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CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS

NOVA FURNITURE BRINGS FOURTH FURNITURE AND HOME DÉCOR LOCATION TO BRANDON

Staff Report





Amber Aaron, President, BRCC welcomes Nova Furniture to Brandon.

Brandon residents have a new destination for furniture and home décor with Nova Furniture, located at 225 W. Brandon Blvd.

The Florida-based furniture and mattress retailer brings together a wide selection of furnishings designed to help customers create comfortable, stylish and welcoming spaces. Its Brandon showroom features living room, bedroom and dining room furniture, mattresses, recliners, sectionals, occasional furniture, home accents and more.

Whether customers are furnishing a first home, updating a single room or redesigning an entire house, Nova Furniture offers a variety of styles and price points to meet different needs and budgets.

"At Nova Furniture, we believe your home should be a reflection of you—comfortable, welcoming, stylish and made for real life," the company states.

The Brandon store is part of a growing Florida company that also has locations in Cape Coral, Fort Myers and Stuart. The stores recently came together under the Nova Furniture name as part of a rebranding effort designed to create one unified company while continuing to serve the communities where the stores have operated.

According to the company, the rebrand represents the next chapter of its growth while maintaining the personal service and community relationships customers have come to expect.

"Different communities. One Nova family," is part of the company's message as it brings its Florida locations together.

Nova Furniture focuses on more than simply selling individual pieces of furniture. The company emphasizes helping customers create complete living spaces, from selecting the right style and arranging a room to finding furniture that works with a home's size and layout.

Its showrooms offer everything from contemporary designs to warm, traditional styles, giving customers the opportunity to see different pieces together and find options that complement their homes.

The company also offers financing options, convenient pickup and statewide delivery. With a large in-stock inventory, Nova Furniture aims to make the process of furnishing a home easier and more accessible.

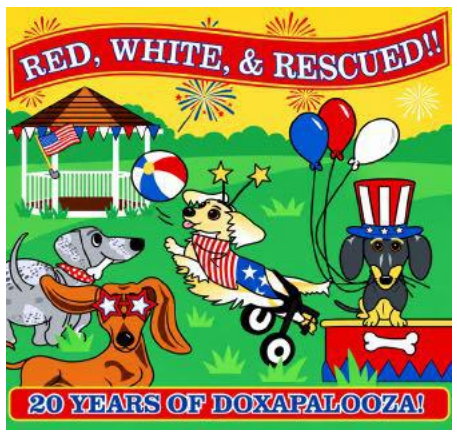
For the Brandon team, the new location provides an opportunity to become part of the local community while offering residents a convenient place to shop for their homes.

Nova Furniture is located at 225 W. Brandon Blvd. The Brandon showroom is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. The store can be reached at 813-869-6682.

DOXAPALOOZA CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF DACHSHUND FUN IN PLANT CITY

By Marie Gilmore





Dachshund lovers and their four-legged friends will gather at Keel Farms in Plant City on Saturday, November 7, for the 20th annual Doxapalooza. The free event will feature wiener dog races, a costume contest, vendors, food trucks, live entertainment and more, with proceeds supporting Dachshund Adoption Rescue & Education (DARE) and its mission to rescue, rehabilitate and rehome dachshunds.

Dachshund lovers from across the area will gather in Plant City on Saturday, November 7, for the 20th anniversary of Doxapalooza, Florida's largest dachshund event.

Hosted by Dachshund Adoption Rescue & Education (DARE), the free, family-friendly festival will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Keel Farms. The annual event serves as DARE's flagship fundraiser, helping support the organization's foster-based mission of rescuing, rehabilitating and finding homes for dachshunds in need.

This year's theme, "Red, White & Rescued," celebrates two decades of Doxapalooza with a patriotic milestone celebration featuring original artwork by illustrator Kay Hilde.

More than 2,000 people attended the 2025 event, making it the largest single-day dachshund gathering in Florida. This year's celebration will bring back many of the activities that have made Doxapalooza a favorite among dachshund owners and animal lovers.

Attendees can watch the popular wiener dog races and lure course races, enter the costume contest, shop at DARE's Doxie Market and visit dozens of vendors and food trucks. The event will also feature live and silent auctions, raffles and a blessing of the animals.

Nashville recording artist Brittany Moore will provide live entertainment during the celebration.

While the event offers plenty of fun for dachshunds and their families, its primary purpose is supporting DARE's efforts to help dogs find loving, permanent homes.

"Twenty years of Doxapalooza means 20 years of this community showing up for dachshunds who don't have anywhere else to turn," said Alicia Duval, president of DARE. "Every wiener race, every raffle ticket, every vendor booth is what lets us keep doing this work. We can't wait to celebrate this milestone with everyone who's been part of it."

DARE is a 100-percent volunteer-run, foster-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit. The organization relies on community support, foster families and fundraising events such as Doxapalooza to continue its work.

Doxapalooza is free to attend, and pre-registration is available at doxapalooza.org.

For more information about DARE and its mission, visit daretorescue.org.

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Bonnet Springs Park is excited to announce food and beverage festival, Central Florida Food Fest, is returning November 7, 5-9 p.m.! A full experience of food, drinks, entertainment, and more. See Page 13 for full story.



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MACBETH & CHEESE PRESENTS: A ONE-DAY ACTING MASTERCLASS WITH KEN EULO

Staff Report



Ken Eulo, an accomplished actor, writer, director and teacher with more than 30 years of experience, will lead a one-day Acting Masterclass on Saturday, November 7.

Aspiring actors and performers will have an opportunity to learn from an entertainment industry veteran when MacBeth & Cheese, the performing arts program at Brandon Performing Arts, presents a one-day Acting Masterclass with Ken Eulo on Saturday, November 7.

The workshop will take place from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Brandon Performing Arts Center, located at 225 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon.

Eulo brings more than three decades of experience in theater, film and television to the masterclass. His career has taken him from Broadway to Hollywood, where he has worked alongside notable performers including Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, Rip Torn, Geraldine Page, Betty Grable and Ray Milland.

An actor, writer, director and teacher, Eulo began teaching acting at the Courtyard Playhouse, one of New York's longest-running Off-Broadway theaters. His training has also included working with influential acting teachers and directors Robert Lewis, Lee Strasberg and Elia Kazan.

The hands-on masterclass is designed for performers at a variety of experience levels, whether they are new to acting, returning to the stage or looking to strengthen their existing skills.

Participants will explore acting techniques and scene study through practical exercises designed to encourage natural emotional responses. The workshop also will include theater games and improvisation focused on spontaneity, creativity, voice, energy and emotional expression.

Character development will be another key component, with participants learning how to approach roles and create believable characters for stage, film, television and digital media.

The day will also emphasize performance skills, confidence and authentic connection with fellow performers.

To provide a focused learning environment, participation is limited to 15 people. Tuition is $250 and includes the full day of instruction with Eulo. Directors who would like to observe the workshop without participating may attend free of charge.

Early registration is encouraged. For more information or to reserve a spot, visit macbethandcheese.com.

MacBeth & Cheese is part of Brandon Performing Arts and works to bring live performing arts opportunities and experiences to the local community.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN INVITES THE COMMUNITY TO A SPECIAL SERVICE

Staff Report



The holiday season can be a time of celebration and joy, but for many, it can also bring feelings of grief, loneliness, uncertainty and other challenges. First Presbyterian Church of Brandon will offer an opportunity for those carrying such burdens to find comfort and encouragement before the Advent season begins.

The church will host a Service of Comfort and Hope on Saturday, November 14, at 1 p.m. in its softly lit sanctuary at 121 Carver Ave. in Brandon.

The special service is designed for anyone who may be experiencing grief, illness, loneliness, family estrangement, financial hardship, job loss or other difficult circumstances. The afternoon will provide an opportunity to step away from the demands of the season, reflect and find a sense of peace and hope.

Led by the church's Stephen Ministry, with support from its Worship and Member Care ministries, the service will feature gentle music, Scripture readings, prayer and time for quiet reflection. Organizers hope the welcoming setting will provide a compassionate space where people can simply be present and take a moment to breathe.

"Our hope is that this service will offer a meaningful opportunity for people to pause, reflect and experience God's comfort as they enter the Advent and Christmas season," said Dawn Trattner. "Whether someone is grieving the loss of a loved one, facing illness, struggling with family relationships or carrying another burden, we want them to know they are not alone. We hope everyone who attends leaves with a renewed sense of hope and peace."

