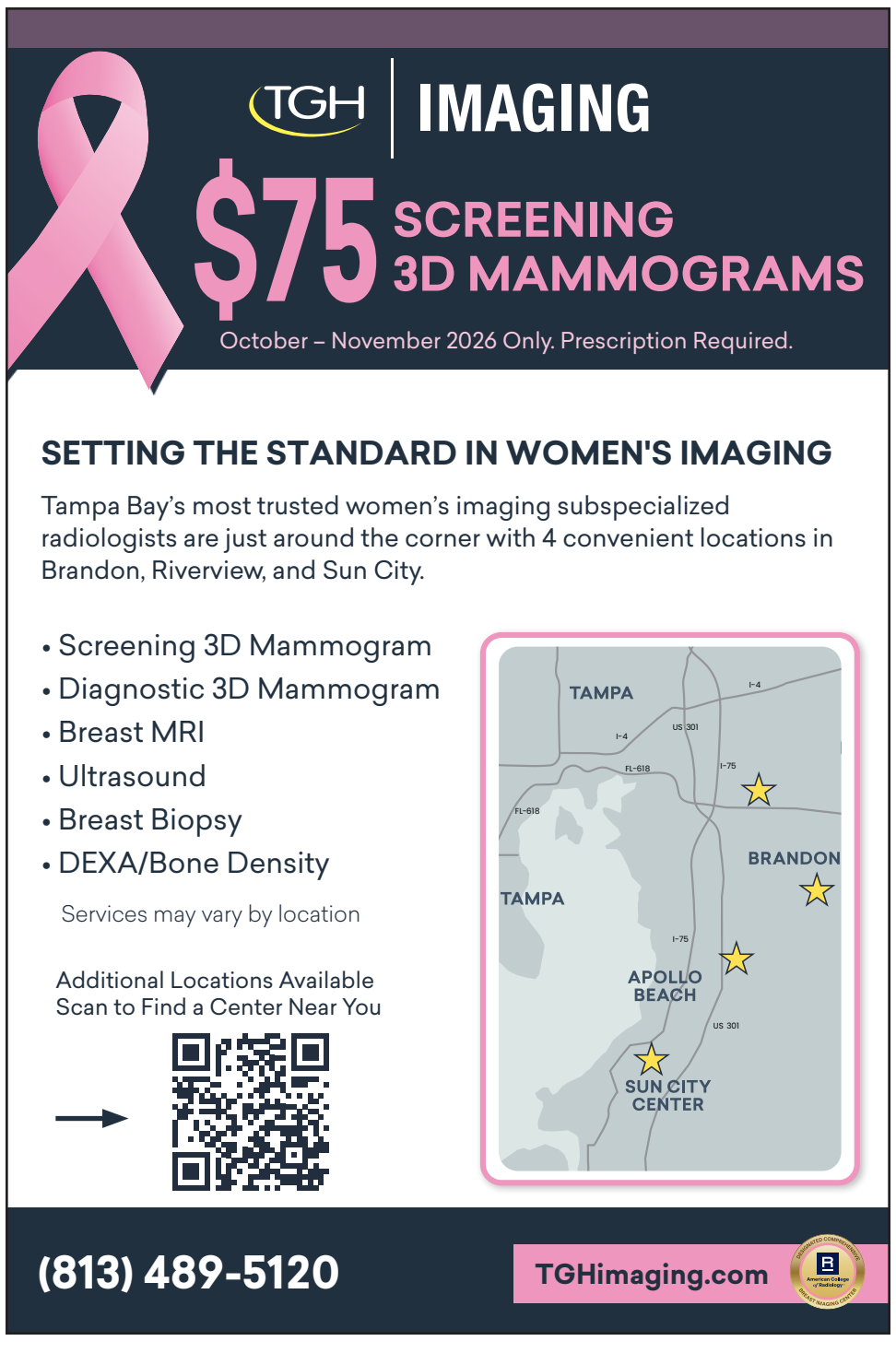
HCA Florida Special Photography Project

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital is inviting local high school student artists to submit their favorite digital images at 300dpi to kathleen.rogers2@hcahealthcare.com for a special photography project to provide featured art for the new emergency room serving FishHawk, Riverview and Bloomingdale, opening in 2027. Please include the photographer's name, high school and grade and the title of the image with each submission. Images should capture the heart of our community from local landmarks in Riverview, FishHawk and surrounding communities to stunning landscapes. The deadline for submissions is Friday, December 4.

Christmas Poinsettias, Plants And Flowers sale

The Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians will be hosting a sale of poinsettias, flowers and plants on Saturday and Sunday, December 5-6, at the Conesa Center in Prince of Peace Catholic Church, located at 702 Valley Forge Blvd. in Sun City Center. The December 5 sale will be before and after the 4 p.m. Mass, and the December 6 sale will be from 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Plants featured in the sale include both red and white poinsettias, amaryllis, Christmas cacti and geraniums. You can also preorder your poinsettias by contacting Karen Humphreys on 812-444-3431.





36TH ANNUAL RUSKIN SEAFOOD FEST RETURNS TO E.G. SIMMONS PARK ON NOVEMBER 14-15

Staff Report





The 36th Annual Ruskin Seafood Festival, presented by Christopher Ligori & Associates, returns to E.G. Simmons Park, located at 2401 19th Ave. NW in Ruskin, on Saturday, November 14, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sunday, November 15, from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is free.

The weekend features more than 120 vendors, including 22 food vendors, plus live music on the Bobby Howard Main Stage and family acts on the Oceanville Family Stage. Families can enjoy the kids' zone, with bounce houses, a rock-climbing wall and bungee, along with sensory-friendly areas and the Dog Bark Zone. On Sunday only, the car show features Revved Up and Roaming Oldies. The OneBlood Big Red Bus will also be on-site.

Festival food trucks and food vendors accept Seabucks only. Guests can preorder Seabucks online through Friday, November 13, at https://buy.stripe.com/3cIdRbcmagoWbE6fETgrS02 or buy them with cash or card at the Seabucks tents at the festival.

"The Seafood Festival is our signature event every year, and our community loves it! It truly captures the heart of the SouthShore."

The Ruskin Seafood Festival is produced by the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce. For more information, visit www.ruskinseafoodfest.org.

About the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce, based in Ruskin, supports its chamber members and the SouthShore community.

The chamber produces signature community events, including the Ruskin Veterans Day Parade and the Ruskin Seafood Festival. Learn more at www.southshorechamberofcommerce.org.

CULINARY STUDENTS BUILD SKILLS FOR THEIR FIRST JOBS AND BEYOND

By Brian Bokor



At Riverview High School, students prepare lunch for school staff using professional cooking equipment while learning that kitchen work starts well before the first ingredient hits the pan.

Inside The Reef, the school's student-run restaurant, junior Nolan Autry was learning to make pizza with help from classmate Kayla. Now in his second year in the culinary program, Autry usually makes cinnamon rolls, but this assignment offered a chance to try something different.

Under chefs Michael Todd Jent and Jessica Evans, more than 200 students gain kitchen experience, earn industry credentials and learn skills they can bring to their first hospitality jobs.

Students study food safety, sanitation, allergens and temperature control while preparing for certification exams. Approximately 75 students earn industry certifications annually, according to Evans, a Certified ServSafe Instructor.

Evans said those credentials help teenagers get ahead of the curve when seeking their first jobs. For local restaurants and other food service employers, the program offers prospective hires with food safety knowledge and practical kitchen experience.

Funding earned through industry certifications also helps purchase equipment, including stacked RATIONAL iCombi Pro ovens and a multifunctional iVario cooking system. Jent said corporate chefs provide training on the new equipment.

"This technology provides our students with firsthand experience using equipment found in modern professional kitchens, giving them a competitive advantage and making them more marketable to future employers," Evans said.

Students also encounter the everyday decisions involved in running a food service operation. Jent adjusts assignments based on ingredient prices, seasonal availability and food trends, giving students opportunities to work with costly ingredients, even when sales will not recover the expense.

"We're losing money on certain things, but they get to experience it," Jent said.

As students advance, they take on greater responsibility and help guide classmates. Emma Juncal, a fourth-year participant now serving as a teaching assistant, is among those experienced students. Culinary arts is one of her favorite classes, although she plans to pursue a medical career.

"So, when some people come in without that like knowledge, it can be more difficult," Juncal said.

Jent has been at Riverview for 25 years; Evans is in her 21st year. Their students' accomplishments are celebrated on the program's 'Most Valuable Chef' wall, an annual peer-voted distinction. Among its honorees is graduate Jada Vidal, who has hosted pop-up dining experiences and made multiple appearances on Food Network, according to Evans.

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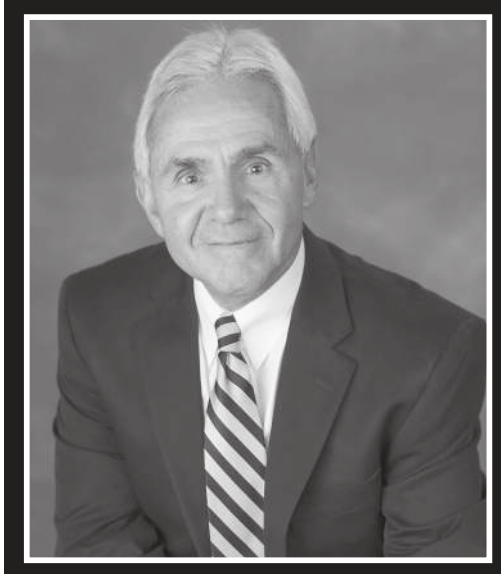

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FIND THE RIGHT FIT: MAGNET & CHOICE APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

By Superintendent Van Ayres



Every child has different interests, strengths and dreams for the future. Finding the right school experience can help turn those interests into opportunities.

At Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS), Magnet & Choice programs give families the opportunity to explore educational options designed to match how their child learns, what excites them and where they want to go next.

From elementary through high school, HCPS offers a wide variety of Magnet programs that allow students to dive deeper into areas they are passionate about. Students can explore everything from biomedical sciences and robotics to performing arts, environmental studies, culinary arts and more, all while building a strong academic foundation.

These specialized programs bring learning to life through hands-on experiences that encourage students to create, collaborate, solve problems and think critically. By connecting classroom learning with real-world experiences, students can discover new interests and begin building skills that will serve in college, careers, and beyond.

Families can also explore a range of Choice opportunities that provide different academic and career pathways. Students may pursue advanced programs, such as Cambridge AICE, International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP), or explore Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs that can lead to industry certifications and workforce-ready skills.

For families, school choice is about more than selecting a program. It is about finding an environment where a child can feel challenged, inspired and excited about learning. Whether a student already has a passion or is just beginning to discover one, HCPS offers opportunities to help them explore their potential and prepare for what comes next.

Magnet & Choice applications are now open, and the application window closes on Monday, December 7.

Families can learn more about available programs, the application process and important dates at https://hillsboroughschools.org/choice.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY EXTENDS EMERGENCY OVER DENGUE CONCERNS

By Marie Gilmlore



Hillsborough County has extended its state of local emergency through October 29 and likely longer as mosquito control crews continue efforts to reduce the mosquito population responsible for spreading locally acquired dengue fever.

County Administrator Bonnie Wise signed an executive order extending the emergency under authority granted by the County's Emergency Management Ordinance and Chapter 252 of the Florida Statutes. The original emergency declaration was issued September 24 and has since been extended in seven-day increments, including extensions through October 8, October 15 and October 22.

A state of local emergency can remain in effect for seven days unless it is rescinded or extended. The declaration allows county officials and emergency managers to take certain actions more quickly to protect the health, safety and welfare of residents. It also provides a path for reimbursement of certain emergency-related expenses.

Hillsborough County has reported more than 200 locally acquired dengue cases during the outbreak, accounting for the vast majority of Florida's reported cases. Cases have been identified in nearly 60 ZIP codes across the county.

Dengue is primarily spread by infected Aedes mosquitoes. Symptoms can include sudden high fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, muscle, bone or joint pain, nausea, vomiting and a rash. Most people recover within two to seven days.

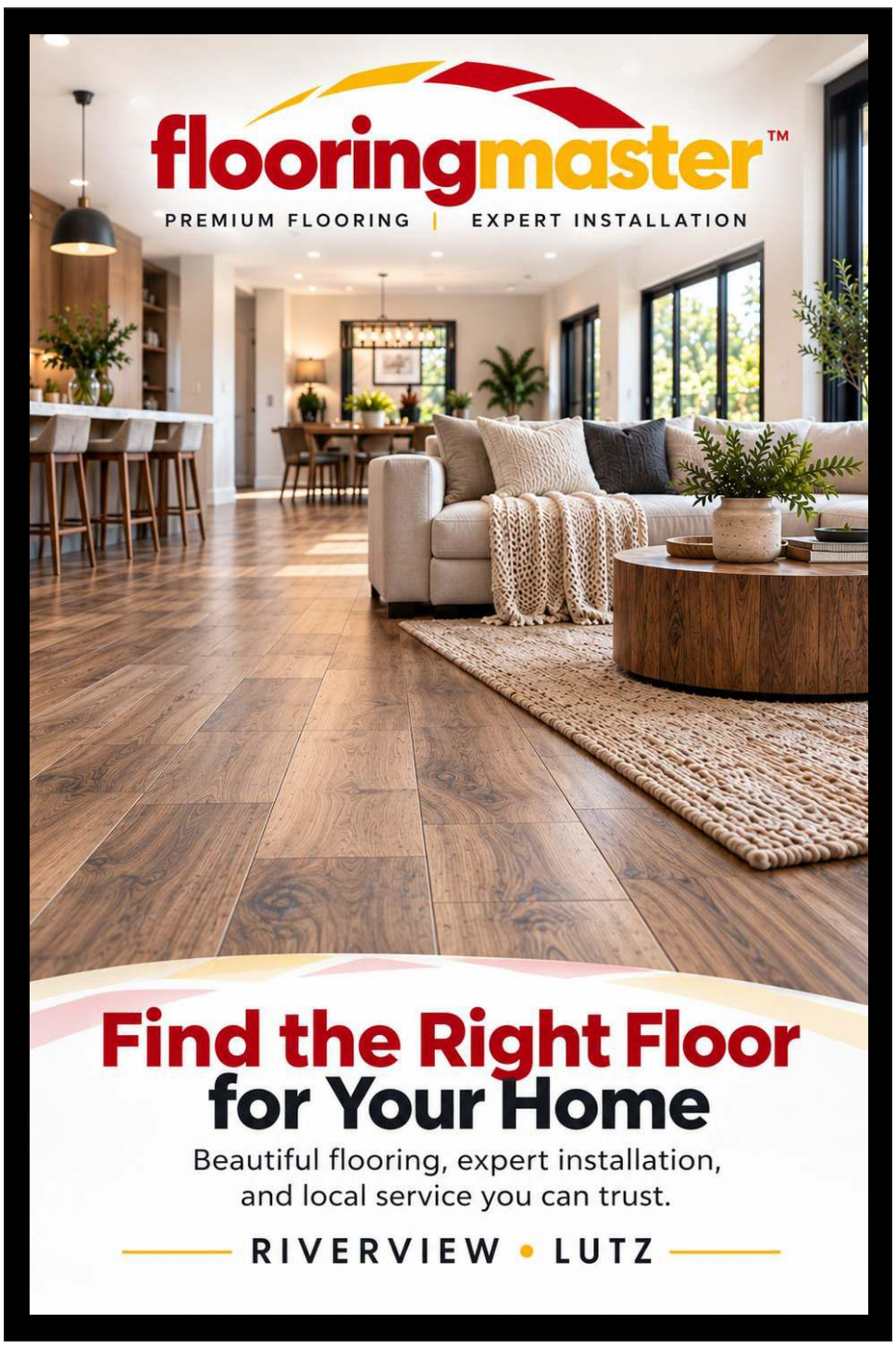
Residents should seek emergency medical care if warning signs of severe dengue develop. These can include severe abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, bleeding from the nose or gums, blood in vomit or stool, extreme fatigue or irritability, and difficulty breathing.

Mosquito Management crews are increasing treatments by both air and ground after mosquito surveillance identified dengue virus activity in mosquito populations in multiple neighborhoods. The county is coordinating with the Florida Department of Health in Hillsborough County on education and treatment efforts in impacted areas.

Residents throughout Hillsborough County are encouraged to help reduce mosquito breeding areas by eliminating standing water around their homes, particularly following recent heavy rains. Even small amounts of standing water in containers, plant saucers and other items can provide breeding areas for mosquitoes.

Residents can also sign up for notifications about localized aerial treatments in their neighborhoods and access information about current mosquito-control activities through Hillsborough County's online resources.

Mosquito control services are funded in part through Hillsborough County property tax dollars. For more information, contact Hillsborough County Mosquito Management Services at 813-635-5400.



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FINANCIAL FOCUS®
Simple budgeting tips that fit real life
Sept. 14, 2026

If you've just started managing your own finances, recommitted to doing it well or noticed your spending isn't making you as happy as you'd hoped, a budget might be exactly what you need. When you know where your money is going, you're likely to feel more in control and more confident your finances reflect what actually matters to you.

A simple budgeting framework to start: The 50/30/20 rule

One of the easiest ways to structure a budget is the 50/30/20 rule. The concept is refreshingly straightforward: Put 50% of your after-tax income toward necessities (housing, groceries, utilities, transportation), 30% toward wants (dining out, entertainment, streaming subscriptions) and 20% toward savings or paying down debt.

The 50/30/20 rule is a great foundation, but you may need to adjust it a little. If you live in a high-cost city, housing alone might require more than half your paycheck. Or you may have high income and can save more than 20%. Think of the 50/30/20 rule as a starting point you can adjust as your life evolves.

Not sure where your money goes?

That's completely normal. If you honestly don't know what you spend each month, try a low-pressure approach first. Spend a few months simply observing. Check your accounts without judgment, noting money coming in and going out. Think of it as a financial check-in rather than a report card. You can't change the past, but you can absolutely adjust for the future.

From there, small steps go a long way. Even spending 15 minutes a week on your budget can make the whole process feel far less daunting.

Make technology your easy button

Some budgeting apps do the routine work for you, syncing with your accounts and tracking spending automatically. Others are more hands-on, encouraging you to map out your spending plan in advance. There's likely one out there for every style of budgeting. The goal is to find a system you'll actually use and stick with.

When the numbers feel discouraging

Sometimes looking at spending brings up more stress than relief. If that happens, start by shifting your perspective. Focus on the expenses that brought you real value — a modest gift that meant the world to a friend or how your rent provides a comfortable, stable life. Then look for changes that align your spending with your values. Substituting expenses, reducing expenses or creating more income could all be used to help you keep your spending below your income.

Build a buffer

If you can, consider building a small buffer into your budget for unexpected expenses such as birthdays, minor repairs or spontaneous plans. Adding perhaps 3% of your income or a set dollar amount, like $200, helps keep those costs from throwing your whole plan off course.