The service is open to anyone in the community, regardless of church affiliation. Organizers emphasize that attendees do not need to be members of First Presbyterian Church of Brandon to participate.

The 1 p.m. start time was intentionally selected to make the service more accessible to those who may prefer not to drive after dark, particularly during a season when evenings arrive earlier.

The Service of Comfort and Hope reflects the church's commitment to caring for both its congregation and the broader Brandon community. By creating a quiet space for prayer, reflection and encouragement, organizers hope the gathering will remind those facing difficult circumstances that they do not have to navigate the season alone.

For more information, contact First Presbyterian Church of Brandon at 813-689-4597 or visit fpcbrandon.org.







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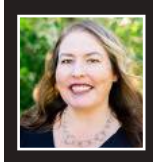


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COUNTY TO HONOR VETERANS WITH 62ND ANNUAL VETERANS DAY TRIBUTE

Staff Report



Hillsborough County will honor Veterans of all eras during its 62nd Annual Veterans Day Tribute on Wednesday, November 11 at Veterans Memorial Park & Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins, Jr. Veterans Museum in Tampa.

Hillsborough County will honor Veterans of all eras during its 62nd Annual Veterans Day Tribute on Wednesday, November 11 at Veterans Memorial Park & Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins, Jr. Veterans Museum, located at 3602 N. U.S. 301 in Tampa.

Hosted by Hillsborough County Veteran Community Services and the Veterans Council of Hillsborough County, the free event will begin at 10 a.m. and offer a patriotic, family-friendly celebration honoring those who have served in the nation's military.

The ceremony will include a JROTC color guard, Veterans Council awards and a sing-along salute recognizing each branch of the U.S. military. Special guests will include Retired U.S. Coast Guard Rear Adm. Steve Poulin and Retired U.S. Army Col. Roland Tiso.

The tribute will also include refreshments and an opportunity for Veterans, military families and community members to gather and fellowship following the ceremony. Representatives from James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, the YMCA Military Program and Hillsborough County Veteran Community Services will be available to provide information and resources for Veterans and their families.

The celebration also recognizes America's upcoming 250th anniversary and the important role Veterans have played throughout the nation's history.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Hillsborough County remains the most heavily populated county for Veterans in Florida. As of September 2026, the county was home to 94,334 Veterans, with the local Veteran community contributing an estimated $1.4 billion in economic impact.

For the 10th consecutive year, the national Veterans Day Committee of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has selected Veterans Memorial Park & Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins, Jr. Veterans Museum as an official Regional Veterans Day Site. The designation recognizes locations that demonstrate excellence in honoring the nation's military and promoting patriotism.

The park is free and open to the public daily from 7 a.m.-5 p.m. Visitors can explore its many monuments, including the new Buffalo Soldiers Memorial and Gold Star Family Memorial.

Admission and parking for the Veterans Day Tribute are free, and the community is encouraged to attend.

For more information about the 62nd Annual Veterans Day Tribute or Veterans Memorial Park, visit HCFL.gov/Veterans or call 813-635-8316.

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IMPACT DESIGNER PURSE BINGO COMBINES FUN WITH A MEANINGFUL CAUSE

Staff Report



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

The Impact Program Inc. will host its annual Designer Purse Bingo event on Thursday, December 3, offering an evening of bingo, 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 bingo beginning promptly at 7 p.m.

Tickets are $55 per person and include food and beverages, as well as one set of 10 bingo games. The event is alcohol-free. Guests who want additional chances to win can purchase additional game packs, available in sets of three cards.

Participants will have the opportunity to win designer purses, including a Kate Spade purse, 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, raffle purchases 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 through Designer Purse Bingo 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 at https://secure.fundeasy.com/ministrysync/event/?e=32995. For questions, contact Kagey at akagey@whatisimpact.com. More information about Impact and its programs is available at www.whatisimpact.com.

SESCO WELCOMES FIRST BULK CEMENT SHIPS TO PORT TAMPA BAY TERMINAL

Staff Report



SESCO Cement welcomed the first two ships carrying bulk gray cement to its import terminal at Port Tampa Bay, bringing the facility's major assets online and marking the start of full commercial operations. The arrivals come just months after the company celebrated the terminal's opening with a ribbon cutting in June.

Each vessel is making a partial discharge at the Port Redwing terminal in Gibsonton before continuing across the gulf to SESCO's Houston, Texas, terminal to complete delivery. The two-port route links SESCO's Florida and Texas operations and gives the company added capacity and flexibility to meet current and future regional demand, building Port Tampa Bay into a key hub within SESCO's global network.

The deliveries were made possible by the terminal's custom-designed ship unloader and conveyor system, which moves bulk cement from the ship's hold directly into SESCO's storage silos. The unloader, the largest wheel-mounted cement ship unloader in operation, arrived in Tampa earlier this year after nearly two years of engineering and design.

Activating the silos also dramatically speeds distribution to customers across the region. The new automated silo system provides quick and efficient truck loading, significantly increasing throughput and allowing SESCO to move more cement to ready-mix producers and other customers each day.

"The arrival of our first bulk cement ships is the moment this terminal was built for," said Rick Van Eyk, CEO of SESCO Cement. "With our ship unloader, conveyor system and silos now running together, we are fully operational and able to get cement to our customers faster than ever. These operations add capacity and flexibility that support both current and future demand across the region, and they establish Port Tampa Bay as a key hub within our global network."

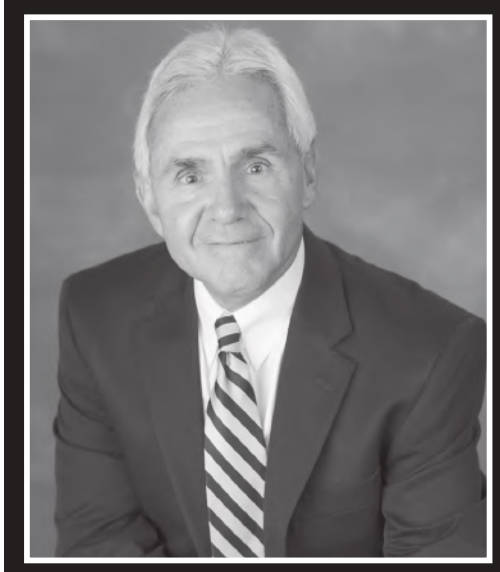
The Port Tampa Bay terminal is strategically positioned to serve Florida's major construction markets via maritime shipping lanes, interstate highways and rail networks. Upon full build-out, it will be the largest cement terminal in Florida.

About SESCO Cement

Established in 2014, SESCO Cement is a subsidiary of the SESCO Group, a vertically integrated manufacturing, shipping, and logistics company with a global presence. In the United States, SESCO Cement has a 22-acre facility in Houston that has a 240,000-ton storage capacity, and a new 14-acre terminal in Tampa with 100,000 tons of storage capacity. SESCO Cement's Houston facility is the largest cement terminal in the country.

For more information about SESCO Cement, visit https://sescocement.com/.