The bottom line

With a few simple steps, budgeting becomes easier to stick with and more meaningful over time. At its core, it's a way to align your money with what matters while enjoying today and planning for tomorrow.



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Happy Thanksgiving!

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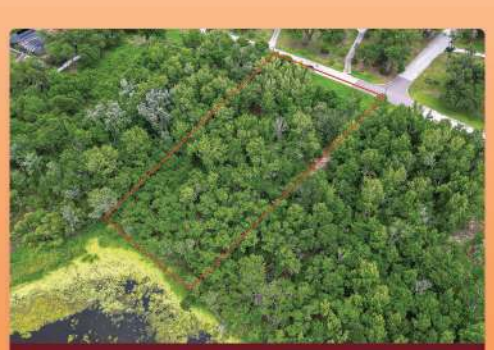

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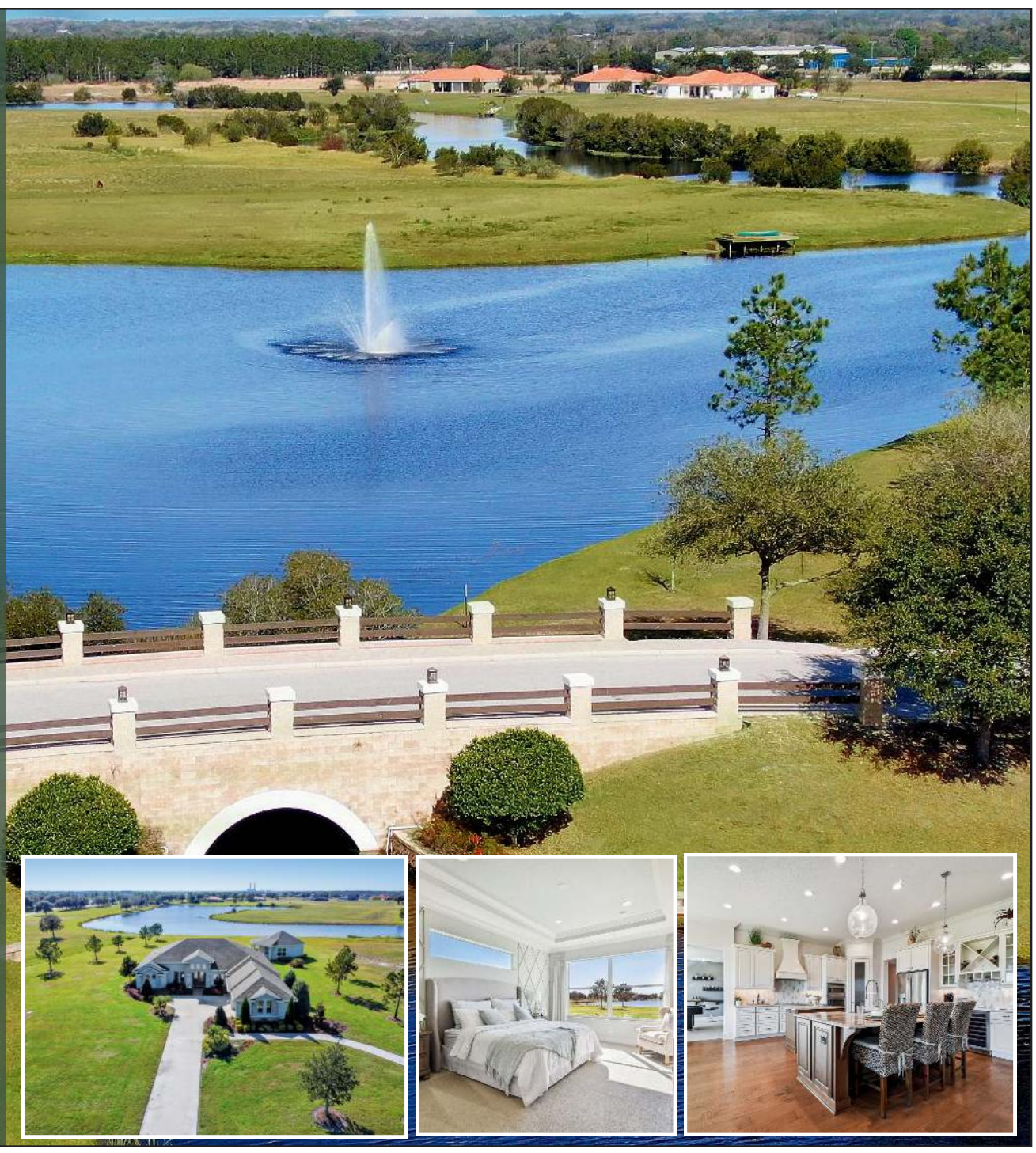



THE OSPREY OBSERVER Riverview Edition

Eye *on* Business

EDITED BY Jenny Bennett

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SUBMIT BUSINESS NEWS & PRESS RELEASES

Send to **Business Editor**
116 E. Bloomingdale Ave., Brandon, FL 33511
or email **jbennett@ospreyobserver.com**
DEADLINE: 15TH OF EACH MONTH

HomeWell Care Services Joins Chamber Of Commerce



The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce recently held a ribbon cutting for one of its newest members, HomeWell Care Services, owned by Raphael and Ketchine Debrosse.

The Debrosses bring more than three decades of combined care experience. HomeWell provides in-home companion care, personal care, Alzheimer's and dementia care, respite care, veterans care, transportation and posthospital support. Care is available hourly, around the clock or live-in, and it serves the surrounding communities, including Apollo Beach, Gibsonton, Riverview, Ruskin, Sun City Center, Wimauma and Lithia.

HomeWell Care Services is located at 400 Frandorson Circle, Ste. 4218, in Apollo Beach. For more information, call 813-738-4900 or visit https://homewellcares.com/.

Floating Springs Celebrates One-year Anniversary

Floating Springs Acupuncture & Wellness is celebrating its one-year anniversary. It is a peaceful, welcoming space designed to help you slow down, reconnect with your body and support your overall well-being. If you've never experienced acupuncture or wellness care before, your first visit begins with a private consultation. It takes time to listen to your concerns, learn about your health history, lifestyle and wellness goals; and answer any questions you may have. This personalized conversation helps it understand your individual needs and develop an approach that is right for you.

Floating Springs Acupuncture & Wellness is located at 500 Vonderburg Dr. W., Ste. 214B, in Brandon. For additional information, call 813-535-0693 or visit its website at https://floatingspringsacu.com/.

PipeFlow Solutions Provides Solutions With Minimal Disruption

PipeFlow Solutions, a Florida-based underground infrastructure and trenchless pipe rehabilitation company, is proud to provide residential and commercial customers throughout Florida with innovative solutions for repairing and restoring damaged piping systems.

With one of the company's co-founders based locally in the FishHawk community, PipeFlow Solutions has strong roots in the Tampa Bay area while proudly serving residential, commercial, multifamily and municipal customers throughout the state of Florida.

PipeFlow Solutions specializes in modern trenchless technologies that allow aging or damaged pipes to be rehabilitated with significantly less excavation, property damage and disruption than traditional pipe replacement methods. From a homeowner experiencing sewer line problems to complex commercial and municipal pipe rehabilitation projects, PipeFlow Solutions is proudly serving the state of Florida and helping customers extend the life of critical underground infrastructure.

For additional information visit its website at www.pipeflowsolutions.com or call 973-391-3841.

Latitudes Tours

Latitudes Tours offers daily narrated eco-tours, sunset dinner cruises and guided kayak tours through the scenic Tampa Bay Estuary and Little Manatee River. Guests can spot dolphins, manatees and native birds while learning about the area's rich ecosystem. Whether you're looking for a relaxing cruise or an adventurous paddle, the friendly crew ensures an unforgettable experience on the water. Latitudes Tours is consistently rated at five stars on Tripadvisor and welcomes private group bookings.

Latitudes Tours is located at 650 Bahia Beach Blvd. in Ruskin. Call 813-641-1311 or visit its website at https://latitudestours.com/ for more information. Gift cards are also available online.

Dancing For Joy Now Providing After School Care

Dancing For Joy, located at 11691 Boyette Rd. in Riverview, is now offering after-school care for students ages 3-17. Students will be collected from local schools, and care will be provided until 6 p.m. The weekly rate of $180 also includes dance classes, homework assistance, creative playtime, educational videos and snacks, all in a safe and happy environment. Register now via its website at www.dancingforjoy1.com. Call 813-610-0801 if you have additional questions.

PSA Apollo Beach Boating and Nautical Flea Market

Flea Market will be held November 21, 7:30 AM – 1:30 p.m. at the Tampa Sailing Squadron at 1250 Apollo Beach Drive Blvd.

All proceeds will support Tampa Sailing Squadron Youth Sailing and Sea Scout Ship #185 Safe Boater Education.

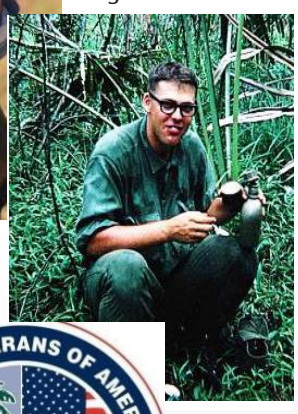
Suggested donation at the gate is $5per person. This includes 5 free raffle tickets for door-prize drawings. To exhibit, contact Bob Shaw at bob.the.sailer@gmail.com.

HISTORY LIVES IN VIETNAM VETERANS EDUCATIONAL MISSION

By Brad Stager



Bill Dixon with his service dog Tank, who accompanies him to his classroom presentations about the Vietnam War.



War in the 21st century has become a pushbutton business of remote-control death and destruction, but veterans of earlier conflicts carried out the fighting on the ground.

The Vietnam Veterans of America are working to ensure one of America's most grueling and polarizing conflicts, and those who served, are not forgotten.

Members of the organization venture into classrooms to share their personal experiences of the Vietnam War with students more than a half-century removed from their own school days.

Bill Dixon is the education chairman of VVA Chapter 787 in Riverview. He said the lessons he presents balance misinformation that has dominated the narrative about America's involvement in Southeast Asia.

"Most of the history the American people know about the Vietnam Conflict, and the men and women who were there is wrong," he wrote in an email.

Dixon, who served a yearlong tour of duty in Vietnam beginning in June 1967, cites inaccuracies surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin episode that escalated America's involvement and the evacuation of Saigon that ended it. He also wants to acknowledge the sacrifices of those behind the 58,281 names etched on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall.

"Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 787, Tampa feels that we owe it to those whose names are on The Wall in D.C., to those who have died from their Vietnam service since they came home and to all surviving Veterans of the Vietnam Era as well as the American Citizens to tell the real, story of our conflict," Dixon said.

He has spoken to about 700 high school students in the past year and hopes the program will grow beyond classrooms.

VVA speakers can help teachers meet Florida education benchmark requirements about the history and consequences of the Vietnam War and legislated mandates to teach about the perils of communism, including required classroom observance of Victims of Communism Day each November 7.

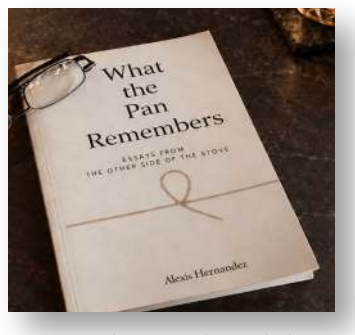
To learn more about local Vietnam Veterans of America activities, visit https://vva787.org/.

FOOD NETWORK CHEF SHARES HIS CULINARY JOURNEY IN NEW BOOK

By Makenzie Atkins Noel



Chef and author Alexis Hernandez, a Sun City Center resident and Food Network competitor, continues to share his passion for food through cooking and writing.



For chef Alexis Hernandez, food has always been about more than what is on the plate.

The Sun City Center resident has built a career spanning professional kitchens, restaurant ownership and television competitions, including Food Network Star and a winning appearance on Cutthroat Kitchen. Today, he is exploring another side of his culinary career through writing, sharing the memories and experiences that have shaped his relationship with food.

His new book, What the Pan Remembers, is a collection of personal essays about the people, places and moments he remembers through food.

Raised in a Cuban American household in New Jersey, Hernandez grew up eating rice, black beans, yuca, plantains and breaded chicken. His curiosity about cooking expanded when he began exploring cuisines beyond those he knew at home, eventually leading him to culinary school at Sullivan University in Louisville, Kentucky.

He went on to gain experience in professional kitchens before owning Union Hill Kitchen in Atlanta, Georgia, where he learned firsthand the challenges of running a restaurant. From managing a small kitchen to making last-minute adjustments when ingredients ran short, Hernandez learned that being a chef required more than knowing how to cook. His experience competing on competition shows brought new challenges, but he said some of his greatest lessons came from solving problems in his own kitchen.

"I learned a lot from television, but I probably learned more on the nights when something went wrong in my own kitchen and I had to figure out what to do about it," Hernandez said.

That practical perspective also informs his writing. In What the Pan Remembers, Hernandez reflects on childhood meals with his sister, eating canned ravioli and other seemingly ordinary experiences that became lasting memories.

He hopes readers will recognize pieces of their own lives in his stories and remember the people, places and traditions that have shaped them.

Now settled in Sun City Center, Hernandez continues to cook, develop recipes and share culinary knowledge through his website, The Other Side of the Stove, and his monthly Kitchen Notes column in the News of Sun City Center.

For more, please visit https://theothersideofthestove.com/.



SELF-CARE: PUT YOURSELF ON THE ROSTER!



Being a special needs parent or caregiver is a lot of work. It's a responsibility that many people may never fully understand. What others don't always see is the toll it can take on us mentally, emotionally and physically.

One of the biggest pieces of advice I give parents and caregivers is simple: Make time for yourself, and don't feel guilty about it!

As caregivers, we spend so much time making sure everyone else's needs are met that we often forget about our own. Between appointments, therapies, daily routines and life's unexpected challenges, it's easy to put ourselves at the bottom of the list.

I always say, "If I go down, this whole operation goes down!" And there's a lot of truth to that.

But let's look at self-care from a different perspective. It's not another task to add to your already busy schedule. It's an opportunity to do something that makes YOU happy!

Self-care doesn't have to be complicated, expensive or time-consuming. Sometimes, the simplest things make the biggest difference. Take a walk, try yoga or Pilates, go to the gym, read a book, get a pedicure, enjoy a date night, meet friends for lunch or take a peaceful drive alone. Even sitting outside with your morning coffee can be a little moment just for you.

The key is to start small and be intentional. Schedule some 'me time' on your calendar, just like any other appointment. Find activities that bring you joy, surround yourself with people who lift you up and don't be afraid to ask for help. Most importantly, let go of the guilt.

Remember, self-care isn't selfish. It's about creating balance, finding joy and giving yourself permission to enjoy life outside your caregiving responsibilities. Taking time for yourself can help you feel refreshed, more positive and better prepared for whatever life throws your way.

So, here's my challenge to every parent and caregiver: Learn to put yourself on the roster.

You matter too. You deserve happiness, rest and moments that are just for YOU!

GASPARILLA BOWL BRINGS HOLIDAY COLLEGE FOOTBALL GAME TO TAMPA

Staff Report



The Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl will return to Raymond James Stadium on Friday, December 18, bringing another postseason college football matchup to Tampa just days before Christmas.

Kickoff is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. ET, with the game broadcast live on ESPN. The bowl, owned and operated by ESPN Events, will feature two teams selected from a pool that includes programs from the Southeastern Conference (SEC), Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and American Conference. The participating teams will be announced later in the season.

The annual event has become a holiday-season tradition for Tampa Bay football fans, while also providing an opportunity for local businesses, families and fan groups to gather for pregame tailgates, holiday parties and other celebrations surrounding the game.

Last year's Gasparilla Bowl featured a dominant performance by NC State, which defeated Memphis 31-7. The Wolfpack jumped to a 31-7 halftime advantage and went on to earn its first bowl victory since 2017.

NC State linebacker Caden Fordham was named the game's Most Valuable Player after recording 13 tackles, 1.5 tackles for loss and a 55-yard interception return. He became the first defensive player in Gasparilla Bowl history to receive MVP honors.

The NC State defense held Memphis to seven points, marking the second-lowest scoring output in Gasparilla Bowl history. The Wolfpack also established a bowl record by scoring 31 points in the first half.

"Each year, the Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl continues to elevate its profile in postseason events in college football, and we're thrilled to return to Raymond James Stadium this December," said Scott Glaser, executive director of the Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl and ESPN Events.

Union Home Mortgage, which has partnered with the bowl for several years, will again serve as the event's title sponsor.

"We're excited to continue our partnership with the Gasparilla Bowl and build on the success we've shared over the years," said Bill Cosgrove, CEO of Union Home Mortgage.

Ticket information for the 2026 Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl will be announced later this fall. Additional information is available at gasparillabowl.com.



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TWO NIGHTS OF MAGIC AND MOTOWN COMING TO SUN CITY CENTER

Staff Report





Two evenings of entertainment are planned for November at the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center, featuring an award-winning comedy magician and a musical tribute to Motown and some of the greatest hits of all time.

Both performances will begin at 7 p.m. at the church, located at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center.

The first show, on Friday, November 6, will feature Elliott Smith, a five-time award-winning comedy magician with more than 45 years of experience. Smith received the distinguished Order of Merlin Excalibur from the International Brotherhood of Magicians and has entertained audiences throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.

His performances combine magic, mentalism, illusions, comedy and audience participation. Over the years, Smith has entertained two former Canadian prime ministers, international ambassadors, legendary entertainer Liberace and comedian Jay Leno. He has also headlined at New York City's Friars Club and earned a place on the Wall of The Great Comedians at the National Comedy Hall of Fame Museum.

On Friday, November 20, The Sounds of Soul will take the stage for an energetic concert celebrating Motown and other popular music favorites.

The five-member group has performed nationwide since 1996, earning a reputation for powerful vocals, distinctive harmonies, lively choreography and polished performances. The show features songs made famous by artists including The Temptations, The Four Tops, Aretha Franklin, The Supremes, Whitney Houston, Lionel Richie, Tina Turner and Barry White.

The group has performed at venues from Los Angeles to New Orleans, aboard cruise ships and on the internationally syndicated television program Dance Connection.

Tickets for each performance are $15 in advance or $20 at the door. Advance tickets are available online at www.lovethelight.org/events, at the Pages of Life Book Store and at the church office. Bookstore hours are Sundays from 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. The church office is open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

For more information about the performances, the upcoming Madrigal Dinner and other concerts and recitals, contact concert series coordinator Steve Krogh at 949-842-9616 or visit www.lovethelight.org.

ECHO THRIFT HELPS PRESERVE A PIECE OF BRANDON'S HISTORY

Staff Report



ECHO Marketing Coordinator Kayla Vincent displays a handmade item created by Otis L. Brandon that was recently donated to ECHO Thrift and then donated to Preserving Brandon representative Karen Vaughn.



What began as an item donated to ECHO Thrift has turned into an opportunity to preserve a piece of Brandon's history for generations to come.