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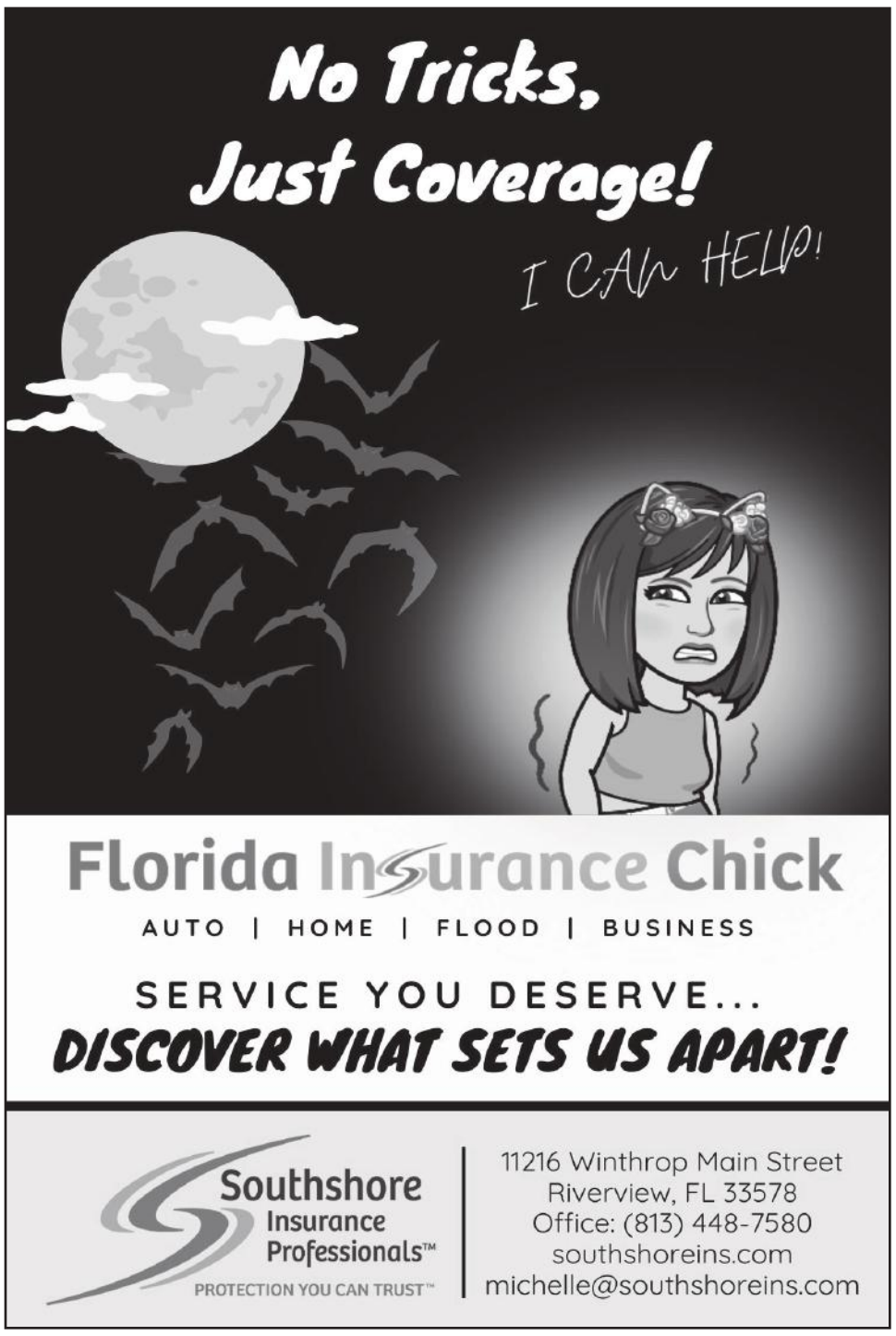
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DENNIS RIESE BUILDS ONE-OF-A-KIND, CUSTOM ARCADE MACHINES

By Libby Hopkins



Dennis Riese, a resident of Valrico and the founder of Phantom Arcades, builds premium, fully custom arcades for homes, businesses and events. Built with high-end components, stunning artwork and thousands of games, each machine delivers an unforgettable experience.

Since 2015, Riese has built 51 custom cabinets for celebrity owners, including The Undertaker and Michelle McCool, Rhea Ripley and Buddy Matthews, AJ Styles, Lil Yachty, Nick Carter, Joey Fatone and JWoww. Every machine is hand-built locally and designed around its owner, and his build videos have more than 10 million views online.

"Phantom Arcades really started by accident," Riese said. "I built my first arcade as a hobby for myself. One day, I had some friends over, and one of them liked it so much that he asked if he could buy it from me. I sold it to him and figured I'd just build myself another one. A few weeks later, another friend saw the new arcade and wanted to buy that one. So, I sold it to him too and built another. That was when I started thinking that maybe I had something here."

By 2022, Phantom Arcades had grown to the point where Riese had a decision to make.

"I decided to take a chance on the business, leave New York City Transit after 14 years, sell our home on Long Island, and move my family to Florida," he said. "That was when I committed to Phantom Arcades full time. Looking back, it's pretty incredible to think that the entire business started because a friend came over to my house and wanted to buy something I had built as a hobby."

What Riese enjoys most about building arcades is that no two projects are exactly the same.

"I get to take a customer's ideas, whether it's their favorite games, sports teams, movies, music or something personal to them, and turn those ideas into an arcade that is completely unique to them," he said. "I also love what happens after the arcade leaves my shop. These machines become something families and friends gather around. Knowing that something I built can become part of the memories a family makes together is probably the most rewarding part of what I do."

Riese's biggest goal for Phantom Arcades is to continue growing the business to the point where he can start hiring employees and building a team around it.

"Right now, Phantom Arcades is essentially a one-person operation," he said. "I'm very proud of that, but I also know that if I want the company to continue growing, eventually I can't do everything myself. I'd love to reach the point where I can hire people, teach them how I build these machines and create jobs here in our local community."

Recently, Phantom Arcades was featured on The Price Is Right, where one of Riese's custom arcades was a prize on the show.

If you'd like to learn more about Phantom Arcades or have a custom machine made, you can visit Riese's website at https://phantomarcades.com/ or call 813-419-7979.

HIGH 5 INC.'S ANNUAL CASINO NIGHT IS AROUND THE CORNER

By Emily Harper





High 5 Inc. is hosting its annual Ice the Dice Casino Night fundraiser on Friday, November 20. This event is the nonprofit's largest fundraiser of the year and serves as a way to positively impact the community.

"Don't miss one of the most exciting nights of the year — come roll the dice and change lives," High 5 Inc. posted on social media.

High 5 Inc. serves over 25,000 individuals in the Brandon area. The organization is dedicated to making a positive impact through its five pillars in progress: learn to swim, special needs education, after-school care, sports and recreation and community partnerships.

"Every dollar raised helps open doors to lifesaving swim lessons, adaptive programs that foster independence for adults with special needs, supportive places for children to learn and grow in a safe after-school space and recreational opportunities that build confidence, friendships and lifelong skills," according to High 5 Inc.'s website.

The fundraiser will be held at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview, from 7-11 p.m. The attire is 'We're Bringing Back the '80s,' encouraging participants to dress in their favorite 80s-inspired fashion.

Throughout the night, there will be a variety of casino games, a dance floor, a silent auction, open bar, unlimited food and other entertainment.

Tickets can be purchased on High 5 Inc.'s website for $75 per person. You must be 21 or older to attend, and tickets include an open bar, unlimited food and play money.

High 5 is offering sponsorship opportunities at different tier levels, which include event tickets, open bar, unlimited food, play money and marketing specials.

For additional information about Ice the Dice Casino Night tickets or sponsorships, visit High 5 Inc.'s website at https://high5inc.org/casino-night/.

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A NEW MODEL FOR COMMUNITY: CENTERPOINT OPENS ITS CAMPUS TO TAMPA BAY HEAT

Staff Report



An innovative partnership between Centerpoint Church and Tampa Bay HEAT is creating new opportunities for families across the Greater Brandon area while offering a different model for how churches can use their facilities to serve the community throughout the week.

Tampa Bay HEAT, a homeschool community serving more than 3,000 students, officially expanded onto the Centerpoint Church campus in January. Since then, the partnership has continued to grow, both in the number of families served and in the shared vision for the property.

Centerpoint Lead Pastor Bryant Golden said the partnership reflects the church's longstanding desire to be connected to the community.

"We've always believed the church should be deeply connected to and invested in its community," Golden said. "We have buildings, classrooms, land and resources that could sit largely unused during portions of the week. We began asking what it could look like to leverage those resources in a way that serves families and our community seven days a week."

Tampa Bay HEAT provides homeschool families with educational opportunities, classes, activities, athletics and community. Since moving onto the Centerpoint campus, HEAT has experienced significant growth.

"It has been an incredible partnership," Golden said. "We share a commitment to families, to our community and to creating environments where people can thrive."

A growing number of HEAT families have also begun attending Centerpoint, further strengthening the connection between the two organizations.

Quail Run Coffee has added another element to the campus, with its coffee shop operating six days a week, including Sundays. The location provides families, students, church members and others with a place to meet, work and connect.

The partnership is also shaping the future of the campus. Centerpoint plans to begin construction on a new auditorium and community-focused lobby in early 2027, with completion targeted for early 2028. Its current auditorium will become a gymnasium, expanded classrooms and activity space serving HEAT students and Centerpoint ministries.

HEAT is also renovating a large cabin on the property into a library and meeting space.

"This really isn't about constructing another church building," Golden said. "It's about asking how we can use what we've been entrusted with to serve more people."

Centerpoint Church is located at 1720 S St Cloud Ave, Valrico. For more information, visit www.centerpointfl.org.

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.

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NBS ESTHETICS HELPS CLIENTS FEEL CONFIDENT AT EVERY AGE

By Marie Gilmore



For Tina Delgado, skin care has always been about more than looking good. It is about feeling confident, caring for yourself and embracing every stage of life.

That philosophy is at the heart of New Beginnings Skincare LLC, doing business as NBS Esthetics, where Delgado combines professional skin care treatments with wellness education and practical guidance for healthy aging.

Based in Apollo Beach, Delgado specializes in maturing and sensitive skin and offers customized facials and treatments, including LED light therapy, dermaplaning, enzyme masks, microdermabrasion, peels, high-frequency and facial massage. She also offers back facials, aromatherapy and professional skin care products.

Her journey into the industry began in Orlando, where she represented Caribbean Sol Natural Sunscreen at luxury resorts and educated guests about mineral-based sun protection. After moving to Apollo Beach, she worked as an aesthetic technician with MediClinics Aesthetics in Tampa, gaining experience with advanced laser and skin-rejuvenation technologies.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Delgado continued her education at Chic Image Academy in Tampa, earning her Florida Facial Specialist license. She soon opened her own practice, bringing her experience and passion for natural approaches to skin care directly to clients.

Today, NBS Esthetics has expanded beyond traditional facials into a philosophy Delgado describes as "Healthy skin. Healthy living. Healthy aging." She encourages clients to consider the connection between professional skin care, daily habits, nutrition, movement, sun protection, self-care and overall wellness.

Delgado, who served in the Army Reserves, also serves as a referral resource for adults interested in learning more about physician-guided wellness options, including GLP-1 and peptide therapies. She emphasized that she is not a medical provider and does not diagnose, prescribe or oversee medical treatment. Those decisions are handled by licensed medical professionals through a telehealth partner.

For Delgado, education is an important part of the experience. Her goal is to help clients understand their options and develop realistic, consistent habits that support healthier-looking skin as they age.

Her advice is simple: Wear sunscreen, stay hydrated and take care of yourself from the inside out.

"I hope you feel seen, supported and empowered on your journey to healthy skin, healthy living and healthy aging," Delgado said.

NBS Esthetics is available by appointment inside Bay Area Salon, located 223 Flamingo Dr. in Apollo Beach. Call 813-922-9327 or book appointments online at www.nbsesthetics.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.



ECHO THRIFT HELPS PRESERVE A PIECE OF BRANDON'S HISTORY

Staff Report

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 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.



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.

LAKE TOSCANA ENTERS FINAL CHAPTER AS SUNRISE HOMES OPENS REMAINING LOTS

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Sunrise Homes is nearing the end of its long-running buildout in Lake Toscana, a community in Wimauma known for expansive homesites and quiet, natural scenery. With only a few lots remaining, company representatives said this final stretch marks a unique opportunity for buyers seeking privacy and space in one of South Hillsborough's distinctive neighborhoods.

Dr. Ali Hasbini, CEO of Sunrise Homes, said the community's scale and natural features have set it apart.

"Lake Toscana is truly a one-of-a-kind community. With 512 acres and only 127 homesites, homeowners have a level of space and privacy that is becoming increasingly difficult to find," said Dr. Hasbini. "The half-acre to 1-acre homesites, combined with the natural beauty of the community, have made Lake Toscana a very special place to build a home. With only four homesites remaining, we're proud to see the vision for this community come to life and excited to welcome its final homeowners."

"Each of the remaining homesites offers a unique, private view. All without backyard neighbors," said Rob Hall, a sales associate with Sunrise Homes in Lake Toscana.

Developed in phases over several years, Lake Toscana has attracted buyers looking for oversized lots and access to preserved landscapes. Hall said the remaining sites continue that theme, offering wide-ranging views and a sense of seclusion established throughout earlier phases.

Sunrise Homes is also offering buyers a $50,000 credit that Hall said can be especially valuable for those wanting to personalize their new home.

"This incentive may apply to any upgrades at our design center," he said, noting the credit can be used toward flooring, cabinetry, countertops, fixtures and other high-end finishes.

Hall said the environmental setting also plays a key role in Sunrise Homes' designs.

"We build open, spacious designs featuring large windows that capture natural light and offer views of the peaceful surroundings," he said.

"Sunrise Homes offers the experience of customizing your design features independently (not 'packages' like other builders)," said Hall. "We allow some structural changes such as larger garages, wall extensions and door/window openings, depending on the buyer's needs. The process takes approximately 11 months from the purchase agreement to move-in," said Hall.

Visit www.sunrisehomescorp.com. The model home is located at 5333 Lake Venice Dr. in Wimauma. Call 813-934-2206.

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CENTRAL FLORIDA FOOD FEST BRINGS FLAVOR TO BONNET SPRINGS PARK

Staff Report



Food lovers will have the opportunity to sample flavors from across Central Florida while enjoying live entertainment at the Central Florida Food Fest on Saturday, November 7, at Bonnet Springs Park in Lakeland.

The event will take place in the Harrell Family Botanical Gardens and Kirby Center. Designed as an interactive tasting experience, the festival will bring together local restaurants, bakeries, cafes and culinary providers, allowing guests to create their own evening of food and beverages.

Small bites and drinks will be available for purchase from 15 participating vendors, offering a variety of flavors and cuisines.

The lineup includes Bang Bang Bakehouse, Cob & Pen, From My Kitchen, GoneGreens by Nessa, JJ's Fusion Khaana, Maritime, Meraki Bakehouse, Nineteen61, Pinoy Cravings, Plates on Deck, Pizza Odyssey, Pour Bear Coffee, The Club at Eaglebrooke, The Wine Garden and Vegetation Plant Café.

In addition to the food and beverages, guests can enjoy live music throughout the evening. Baba Caiman will perform Top-40 favorites, while Central Florida band Ripperdüski will bring its groove-rock sound to the event. Tampa-based emcee DJ Lady Shay will provide music and host the festivities.

The event offers more than an evening of food and entertainment. Proceeds from the Central Florida Food Fest will support the ongoing mission of Bonnet Springs Park, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching the community through nature, culture, recreation and education.

Located at 400 Bonnet Springs Blvd. in Lakeland, Bonnet Springs Park encompasses 168 acres and combines natural spaces, recreation, education and cultural experiences. The park was created as a place where residents and visitors can connect with nature, explore Central Florida's history and enjoy opportunities for learning and recreation.

Tickets are required for the Central Florida Food Fest and are available at www.centralfloridafoodfest.com.

The event is open exclusively to guests ages 21 and older. The festival will run from 5-9 p.m., providing an opportunity to enjoy an evening of local food, beverages, music and community while supporting the continued work of Bonnet Springs Park.

A PLACE TO CALL HOME: SAVANNA THOMPSON RECEIVES HABITAT KEYS

Staff Report



Savanna Thompson celebrates receiving the keys to her new home in Windhorst Commons during a dedication ceremony with Habitat for Humanity and home sponsor Gensler.

After a lifetime of searching for a safe place that feels like home, Savanna Thompson received the keys to her own home Friday during a dedication ceremony with Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough and home sponsor Gensler.

Thompson works for the nonprofit ECHO of Brandon and has bounced around to more than 10 homes throughout her life. She described her childhood home as a place of fear and anxiety and said she has spent much of her life searching for security and comfort.

She had been living in a one-bedroom apartment that limited her ability to care for others while also dealing with a bug infestation.

Now, with the help of Habitat and Gensler, Thompson is a homeowner at Windhorst Commons in Brandon. She hopes her new home will eventually allow her to become a licensed foster parent and provide children with the safety and stability she has long wished to give them.

"I'm so grateful for your hard work, time, and support to help me become a homeowner," said Thompson. "One of my deepest longings in life has been to provide a home to others. I want to open my home to children who need a safe place to land. You are helping make my dreams come true."

The home is the third of eight being built through Habitat of Tampa Bay Hillsborough's Pope Leo Village initiative.

"Pope Leo Village is about the power of giving through time and resources and ultimately giving families the opportunity to build a better future," said Tina Forcier, CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough.