ECHO recently received an item at its thrift store that was handmade by Otis L. Brandon. Recognizing that the piece could have historical significance to the Brandon community, the ECHO team decided it deserved more than a place on a thrift store shelf.

ECHO reached out to the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce, which connected the organization with Preserving Brandon, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving, protecting and sharing Brandon's history.

That connection confirmed that the item was indeed tied to the Brandon family legacy.

According to Preserving Brandon, Otis L. Brandon was born on April 1, 1929, and was a descendant of James Henry Brandon, the fourth child of John Brandon (1809) and Martha Brown Carson (1813). James built what is now known as the Brandon Homestead, also associated with Stowers Funeral Home, on State Road 60 in 1876.

Rather than reselling the item, ECHO worked with Preserving Brandon to ensure the piece could be preserved and have its history shared with the community.

"We are so grateful for the opportunity to be part of this incredible connection," said Kayla Vincent, ECHO's marketing coordinator. "What could have simply been another item moving through our thrift store instead became an opportunity to return a piece of Brandon's history to the community. It is a wonderful example of what can happen when local organizations recognize an opportunity and work together."

Preserving Brandon has also partnered with the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library. When the new Brandon Library opens, the organization plans to have a dedicated display shelf where historical items like this one can be featured for the public.

The journey of this item highlights the importance of community connections.

"As ECHO approaches 40 years of serving Brandon, we are reminded that we are not only part of Brandon's present — we are part of its story," the organization said.

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THE GODDARD SCHOOL IS BRINGING A NEW LOCATION TO WIMAUMA

Staff Report



The Goddard School, a nationally acclaimed early childhood education franchise, is set to open its first location in Wimauma in late October, joining the more than 30 Goddard Schools in Florida offering an inquiry-based learning experience. The Goddard School of Wimauma is the third Florida school for owners Shekar Laveti and Soujanya Chalumuri, who opened The Goddard School of Lithia – FishHawk in 2017 and The Goddard School of Riverview in 2022.

Located at 10310 Paseo Al Mar Blvd. in Sun City Center, this 17,500-square-foot early childhood education center will have 15 classrooms to provide care for and educate approximately 250 students. Additionally, the school will add 40 teaching jobs to the community.

"As a father of two boys, I understand the importance of finding a high-quality early education program that meets a family's needs," said Laveti. "We are excited to provide families in Wimauma and the surrounding communities with an environment where children can build confidence, develop a lifelong love of learning and gain skills they need to thrive in kindergarten and beyond."

The new school will have an indoor gymnasium, a rock wall and a playground with artificial turf. Additionally, the school will be equipped with hospital-grade sanitization equipment to ensure a healthy environment.

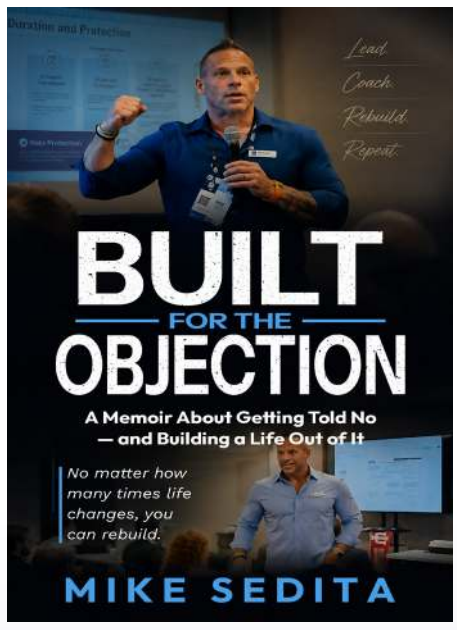
The Goddard School's exclusive inquiry-based education program, Wonder of Learning, embraces how children learn best — through their innate curiosity — because research confirms that when wonder leads, learning follows. Wonder of Learning features a cutting-edge curriculum developed by a diversely skilled group of educators, researchers, physicians and early childhood experts, as well as built-in assessment of academic and social-emotional progress and family communication via a proprietary app.

Inquiry-based learning, which guides the Wonder of Learning curriculum, is a teaching and learning approach that focuses on the natural curiosity and sense of wonder children bring into the classroom. With teacher-guided inquiry topics, children learn about themselves and the world around them by exploring their interests, investigating concepts and asking questions.

For families interested in learning more about The Goddard School and how to enroll in the new Wimauma location, visit www.goddardschool.com or call 813-535-5350.

SALES COACH TURNS A CAREER OF HEARING "NO" INTO NEW MEMOIR

Staff Report



Mike Sedita has heard "no" for a living for more than 20 years. He heard it from insurance customers, from advertisers and from life itself. His new memoir, *Built for the Objection*, tells how he learned to treat each one as a starting point instead of a dead end.

The book is now available on Amazon in Kindle, paperback and hardcover editions. Sedita is a region coach for Best Version Media and has sold more than $25 million in advertising since 2010. He grew up in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey, and has lived in the Tampa Bay area since 2019.

Built for the Objection follows Sedita from a North Jersey hometown to banking, car sales and two decades in financial services. In those years, he ran a 65-seat insurance call center that handled 3,500 calls a day. It then traces his years as a partner in an Atlanta, Georgia, media-buying agency and his move to Florida to rebuild.

At Best Version Media, Sedita launched three community magazines on his first day while carrying heavy personal obligations. He went on to set the company's single-month sales record of more than $558,000 in December 2023. He was named to the company's Inner Circle every year from 2022 through 2025.

"I didn't write this book because I always won," Sedita said. "I wrote it because I got knocked down more times than I can count, and I kept getting back up. If there's a will, there's a way."

The book has 34 short chapters in five parts. Each story carries a practical lesson for salespeople, business owners and anyone starting over. Sedita wrote it to sound the way he talks: direct, a little raw and built to move readers to action.

"Every objection is just a question nobody has answered yet," Sedita said. "That's true on a sales call, and it's true when life hands you a setback. I want people to close this book and go do something in their business the next morning."

An audiobook read by the author is in production. Sedita is available for interviews, podcasts and speaking engagements on sales, coaching, resilience and rebuilding after a setback.

Built for the Objection is available at www.amazon.com/dp/b0hl9hmxz2.

About The Author

Sedita is a sales performance coach for Best Version Media, where he helps new publishers launch community magazines across the country. He spent 20 years in financial services, including as director of international annuities. He has sold more than $25 million in media since 2010. Sedita is a strategic adviser to 16W Media Group, a Tampa Bay marketing agency. He lives in Apollo Beach with his wife, Kacey.

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VETERANS DAY PARADE: COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER TO HONOR THOSE WHO SERVED

By Dep. Jeff Merry





On Saturday, November 7, the streets of Ruskin will once again come alive with a proud American tradition — the Ruskin Veterans Day Parade. Beginning at 11 a.m., the parade will travel north along U.S. 41 from Fifth Avenue SE to 11th Avenue NE, bringing together veterans, families, civic organizations, businesses, schools and residents from throughout SouthShore.

At its heart, however, this parade is about one thing: saying thank you to the men and women who served our nation.

This year's parade carries an especially meaningful message as the community honors its surviving World War II veterans as grand marshals. These remarkable Americans belong to a generation that is disappearing before our eyes. They answered their nation's call decades ago, often at remarkably young ages, and helped preserve the freedoms that generations of Americans have enjoyed ever since.

Every year, there are fewer opportunities to personally thank a World War II veteran. That makes this year's parade more than a celebration — it is an opportunity to gather together while we still can, look these heroes in the eyes and simply say, "Thank you for your service."

The parade also represents something larger about the SouthShore community: the ability to come together for a purpose greater than us.

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce recognized the importance of ensuring this beloved tradition continues. Rather than allowing a longstanding community celebration honoring veterans to disappear, the chamber felt compelled to help keep the parade moving forward. The chamber's involvement reflects an important principle: community traditions survive when people are willing to step forward, work together and take responsibility for preserving them.

And this will truly be a community parade.

Spectators will see colorful krewe floats, Jeep krewes, ROTC cadets, veterans organizations, civic groups, businesses and other community entries making their way down U.S. 41. Each participant brings something different, but they all share the same purpose — honoring America's veterans.

For the veterans watching from the sidelines, and especially those riding as grand marshals, the parade is a visible reminder that their sacrifices have not been forgotten.

For children, it is a living history lesson.

For families, it is an opportunity to teach the next generation about service and sacrifice.

And for the entire SouthShore community, it is a chance to stand together.

On November 7, Ruskin won't simply be hosting a parade. It will be making a statement: We remember. We appreciate. We honor.

Most importantly, we will say thank you to the veterans who gave so much so that all of us could enjoy the freedoms we sometimes take for granted.

For the Ruskin Veterans Day Parade, bring your family, bring your American flag, line U.S. 41 and join your neighbors in giving our veterans the welcome and gratitude they deserve.

TAMPA ELECTRIC'S MANATEE VIEWING CENTER IS OPEN FOR 40TH YEAR

Staff Report



Tampa Electric's award-winning Manatee Viewing Center opened for the 2026-27 season on November 1 — its 40th anniversary year — welcoming visitors back to one of the Tampa Bay area's most popular destinations.

The cownose rays are now living year-round in the Manatee Viewing Center's touch tank as permanent residents. This avoids stressing the animals when moving them to another home for the summer. During the offseason, the gentle creatures will be available as ambassadors for summer campers.

Other improvements since last season:

- A new shelter provides shade for visitors awaiting tram pickup on the south end of the parking lot.
- Freshwater turtles have a new habitat at the Suncoast Youth Conservation Center, including underwater views.
- The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's fish hatchery is now open to the public.
- New solar-powered charging tables have been installed, to replace a few that were damaged by hurricanes.
- The Tom Hernandez Clean Energy Center will be improved throughout the season.