This is the second Habitat home Gensler has sponsored, giving the firm another opportunity to put its belief in the power of design to work in the community.

"At Gensler, we think a lot about how the places we design affect people's everyday lives, and this is a really meaningful example of that," said Sarah Joubert, principal and managing director at Gensler. "We're proud to partner with Habitat and be part of creating a place where Savanna can feel a sense of belonging and have the space to pursue the future she envisions."

As a Habitat homeowner, Thompson contributed hundreds of hours of sweat equity, helping build her home and investing in her future. Windhorst Commons is Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough's 23-home neighborhood in Brandon, featuring hurricane-resilient construction. The remaining homes are expected to be completed by early 2027.



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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.

SMALL BUT MIGHTY HEROES SUPPORTS FAMILIES IN CRISIS

By Dale Bliss



Heroes come from all walks of life and are often recognized for the extraordinary things they do. But there is another kind of mighty hero — the children who face serious illnesses with courage and strength. For Tina Downing, founder of Small But Mighty Heroes, these children and their families have become the focus of her life's work.

Downing and her volunteers are dedicated to supporting young patients, their siblings and their families by offering encouragement, comfort and moments of happiness during difficult times.

Downing's journey began when she decided to invest 6 percent of her salary in helping local children with illnesses.

"A little blue-eyed boy with a love for Thomas the Train is what prompted me to start Small But Mighty Heroes," Downing explained.

Supporting this little "hero" would change her life forever.

"The images of what he endured are burned into my memory," she continued.

Seeing the reality of what cancer asks children and their families to endure, Downing knew she could not simply walk away.

"I could not walk away from that experience and simply return to life as it was," she said.

"I knew I had to do something with the love, the pain and the fire it left in me," she explained. "Blakely is forever a part of why I started. Every family we stand beside is why I keep going."

As Downing became more connected with children and families facing serious illnesses, she wanted to do more than offer support. She wanted to bring smiles and moments of joy during a time often filled with fear and uncertainty.



Downing began reaching out to families to learn what they needed. One of the organization's signature efforts is the Hero Box, a special package filled with gifts and comfort items for children battling cancer. Their siblings receive Sidekick Boxes to remind them that they, too, are an important part of the journey.

"This work has deepened my purpose and strengthened my determination to keep showing up," Downing said. "Every family deserves to know they do not have to carry this along. I want my sons to see that compassion is something we practice. We lead by example when we turn caring into action."

Founded in 2017, Small But Mighty Heroes serves families in Florida and Missouri. Volunteers can help prepare Hero Boxes, fundraise, participate in events and support the organization through community involvement.

For more information, visit smallbutmightyheroes.org, call 813-772-4584 or email info@smallbutmightyheroes.org.

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Boo Bash Bingo, Sip n Shop, Gem Show & More.....

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Boo Bash Bingo

Boo Bash Bingo will be held at The Regent on Tuesday, October 27, starting with light bites at 6 p.m., followed by bingo at 6:45 p.m. Dress up in your favorite Halloween costume (if you want to) and join Brandon Juniors for a fun night of 10 rounds of bingo, in which you can win your choice from a selection of designer handbags, including Kate Spade, Michael Kors, Coach and more. Along with bingo, there will be raffle baskets, silent auction items and a 50/50 drawing. For more information, contact treasurebjwc3509@gmail.com.

Pumpkin Palooza At First Presbyterian Church Of Brandon

First Presbyterian Church of Brandon invites families and the Brandon community to celebrate Pumpkin Palooza a free event on Sunday, October 25, starting at 10:45 a.m. This fun-filled fall celebration will feature games, prizes, food, entertainment and plenty of family-friendly activities.

The festivities begin with the Trail of Treats, taking place from 11:15-11:45 a.m. Children can make their way along the trail collecting treats and enjoying the Glow-in-the-Dark Lab, which is part of the Trail of Treats. The fun continues at noon with lots of games, face painting, a magic show, a pumpkin baking contest, a cake walk and food concessions.

Pumpkin Palooza will be held at First Presbyterian Church of Brandon, located at 121 Carver Ave. in Brandon. Call 813-689-



4597 or visit https://fpcbrandon.org/event/pumpkin-palooza/ for more information.

St. Stephen's Bingo Night

Come to bingo on Tuesday, October 27, in the St. Stephen Family Life Center, located at 10118 St. Stephen Circle in Riverview. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Games start at 6:30 p.m.

Bingo is $20 per person, and there will be a concession stand with food, drinks and dessert available for purchase. Bring a packaged food item or a PB&J donation for the St. Vincent de Paul Society and receive and additional jackpot game for free.

The Community For Women group will also be displaying and selling tickets for its Raffle Bonanza Baskets. Come and see the wide variety of prizes available, including gifts and services. The raffle will be drawn on Wednesday, November 18.

Attendees must be 18 years of age or older to play bingo.

Holiday Sip n Shop

Please join the Women of Grace for food, fellowship and fun at its Holiday Sip n Shop Tea at Grace at Lithia on Saturday, November 7, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. In addition to tea and treats, there will be a carefully curated selection of local, woman-owned vendors present and multiple vacation getaways to bid on in the silent auction. You won't want to miss this exciting community event. Tickets are $30 and must be purchased in advance by Saturday, October 31. Proceeds will go to Grace at Lithia's community outreach missions. To register, please visit its website at https://mygraceumc.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3851829.



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.

Tampa Bay Mineral And Science Club Annual Fall Gem, Mineral And Jewelry Show

The Tampa Bay Mineral and Science Club presents its 67th annual Fall Gem, Mineral and Jewelry Show on Saturday and Sunday, November 7-8, at the Florida Fairgrounds Special Events Center, located at 4800 U.S. 301 N. in Tampa. This is the premier event for mineral collectors and jewelry enthusiasts in the Tampa Bay area. More than 60 vendors will showcase a remarkable selection of unique slabs, cabochons, beads, gemstones, jewelry and more. Whether you're a collector, creator or simply love working with nature's materials, this event is perfect for you.

Boo Bash Trick-or-treat

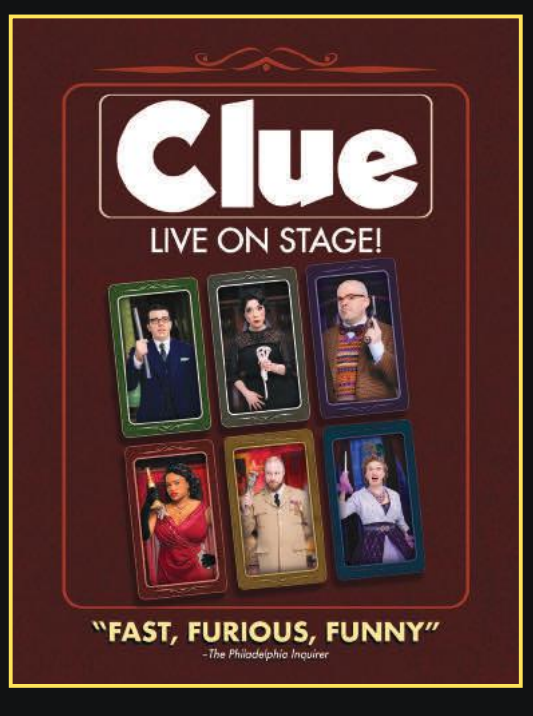
Dillard's department store at Brandon Exchange is hosting Boo Bash, an indoor trick-or-treating event for families, on Saturday, October 24, from 12 Noon-2 p.m. Along with trick-or-treating, there will be games and music from a DJ. Dillard's is located at 303 Brandon Town Center Dr. in Brandon. Come out dressed in your favorite costume and enjoy the fun.

Revival Miracle Meetings

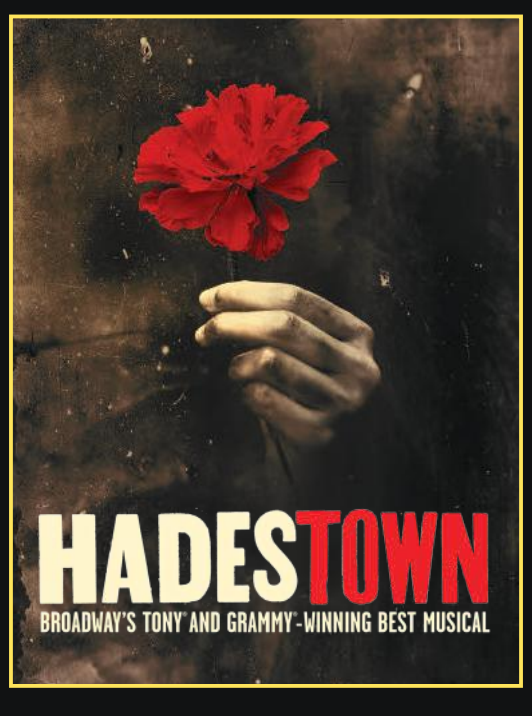
Jesus Encounter Ministries is holding Miracle Revival meetings at Christ Community Church, located at 1310 John Moore Rd. in Brandon. The meetings will be held on Friday and Saturday, November 6-7, starting at 6 p.m. Come and hear the good news of Jesus Christ! There will be worship and the ministry of the word, and everybody will receive prayer. Witness the healing power of the Holy Spirit at each meeting.

Registration is not required but encouraged. Visit https://jesusencounterministries.com/schedule/.

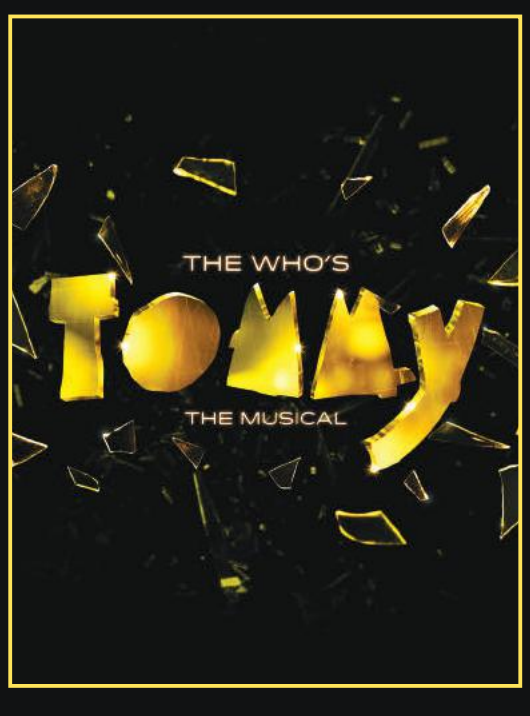
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BAY LIFE FALL FEST RETURNS WITH GAMES, CANDY AND FAMILY FUN

By Dale Bliss



With cool crisp mornings and afternoons mixed with warm sunshine and a slight tingling aroma of roasting marshmallows in the air while blanketed with golden shades of fall hues — crimson reds, bright golds, deep plums and goldens greens — you know that fall has taken its place for another year. It's the season of sweet and smooth caramel candied apples, warm piping cider, hot chocolate with peppermint sticks (or cinnamon, whichever you prefer) and those special, freshly baked recipes to welcome friends and family in for a visit.

Bay Life Church, located at 1017 Kingsway Rd. in Brandon, will be holding its annual Fall Fest on Sunday, October 25, from 4:30-7:30 p.m. for families throughout Hillsborough County. There will be games, a photo booth, music, candy and snacks. The theme this year will be Bill and Barb's Building Boot Camp and Family Quest, with a 'Playful Building-brick' look for an evening of family fun.

Stephen Strough, communications director, said, "At its heart, Fall Fest is simply a chance for our neighbors to come together and enjoy a great night out."

Strough continued, "It takes about 400 volunteers to put on Fall Fest every year. Running games, check-ins, the photo booth, the Family Quest and more. We still have spots to fill, and anyone interested can sign up at baylife.org/ffvolunteer."

"As communications director, I get to help tell the story of Fall Fest. The best part, though, is watching about 400 people from our Church family give up their evening to serve our neighbors. It's a great picture of what the church is supposed to be: a light and a source of hope in the community," Strough explained.

He continued, "I love the look on kids' faces when they walk onto campus and see everything lit up. The hundreds upon hundreds of pounds of candy, the laughter you hear all throughout the Family Quest, seeing our whole community come together for a great night. I also love the family photo booth."

Strough gets to take photos and videos of the major events throughout the year! He loves the family photo booth.

"I've gotten to watch so many of our families grow up over the years. Every family gets a free photo, and for some of them it's the only family picture they take all year," he said.

Bay Life Church will be accepting candy donations through October 25. Donations may be brought to the donation boxes in the lobby on Sunday morning during services or taken to the church offices during business hours.

MATHNASIUM MARKS 13 YEARS OF MATH, MENTORSHIP AND COMMUNITY

By Libby Hopkins

This October marks 13 years since Becky McDaniels opened her first Mathnasium, and when she thinks about those years, she thinks about the people who have walked through her doors.



This October marks 13 years since Becky McDaniels opened her first Mathnasium in the Brandon Community.

"We've had the privilege of serving so many students and families, and we've also had some incredible people become part of our Mathnasium team along the way," McDaniels said. "Every student, family and team member has become part of our story, and they've certainly become part of mine.

"I've watched team members grow in confidence and leadership and go on to do amazing things, and through all of that, they've helped me grow too," she said. "I started Mathnasium because I wanted to make a difference for kids, but 13 years later, I can honestly say that they have made just as much of a difference in my life."

Today, McDaniels and her team are incredibly grateful to have two locations serving the community, Mathnasium of Brandon and Mathnasium of Riverview.

"We're looking forward to continuing that journey with Mathnasium of Parrish when God provides us with the right space," McDaniels said. "We're excited about what the future holds, but we're also incredibly thankful for where we are and for all of the families who have trusted us along the way. That's what makes this anniversary so special to me. Mathnasium has never just been a business. It's been 13 years of relationships, growth and getting to do work that I truly love.

Something McDaniels and her team are especially excited about right now is Mathnasium Plus.

"For years, we've helped students who need to catch up, but we've always worked with advanced students as well," she said. "Mathnasium Plus gives us an exciting additional way to serve students who are already performing well and are ready for more. Sometimes a child gets overlooked simply because they're getting A's. Everyone thinks, 'They're doing great. They don't need anything,' but an advanced student needs to be challenged too. We don't want a child who loves math to become bored with it. We want to feed that curiosity."

Mathnasium Plus is designed for students who are ready to go deeper, think differently, solve more challenging problems and stretch their mathematical thinking.

"It's not about piling on more worksheets or just racing ahead to the next grade level," McDaniels said "It's about giving strong math students the opportunity to explore, problem-solve and develop the kind of mathematical thinking that will continue to serve them as they move into more advanced coursework. We're really excited to bring that opportunity to our families."

Mathnasium of Brandon is located at 1048 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico, visit www.mathnasium.com/math-centers/brandon or call 813-655-6284.

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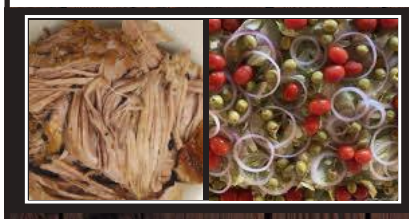
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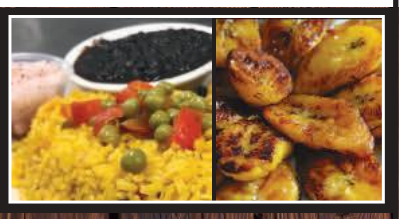
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SIDNEY O'SULLIVAN GOES FROM BEVIS BRONCO TO TEACHER OF THE YEAR

By Libby Hopkins



Sidney O'Sullivan is a product of Hillsborough County Public Schools. She went to Bevis Elementary School as a student of Tricia Simonsen, who was her principal. She proceeded to Randall Middle School, Newsome High School and then earned her bachelor's in elementary education at the University of South Florida.

"I have been teaching for nine years, only ever working at Valrico Elementary School under the wonderful lead of Mrs. Simonsen," O'Sullivan said. "Besides being a teacher, I am mom to the best 5-year-old son, Connor, who also attends Valrico Elementary. I also sing live music on the weekends in our community at some local spots as well."

O'Sullivan loves working with her students and growing relationships with each child.

"Our classroom always feels like one big family full of love, acceptance and learning," she said. "It's inspiring to watch the 'magic' happen when these young minds grow. They teach me so much about resilience and how each and every one of them is capable of amazing things. It's a profession that certainly leaves your heart bursting."