"The Manatee Viewing Center has always been a special place where people can experience the wonders of Florida up close, and now we're excited to have the rays make their permanent home here, too," said Stan Kroh, manager of Land and Stewardship Programs for Tampa Electric. "Whether you're watching manatees in the wild or getting an up-close look at the rays, it's a chance to connect with nature and see environmental stewardship in action."

Admission and parking are free.

Why Manatees Gather At Tampa Electric

Since the early 1970s, manatees have sought refuge from the cold in the warm water canal at Tampa Electric's Big Bend Power Station in Apollo Beach.

When Tampa Bay's water temperature drops to 68 degrees or below, manatees gather in the canal. Sometimes hundreds of manatees can be seen at once. On one very cold day last season, a record 2,100 manatees congregated in the canal. About 190 manatees have been documented returning to the canal for more than 20 years. One remarkable manatee has returned for more than four decades. The area is a state and federal manatee sanctuary.

The Manatee Viewing Center draws nearly 400,000 visitors each season and has welcomed more than 8.7 million visitors. Admission and parking are free.

The center is open from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily from November 1 through April 15, except Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter, when it is closed. On Christmas Eve, the center closes at 3 p.m. Comfortable shoes and clothing are recommended. Trained service animals are permitted.

For more information, visit www.tampaelectric.com/manatee or call 813-228-4289.







$350,000 AWARD TO EXPAND CAREER SUPPORT FOR TAMPA BAY VETERANS

Staff Report



CareerSource Tampa Bay (CSTB) was awarded $350,000 in state appropriations funding for the Veterans Project for Job Recovery, sponsored by Florida Senator Nick DiCeglie and Representative Berny Jacques. The project will provide training, employment and supportive services to local veterans, transitioning service members and eligible spouses.

The project will prioritize veterans facing barriers to employment, including veterans experiencing homelessness, veterans with disabilities and women veterans. The goal is to help participants obtain or retain employment and pursue opportunities for career advancement and increased wages.

The investment will serve a significant veteran population in the Tampa Bay region. Nearly 175,000 veterans live in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, representing approximately 12 percent of Florida's veteran population.

From July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, CSTB served 2,814 veterans across Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. Of those, 2,087 were veterans facing qualifying employment barriers, 666 were veterans with disabilities, 440 were women veteran and 258 were experiencing homelessness.

"Supporting those who have served our country is a vital part of our mission at CareerSource Tampa Bay," said Keidrian Kunkel, president and CEO of CareerSource Tampa Bay. "With such a significant veteran population in our region, this funding represents an important investment in veterans and their individual needs, while creating stronger pathways to translate their military skills and experience into meaningful, high-demand and high-wage careers."

About CareerSource Tampa Bay

Effective July 1, 2024, CareerSource Tampa Bay is the designated local workforce development board serving Hillsborough County and Pinellas County. CareerSource Tampa Bay is governed by a board of directors whose members are appointed by a consortium of chief local elected officials (CLEOs) from each county commission.

CareerSource Tampa Bay is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. All voice telephone numbers listed may be reached by persons using TTY/TDD equipment via the Florida Relay Service at 711.

CareerSource Tampa Bay is the direct service provider for various workforce programs which are supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, Agriculture and other agencies as part of awards totaling $38,665,000 with 93 percent federally funded (updated annually, as of September 2025).

For more information about CareerSource Tampa Bay, please visit the website at www.careersourcetampabay.com.

MAKE-A-WISH HELPS VALRICO TEEN STEP INTO NFL BROADCASTING BOOTH

Staff Report

A Valrico teenager whose heart condition forced him to give up competitive sports recently found a new way to stay close to the games he loves when Make-A-Wish Southern Florida helped make his dream come true.



Valrico's Justin Pogorzala, 15, met his broadcasting hero, CBS Sports announcer Kevin Harlan, as part of a Make-A-Wish Southern Florida experience.

Justin Pogorzala, 15, requires an implantable cardiac defibrillator to protect against sudden cardiac arrest. Before his diagnosis changed his plans, Justin was a promising young athlete. He has since channeled his passion for sports into a new goal — becoming a play-by-play broadcaster.

His broadcasting hero is CBS Sports announcer Kevin Harlan, and Justin's wish was to meet Harlan and experience what it is like to work behind the scenes of an NFL broadcast.

That wish became a multi-day VIP experience in South Florida when the Kansas City Chiefs faced the Miami Dolphins at Hard Rock Stadium.

Justin not only met Harlan but spent time with the veteran broadcaster, learning about his career and getting an insider's perspective on how a professional NFL broadcast comes together.

The two quickly connected over their shared love of sports. Harlan offered Justin career advice and was impressed by the teenager's knowledge of the game and his voice, telling him he sees a promising future for him in broadcasting.

Justin also had the opportunity to wear a headset and sit in the broadcast booth during the game, giving him a firsthand look at the action from the perspective of the announcers.

The experience extended well beyond the broadcast booth. Justin met players on the field, watched as Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes was interviewed and received team gear and memorabilia.

His family was also treated to a memorable experience, arriving at and leaving the stadium in a chauffeur-driven limousine.

The wish was made possible through a collaborative effort involving CBS, the NFL, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Miami Dolphins, all of which helped create a behind-the-scenes experience Justin and his family will remember.

For Justin, the opportunity provided more than a chance to meet a sports broadcasting idol. It offered encouragement and a glimpse into a possible future after his health challenges forced him to leave competitive athletics.

The experience demonstrated how a passion for sports can take on a new form and how a dream can provide direction during a difficult time.

Make-A-Wish Southern Florida provided photos and video from Justin's experience. Materials are credited to Make-A-Wish Southern Florida.



PRESERVING BRANDON FLORIDA

Get in touch at Preserving Brandon@gmail.com

SECOND CHANCE FOR THE GALVIN-CARL HOUSE



For more than a century, the Galvin-Carl House on Mulrennan Road in Valrico has quietly witnessed the transformation of Eastern Hillsborough County from a rural community into one of the region's fastest-growing areas.

Built in the late 19th century, with historical records generally dating the home to circa 1890, and some local documentation identifying 1893, the house was built for Daniel J. Galvin, an early Brandon businessman and civic leader. John McCormick was identified as the builder.

Galvin was a prominent figure during Brandon's early development. He operated a general store near the Brandon railroad depot on Moon Avenue and was involved in Hillsborough County government. His home stands as a tangible connection to the families and businesses that helped shape the community more than 130 years ago.

The property originally encompassed approximately 40 acres and included a citrus grove. Over the decades, the surrounding landscape changed, families came and went and the historic home eventually fell into significant disrepair.

With so few historic homes remaining in the Brandon and Valrico area, the future of the Galvin-Carl House became a matter of concern for local preservation advocates. At one point, demolition appeared to be its likely fate.

Then the story changed.

The current owner ultimately chose restoration over demolition, giving the historic property an opportunity to continue into another generation.

"Once completed, the Galvin-Carl House will pay homage to the original architecture, preserving the exterior details specific to the house when it was built in 1893," current owner said.

The plumbing, electrical and air-conditioning systems are being completely replaced, while much of the interior will be redesigned and key historic elements preserved.

"Every effort is being done to restore this historic resource while rebuilding it to last another 100 years," current owner said.

For a community rapidly losing many of its historic structures, the Galvin-Carl House represents more than an old building. It is a physical connection to the people, places and stories that came before us and a reminder that preservation sometimes begins with one important decision: to save it.

To learn more or get involved with Preserving Brandon, please contact us at preservingbrandon@gmail.com.

SENIORS VS. CRIME VOLUNTEERS HELP PROTECT LOCAL SENIORS FROM SCAMS

By Libby Hopkins



Seniors vs. Crime is a special project of the Florida attorney general. The project began in 1989 as a crime prevention program utilizing senior volunteers in educating their peers and promoting fellow seniors to become involved in their own protection. The project has now grown into a statewide organization that provides direct services to senior victims as well as continuing its educational component. The project has now become one of the most unique and successful volunteer programs in the nation in assisting and protecting senior citizens.

The primary mission of the Seniors vs. Crime project is to reduce the victimization of senior citizens who are targeted for specific crimes or scams based on their age.

"Even though we were retired, we wanted to stay active and looked for ways to make a difference in our community," said Rosanne Pogash. "We read about a group that was charged with helping people who might have been scammed or who have had disputes with businesses, contractors or salespeople and needed some help in resolving issues. That led us to volunteer with a statewide group, Seniors vs. Crime."

Couple Rosanne and Bill Pogash felt that by working with people who have lost, in some cases, thousands of dollars, they could help others settle disputes and, in some cases, resolve financial hardships for their individual cases.

"Individuals contact Seniors vs. Crime by completing an online complaint form at www.seniorsvscrime.com or calling 800-203-3099, and those forms are distributed to one of the Seniors vs. Crime offices located across the state," Rosanne said. "Our Region 2 Office is in Sun City Center at 946 Cherry Dr., Ste. A, next door to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's substation. Our office is staffed on Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to Noon, and walk-ins are always welcome."

The Pogashes feel the best part of volunteering with this group is when they can actually help people get restitution after they have been wronged in some way.

"We act as an intermediary between the complainant and the company," Rosanne said. "In many cases, after we represent that we are volunteers for a special project of the Florida attorney's office, reputable businesses or individuals usually want to help resolve any issues. We can help after the complainant has been stonewalled by the other party and just needs some help in getting to the right person to resolve the dispute."

The couple loves to provide outreach presentations to seniors, church groups, clubs, homeowners and condo associations, senior centers and any group that wants to learn about current scams and methods that they can use to avoid being scammed.

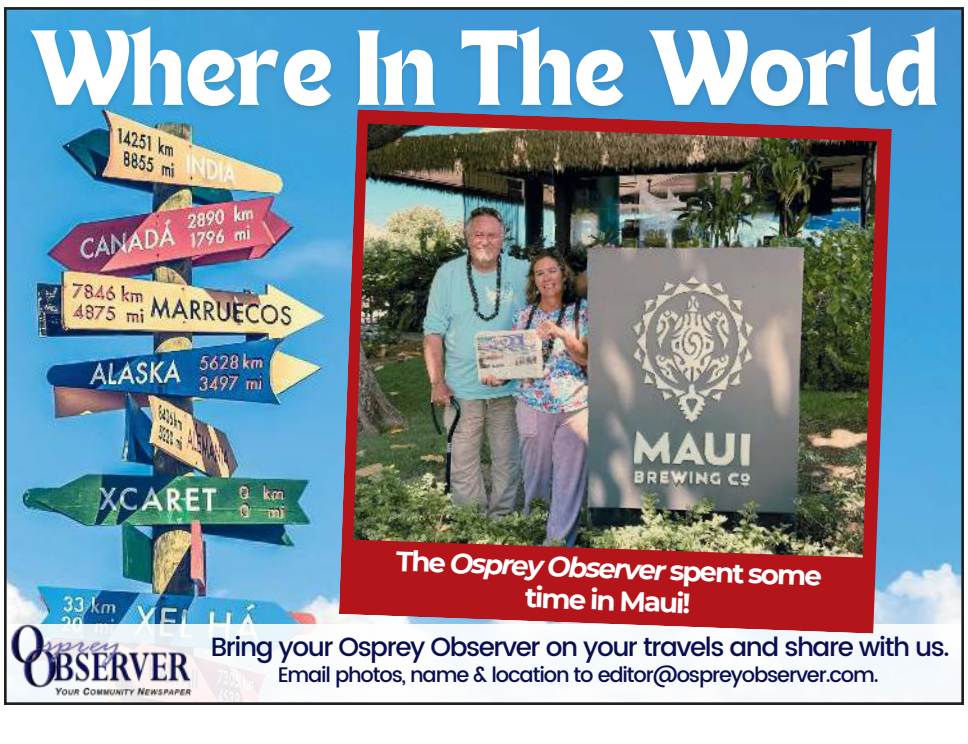
"We feel that if we can get to these groups and explain scam prevention strategies, we can reduce the number of people needing help resolving disputes," Rosanne said. "Our experience in giving these presentations is that we learn from each other and get our point across much better by hearing from the audience who share their own experiences."

If you would like to learn more about Seniors vs. Crimes, visit the website at www.seniorsvscrime.com.









Christian Voice



Grace Notes

When Your Sacrifice Crawls Off the Altar
By Debora Coty

Someone recently asked me, "Are altar sacrifices still expected of Christ-followers today?"

The answer is yes, but in a different form than biblical times: sacrificial giving.

A little digging revealed King David's insight while seeking a suitable place to build an altar to ask Jehovah's forgiveness via an animal sacrifice for a rotten sin David had committed (aren't we glad that because of Jesus' blood sacrifice on the cross we don't have to do that anymore?).

David inquired about a certain piece of real estate. The submissive owner offered the land to his king for FREE, and wood and oxen (to sacrifice) too.

King David wisely replied: "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the LORD or offer a sacrifice which costs me nothing," (1 Chronicles 21:24).

Note: If it costs you nothing, it isn't a real sacrifice. It's worthless. It means zilch.

I let those sobering thoughts percolate. Maybe my own sacrificial giving is too easy. Most of the things I do for the Lord cost me nothing. I do them because I like doing them. I turn down things that I don't like doing because they're too time-consuming, difficult or energy-draining.

They cost me too much.

Then a friend asked if I would spend the afternoon with her live-in 91-year-old mom while she worked. Now, this may not sound like a sacrifice to you, but because of my chronic nighttime insomnia and afternoon naps being necessary to keep (barely) functioning, it's a big deal to me. Skipping my nap would mean a blossoming migraine and terminal irritability.

Yikes. My sacrifice was trying to crawl off the altar. I felt the Holy Spirit's elbow jab: It's not a sacrifice if it costs you nothing, Deb.

So, I went granny-sitting. And the Almighty blessed my socks off with a wonderful afternoon of fellowship with the perkiest and godliest sweetly ripened gal ever.

I guess my sacrificial parameters aren't set in stone after all. And that's a good thing, because Papa God is pleased when we don't allow our living sacrifices to crawl off the altar.

"Do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased," (Hebrews 13:16 NASB).

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.

TEACHING: BOTH EXHILARATING AND FRIGHTENING!



"We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago," (Ephesians 2:10).

Teaching is an interesting phenomenon. I really enjoyed it in the classroom when I was a young man, working with exceptional student education. Later, I taught adult ed. and led small groups in church. I also have fun speaking at retreats and workshops as a spin-off from the books I write.

But what's happening now with the community men's Bible study here in North Carolina is a serendipitous highlight in my life, something neither planned for nor expected, at the same time both exhilarating and a little bit frightening.

I always return home with a tight knot in my stomach because A) I care so deeply for these guys, B) I am conscious of how important this is and C) I second-guess nearly everything I do!

I believe that God is trusting me with something special, and I want to be as good as I can. And that means pointing people toward Jesus. Or, as John the Baptist put it, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Currently, we're reading Ephesians, where Paul writes that we are all citizens together and covered by the same covenant promises. And along with our membership in God's household comes responsibility. Not rule-keeping obligations but the opportunity to join in with God's initiatives of mercy, grace, goodness, reconciliation, healing, justice and more.

Jesus is a catalyst who, in a sense, activates and releases the power and the purpose of our spiritual nature. We become, as Paul points out, "God's masterpiece, recreated in Jesus so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

Jesus accepted pretty much everyone without being judgy — but he also said, "By their fruits you shall know them." Jesus invites us to live our salvation out loud and to join in with God's good work.

Like all good lessons, this one ended too soon. But we will pick it up again next week ... and if I didn't completely blow it this time, I suspect that the guys will be back!

— 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.



IMPORTANT 2026 PROPERTY TAX NOTICE

The 2026 Hillsborough County tax roll has been delivered to the Tax Collector by the Property Appraiser's office. The collection of the ad valorem taxes and non- ad valorem assessments will begin on **November 1, 2026**.

Nancy C. Millan, Tax Collector

To the Residents of Hillsborough County,

The 2026 property tax roll is now open, and tax bills will begin arriving in mailboxes and inboxes in early November.

Your property taxes do more than cover a bill. They fund the schools our children attend, the first responders who answer our calls, and the parks, roads, and services that make Hillsborough County home. Our job is to make paying them as simple as possible, so you can take care of it and get back to your life.

Whether you prefer to pay online, by mail, or in person, we've made it easy, and paying early means you save.

Have a question? Don't hesitate to reach out to our team. We are here to serve you, and we are grateful for the trust you place in us.

Sincerely,

Nancy C. Millan
Hillsborough County Tax Collector

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4% if paid by Nov. 30
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NANCY C. MILLAN
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR

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2026 PROPERTY TAX REFORM: KNOW THE FACTS

NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR 2027 COUNTY WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME

Staff Report



Hillsborough County is inviting residents to nominate an exceptional woman who has made a significant positive impact on the community for induction into the Women's Hall of Fame.

The program, presented by the Hillsborough County Commission on the Status of Women (COSW), celebrates local women whose contributions have improved the lives of residents through areas including social services, education, philanthropy, the military and public service.

Up to three women are selected for the honor each year. Since the program was established in 2011, more than 40 Hillsborough County women have been recognized for their leadership, service and accomplishments.

The 2026 inductees included Liana Fernandez Fox, Ph.D.; Susan Wagner Leisner, CFA; and Norma Camero Reno, three women whose careers and community service have created opportunities for others and strengthened the community.

A fourth-generation Tampa native, Fox has dedicated more than 50 years to expanding access to higher education and advancing women's leadership in Hillsborough County. Her career has included serving as a mathematics professor, academic leader and union president, as well as philanthropic and advocacy work supporting Latino representation. Her accomplishments have earned her honors including Professor Emeritus at Hillsborough Community College, Woman of Distinction and Tampa Bay Lightning Hometown Hero.

Leisner is a nationally recognized finance expert and advocate for gender equality. She broke the corporate glass ceiling as the lead plaintiff in a landmark Title VII discrimination case and later became the second woman appointed to the Florida Public Service Commission.

Through decades of leadership and philanthropy, she has continued working to expand opportunities for women in Hillsborough County and beyond.

Reno, a Venezuelan-born attorney, educator and human rights advocate, has devoted decades to empowering immigrant and Hispanic communities. She is a co-founder of Casa Venezuela Tampa Bay and has served in civic and advisory leadership roles while promoting cross-cultural understanding through her community service, legal scholarship and bilingual writing.

Residents are encouraged to nominate a woman who has served as a mentor, teacher, business leader, community advocate or volunteer and whose work has made a lasting difference.

Nomination forms are available at https://hcfl.gov/whof and will be accepted until 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 12. For questions, contact Jaida Clark at 813-635-7403.

The COSW was created to study issues affecting women and make recommendations to the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners on topics including discrimination, employment, day care, education and health care.