O'Sullivan recently became Valrico Elementary's Teacher of the Year.

"I was in the middle of teaching a math lesson when administration, fellow colleagues and my entire family entered the room clapping and cheering with pom-poms and music," she said. "My son presented me with a certificate for 'Teacher of the Year,' and that's when Mrs. Simonsen made the announcement to the class that I had been nominated. It was very special to have all of my people there."

Simonsen couldn't be prouder of her former student and employee.

"As a principal, moments like this are truly special," Simonsen said. "Years ago, I had the privilege of serving as Sidney's principal throughout her elementary years at Bevis Elementary. Today, I am honored to continue serving as her principal while she thrives as an outstanding educator. Watching her journey come full circle, from a Bevis Bronco student to a Valrico Hawk teacher, has been incredibly rewarding. Her recognition as Valrico Teacher of the Year is a well-deserved reflection of her passion for teaching, commitment to students and dedication to our school community. Ms. O'Sullivan exemplifies the very best of our profession, and I'm so proud to celebrate this remarkable achievement with her."

O'Sullivan's students were extremely proud of their teacher as well.

"They were so sweet," she said. "They shared some very kind words and showered me with hugs and congratulations. Valrico Elementary is truly a special place to be. I may be biased, but the faculty, staff and administration here are like no other. I love being a Valrico Hawk."

Valrico Elementary is located at 609 S. Miller Rd. in Valrico. For more information about the school, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org/o/valrico.

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.



FAMILY PROMISE HELPS FAMILIES BUILD A MORE STABLE FUTURE

By Dale Bliss



Family Promise of Hillsborough County helps families have a chance to find stability and hope.

When someone gives a promise of hope, it can change circumstances, thoughts and hearts. It may help give someone a whole new navigation in a new direction to a whole new path.

This is what Family Promise of Hillsborough County Inc. is all about.

Since May 2014, Family Promise has provided families with children of school age, regardless of family structure, and with less than livable incomes a place to receive prevention, diversion and stabilization services.

Edwina Reddick, B.S. Mgmnt., executive director, said, "I have seen families walk through our doors feeling hopeless and uncertain about their future and leave not only with keys in their hands but with renewed hope."

She continued, "Through the support and resources provided by Family Promise, families begin to see that their circumstances can change. They leave knowing that their future can be brighter and more stable than it was when they first arrived."

Families facing eviction can turn to Family Promise for help avoiding eviction. The program works with families to identify areas that may have contributed to a crisis and connects them with available resources and solutions specific to their circumstances.

Once the immediate crisis has been addressed, Reddick and her staff continue working with families through Stabilization Services. The program is designed to help families strengthen their foundation and address challenges that could contribute to continued housing difficulties.

Stabilization Services are provided for up to a year and, in some circumstances, longer if additional support is needed.

"We do not simply create a plan for the family; we work with the family to create a plan that reflects their needs, their goals and their vision for a more stable future," Reddick explained.

With the help of a stabilization coach, families can identify key areas that may need attention, including employment, housing, finances, budgeting, transportation and child care. Addressing these areas can help families work toward long-term stability and reduce the likelihood of continued housing challenges.

Family Promise will also host its annual Christmas Cookie Sale on Saturday and Sunday, December 12-13, at New Hope Family Life Center, located at 121 N. Knights Ave. in Brandon. The event will be held Saturday from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. A Christmas Bazaar and raffle will also be held.

For more information, go to www.familypromisefl.org, email executivedirectorfpgb@gmail.com or call 813-681-6170.

HILLSBOROUGH MADE A PROMISE TO ITS SCHOOLS. NOW WE MUST KEEP IT

By Anna Corman, President and CEO, HEF



In 2018, too many Hillsborough County schools were struggling with failing air-conditioning systems, leaking roofs and years of deferred maintenance. The need was clear, but existing funding was insufficient to address the growing backlog.

Hillsborough County voters stepped forward and approved a half-penny sales tax dedicated to improving our public schools. It was a practical solution to a serious problem, and it has made a measurable difference.

Since 2019, more than $1.5 billion has been invested in schools throughout our district. More than 1,000 projects have been completed, with another 200 underway. Aging air-conditioning systems and roofs have been replaced. Schools have received improvements to safety and security, classroom technology, playgrounds, and athletic facilities.

These projects may not be what we picture first when we think about improving education. A new roof does not teach a child to read, and an air-conditioning system does not teach algebra. But students cannot do their best work in overheated classrooms, under leaking roofs or amid constant facility disruptions. Teachers should be able to focus on teaching, not whether their work environment will function as it should.

Safe, reliable, and well-maintained schools create the conditions students and educators need to succeed.

The half-penny has also allowed Hillsborough County Public Schools to address facility needs proactively and plan for long-term needs. With a dedicated funding source, the district can address problems before they become disruptive and more expensive.

That progress is now at risk.

The current half-penny expires at the end of 2028. Referendum 3 would renew it for another 10 years without increasing the tax rate. The renewal also maintains the accountability measures established in 2018, including independent audits, public reporting, and review by an independent citizen oversight committee.

The cost is shared broadly, while much of the economic benefit stays local. The average Hillsborough County household pays an estimated $86 per year, groceries and prescription drugs are exempt, and approximately 25% of the revenue is contributed by visitors to our region. At the same time, more than $800 million in work has been awarded to Tampa Bay businesses, supporting local jobs and keeping these dollars working in our community.

Without this dedicated funding, deferred maintenance will not simply pause. Roofs, air-conditioning systems, technology, and safety infrastructure will continue to age, and delaying those investments will only make them more expensive.

Hillsborough County voters made an important investment in our public schools in 2018, and we can see the results across the district. Renewing the half-penny will allow us to build on that progress and continue providing students and teachers with the safe, reliable schools they deserve.

Hillsborough Education Foundation encourages voters to vote yes on Referendum 3 and renew the Half-Penny Promise.





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SUNCOAST FOUNDATION INVESTS $327,000 IN HILLSBOROUGH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Staff Report



Hillsborough Education Foundation (HEF) is proud to announce a charitable gift of $327,000 from the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation. The funds will support several of HEF's key programs, ensuring that students, teachers and schools throughout Hillsborough County receive the resources they need to thrive.

Through the Teaching Tools Resource Center, teachers can access essential classroom supplies at no cost, while the Transforming Early Literacy Initiative provides job-embedded coaching for early educators at 31 high-needs schools, helping young learners build strong foundations for future success. Suncoast Credit Union Foundation's support also helps fund School and Classroom Enrichment Grants that bring innovative learning opportunities to students, mentoring programs that provide students with guidance and encouragement and the CEOs in Schools initiative, which connects business leaders with public schools to deepen understanding and strengthen community partnerships.

"Suncoast Credit Union Foundation is a valued partner in expanding opportunities for students and educators across Hillsborough County," said Anna Corman, president and CEO of Hillsborough Education Foundation. "Their generous investment helps put essential resources in the hands of teachers, build strong foundations for our youngest learners and prepare students for success beyond high school. We are grateful for their continued commitment to public education and for investing alongside us in the success of our students, teachers and schools."

Suncoast Credit Union, Florida's largest credit union, founded the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation to promote the education, health and emotional well-being of children in the community. Each time a Suncoast member uses their debit or credit card, the credit union donates four cents to the foundation to fund local initiatives. Since its inception in 1990, the foundation has raised and donated more than $68 million.

"Founded by educators in 1934, Suncoast Credit Union has spent more than 90 years investing in teachers, students and schools," said Kevin Johnson, president and CEO of Suncoast Credit Union. "We're especially proud to help students across Hillsborough County thrive and reach their full potential."

NONPROFIT BRINGS INDEPENDENCE THROUGH ADAPTIVE E-BIKES

Staff Report

On a quiet stretch of Balm Riverview Road, a local nonprofit is helping residents regain independence and reconnect with their communities, one adaptive bicycle at a time.

The Mobility Blessing Initiative (MBI), founded by U.S. Army veteran and longtime community leader Rande Harris, provides new adaptive electric bicycles and tricycles to individuals who need safe, comfortable transportation. Serving residents across Hillsborough and Polk counties, the organization focuses on seniors, veterans, individuals with disabilities and families facing financial challenges.