NOVEMBERFEST CELEBRATES 55 YEARS OF COMMUNITY TRADITION

By Marie Gilmore





For 55 years, Novemberfest has brought families, friends and neighbors together for a weekend of rides, food, entertainment and fellowship. This year, Nativity Catholic Church and School will celebrate the longtime Brandon tradition from Friday, November 20, through Sunday, November 22.

Held on the grounds of Nativity Catholic Church and School at 705 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon, Novemberfest is a family-friendly carnival featuring amusement rides, food, games and live entertainment. Admission and parking are free, with rides, food and other activities available for purchase throughout the weekend.

The 2026 celebration will open on November 20 at 4 p.m. and continue until 12 Midnight. Saturday's festivities will run from 11 a.m.-12 Midnight, followed by Sunday's schedule from 12 Noon-9 p.m. Entertainment will include Soul Circus Cowboys on Friday, adding live music to an evening filled with carnival attractions and activities.

For families planning to enjoy the rides, access is based on height rather than age. Ride tickets and wristbands can be purchased at kiosks or the Ride Kiosk Trailer located on the midway. Fairgoers can choose between a Ride Card, which can be loaded with the desired number of credits, or a $30 wristband.

Ride credits cost $1 each, and there is a one-time $2 activation fee when a Ride Card or wristband is first purchased.

Ride availability and height requirements vary, and families can check individual ride requirements before attending.

Food will also be a major part of the Novemberfest experience, with a variety of options available for purchase throughout the festival.

Organizers noted that all sales for ride vouchers, ride tickets, food vouchers, food tickets and games are final. There are no refunds or rain checks. Some rides may temporarily close because of inclement weather or lightning and will reopen when conditions are safe.

Florida Highway Patrol will be on-site throughout the event to help ensure the safety of guests.

The 55th anniversary also provides an opportunity for local businesses, organizations and families to support Novemberfest through sponsorships. Sponsorships help make the event possible while supporting students at Nativity Catholic School and youth ministry programs at Nativity Catholic Church.

For sponsorship information, contact Therese Alonso at talonso@nativitycatholicchurch.org or 813-681-4608, ext. 2237.

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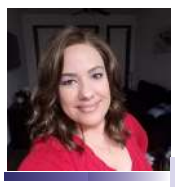

WHAT IS A LADY BIRD DEED?

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

Lately, I have had many a phone call from potential clients asking about a 'ladybird' deed or saying that they need one for their house. Although it is one of the simplest ways to keep a home out of probate and away from Medicaid estate recovery, it does come with some pitfalls.



As an elder law attorney, I reach for this tool often. Here is what it does, what it does not do and who it tends to help most.

The legal name is an 'enhanced life estate' deed. The deed allows you to keep a life estate for your house and names who receives the home when you pass. The word 'enhanced' is what makes it different from a traditional life estate. You keep the right to sell the home, mortgage it, rent it or even change your mind about who inherits it, without asking anyone's permission. The people you named have no ownership interest until the day you pass. When you pass away, the beneficiaries record a death certificate. No probate, no court, no waiting.

For long-term care Medicaid purposes, this is not considered a gift. If you gift assets to your children, there is, typically, a five-year lookback period and gifts incur a penalty. Since this is not a gift, that means no penalty period.

The ladybird deed does not affect your homestead exemption, and the Save Our Homes cap stays in place. Your creditor protection stays in place. When the home passes, your beneficiaries typically receive a stepped-up basis, which can save them meaningful capital gains tax if they later sell.

Although a ladybird deed is a powerful tool, it comes with some drawbacks. One of the drawbacks is that Florida's homestead rules limit how you can leave a home if you have a spouse (who is not on the deed) or minor child, and a deed that ignores those rules can be challenged. The deed also does not name backup beneficiaries well, so if a named child passes before you, the result may not be what you intended. And a deed handles one asset. It does not replace a will, a trust or your powers of attorney. It works best as one piece of a complete plan.

Used correctly, this small document can spare your family months of court involvement and protect the home you worked for from a state claim after you are gone.

BEYOND THE COURTROOM: OUR FIRST 'DAY OF SERVICE'

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



When you work at the state attorney's office, serving the community is part of your job description. But most people associate that service with what happens inside a courtroom. Recently, our team had the opportunity to serve Hillsborough County in a different way.

We held our first-ever State Attorney's Office Day of Service, giving employees the chance to step away from their daily responsibilities and volunteer with organizations that help our neighbors through some of life's most difficult challenges.

Our team spent the day volunteering at Feeding Tampa Bay, Metropolitan Ministries and the Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center. While these organizations have different missions, they share a commitment to helping people facing difficult circumstances.

What made the day especially valuable wasn't just the opportunity to lend a hand. It was the chance to learn more about the challenges people in our community face and the resources available to help them.

For example, many people know the Pet Resource Center as the county animal shelter. But our volunteers learned that its work goes far beyond caring for homeless animals.

The center offers resources designed to keep pets with the families who love them. Through its community pet pantry, vaccination clinics and a special program for owners considering surrendering their pets, the center helps families find solutions during difficult times. We even got to help them prepare for their vaccination clinic, which was set to help hundreds of families over just one weekend. It's just one example of how much important work is happening in our community that many of us may never see.

As prosecutors, we encounter people from all walks of life, often during some of their most difficult moments. While our primary responsibility is to hold offenders accountable and protect public safety, understanding the challenges people face outside the courtroom makes us better at serving them. That's what I hoped our team would take away from this experience.

Our first Day of Service was about more than donating a few hours of our time. It was an opportunity to strengthen our connections with the community and remind ourselves why public service matters so much.

I'm proud of our team for embracing this opportunity, and I hope this becomes a tradition at our office for years to come. Because serving Hillsborough County doesn't begin or end at the courthouse doors.

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.



Thanks!

Thanksgiving reminds us to be grateful for all we have -- and to help those less fortunate. Here are some worthy local organizations that welcome your donations!

Feeding Tampa Bay, serving needs countywide: 813-254-1190 or FeedingTampaBay.org

Seeds of Hope, featuring the Nov. 26 FishHawk Turkey Trot: SoHopeFL.org

ECHO (Emergency Care Help Organization): Brandon 813-685-0935, Riverview 813-540-9880

Meals on Wheels: MOWTampa.org, BrandonMealsOnWheels.com

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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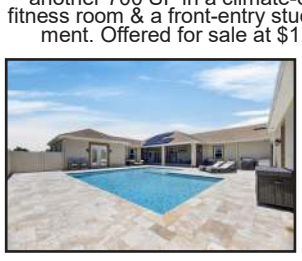
Ready To Be Thankful For A New Home?

FIND YOUR FLORIDA TREASURE in the Lost River Preserve! This uniquely designed, thoughtfully constructed estate delivers advanced amenities inside & out on 2.6 acres of natural, waterside privacy still convenient to the highlights of life around Tampa Bay. Custom-built 6 years ago it's packed with extras such as rooftop solar, 20kWh home battery, tankless water heater, EV charger, RV parking pad with electric hookup, & a beautiful courtyard pool surrounded by a travertine deck. The main residence provides 3,170 SF of single-story living with 4 bedrooms & 3.5 baths, but there's another 700 SF in a climate-controlled fitness room & a front-entry studio apartment. Offered for sale at $1,499,000.



YOUR OWN 1/4 ACRE with pool, spa, patio, & fire pit privacy-fenced in back make this home worth discovering in the security-gated section of Riverglen! Spread out in 2,700 SF with the Windward Homes St. George design, which offers spacious formal & casual living & dining rooms flanked by 4 bedrooms & 3 baths, then adds bay-windowed extensions to both the owner suite & another bedroom. The big pool lanai, with screened & roof-sheltered portions for all-weather enjoyment, is accessible from the suite on one end, a back bathroom on the other, & through sliders from the central family room beside the kitchen. No carpet, only tile or wood & luxury vinyl plank floors. $525,000

















BRING YOUR BOAT or RV to a neighborhood that allows them & a big corner yard with double gate to handle them! In Boyette Springs, this 2,370-SF pool home offers a flexible design for 3 or 4 bedrooms & 2.5 or 3.5 baths. It has tile, wood, & brand-new luxury vinyl plank floors & much more. $489,900



GET 2,700 SF on a gated & fenced 1/4 acre with no rear neighbor or HOA fees! In Boyette Springs, this original-owner home is available for the first time in a generation, still overlooking county conservation land from a big,pavered patio. An upstairs bonus room adds to 4 beds, 3 baths & lots more. $450,000



A PRIVATE, WOODED pond instead of a back neighbor is just 1 highlight of this 2,000-SF 3/2/2 on nearly an acre in 0-fee Boyette Springs! Other advantages include a 50-year metal roof, storm-impact windows, tile or luxury vinyl plank floors with no carpet, & a screened back porch. $399,900

A BACKYARD BONUS you'll love: an extended, screened, roof-covered lanai & attached patio overlooking a tree-lined pond with lighted fountain! It's the all-day-or-night, all-weather highlight of this 2,200-SF gem in The Reserve at Pradera. Also, 2 suites among the total 4 beds & 3 full baths! $415,000



BLOOMINGDALE RIDGE is where you'll find this woodsy pond view with no back neighbor from a screened, roof-covered lanai! On a cul-de-sac street, an open "great room" design stretches all the way back to the lanai, which adds 330 SF to help the 3-bed, 2-bath home live larger than 1,335 SF. $305,000



NEARLY EVERYTHING is new & improved at this maintenance-free villa with a backyard pond in Rivercrest! AC & water heater, LVP & tile floors, LED lights & ceiling fans, garage door opener & epoxy floor, hurricane shutters & more. It's a 3/2/2 with a screened lanai overlooking that pond. $279,900