Rande Harris and his wife, Ana Lopes-Harris, are the founders of the Mobility Blessing Initiative.

"Mobility is dignity," Harris said. "When someone receives adaptive transportation, they're receiving the freedom to participate in life again."

Harris founded MBI after witnessing how limited transportation options can affect people's ability to work, attend medical appointments, participate in worship and enjoy everyday activities.

His background includes six years in Army logistics, 26 years in retail leadership and more than a decade ministering inside Polk County Correctional. Through those experiences, he saw individuals struggling to access resources and regain independence.

Insurance rarely covers adaptive transportation, and specialized equipment can be financially out of reach for many families.

"I kept meeting people who weren't asking for luxury," Harris said. "They were asking for the ability to move."

The initiative's impact can be seen in the lives of its recipients. A Riverview soldier recovering from a lengthy illness received an adaptive e-trike that helped him return to neighborhood outings and church gatherings.

A disabled Brandon veteran received an e-bike that made traveling to appointments and reconnecting with the community easier. In Tampa, a single mother caring for a child with mobility limitations found relief through adaptive transportation.

MBI has also supported returning citizens through Harris' volunteer ministry, helping them access transportation as they rebuild their lives after release.

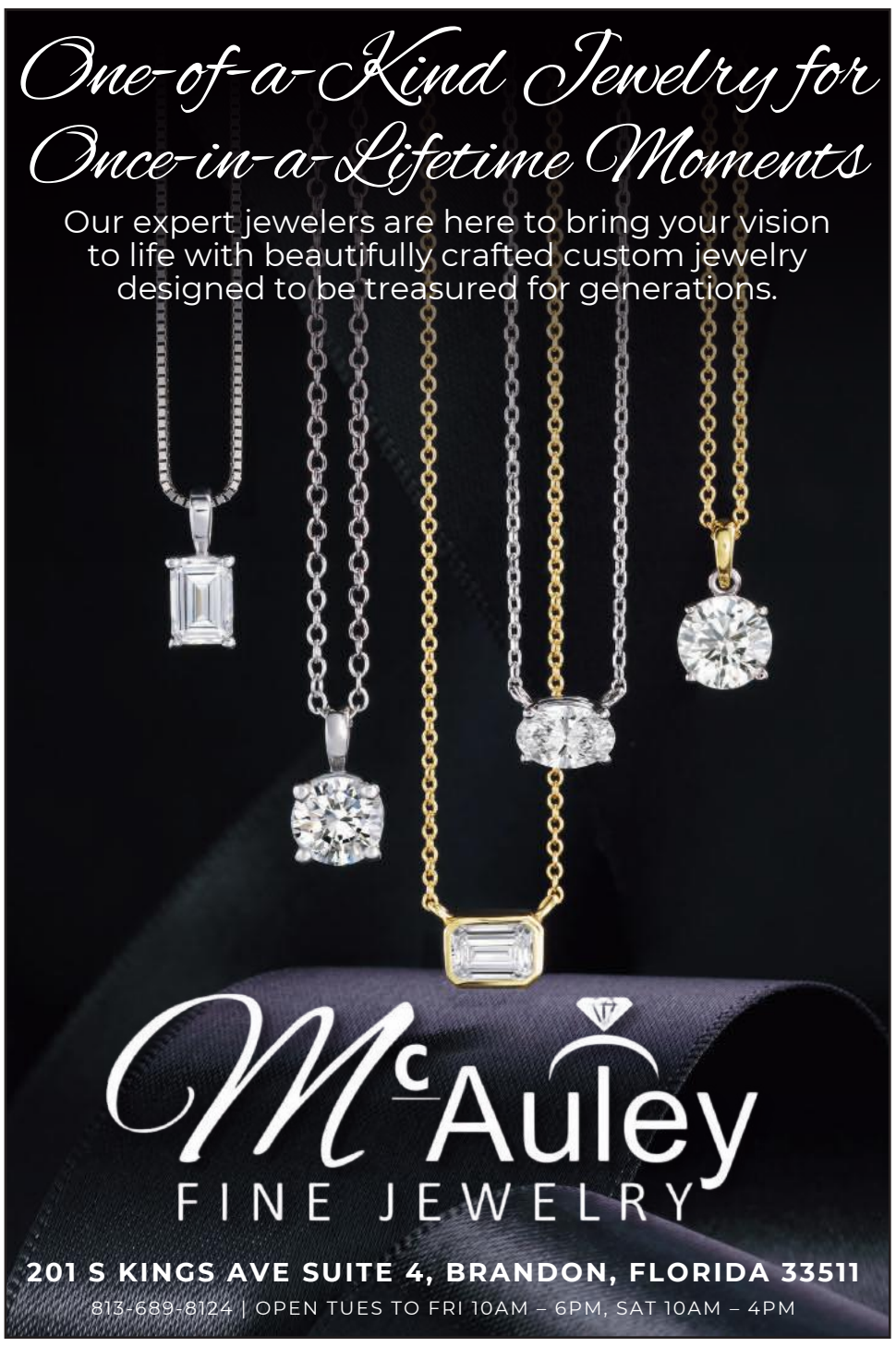
The organization relies on volunteers, churches, civic groups and families to identify individuals in need, coordinate deliveries and support outreach efforts.

MBI is working to expand partnerships with senior centers, hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, faith-based organizations and veteran support networks. It is also pursuing grant funding to increase its inventory and improve delivery logistics.

Harris hopes to establish MBI as a regional resource for adaptive transportation, connecting more people with practical mobility solutions.

"Freedom of movement is a gift," he said. "And we're here to make sure everyone has access to it."

For more information or to get involved, visit the charity's website at www.mobilityblessinginitiative.com.





COMMUNITY RALLIES AROUND TAMPA FIRE CAPTAIN BENNY

By Brian Bokor



Tampa Fire Rescue Captain Benjamin 'Benny' Bengter has spent 15 years answering calls for people who needed help. Now, as Benny continues a difficult recovery from a life-threatening medical emergency, firefighters and community members throughout Tampa Bay are answering the call for him.

First responders, their families, friends and residents packed Voodoo Brewing Co. in Valrico on September 13 for 'Beers for Benny,' a fundraiser organized to support Benny, his fiancée and their young daughter.

Voodoo Brewing Co. Valrico owner Chris Ciulla said two firefighters who work at the brewery approached him after telling him what had happened to Benny.

"I have two firefighters who work for us, and they told me about Benny and what happened to him," Ciulla said. "They asked if they could hold a fundraiser, and I said, 'Hey, you can have use of my place any night you need. We're going to raise as much money for the family as we can.'"

Ciulla's connection to the fire service made the decision especially personal.

"My dad is a retired fire chief in New York City, so anytime we can help a firefighter, it hits home for me," Ciulla said.

The gathering brought together members of Tampa Fire Rescue and Hillsborough County Fire Rescue, including Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Chief Jason Dougherty. Some knew Benny personally, while others came because a firefighter and his family needed their support.

Benny became critically ill while vacationing with his family in Hawaii. His mother, Irina Bengter, said an attack of pancreatitis progressed to shock, organ failure, abdominal compartment syndrome and sepsis. Doctors performed emergency surgery and spent weeks stabilizing him before he returned to Tampa.

Although Benny could not attend the fundraiser, his daughter and a friend sent him photographs and videos throughout the evening. Irina said he was excited by what he saw and deeply appreciative.

"Ben asked me to share his heartfelt gratitude and say thank you to everyone who has lifted him up in prayer, supported him financially, sent messages, made phone calls and shown their love and support in so many other ways," Irina said. "He is forever grateful to each and every one of you."

The event featured "Benny Strong" T-shirts, vendors, food and drink specials, raffles, a silent auction and a DJ. More than $20,000 worth of prizes were donated.

Tampa Fire Rescue Driver Engineer Benjamin Carlson, a longtime friend of Benny, helped organize the fundraiser with assistance from the Firemen's Benevolent Association of the City of Tampa. The two have known each other since paramedic school in 2011.

"Last night truly filled my heart," Carlson wrote. "It means the world to me and my family."

Benny followed his father and uncles into the fire service and has risen from driver engineer to captain at Tampa Fire Rescue Station 16.

The Firemen's Benevolent Association has established an online fundraiser to help with medical and recovery expenses.

WALK THE WALK PET CARE CELEBRATES A DECADE OF CARING

By Amanda Castillo



Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care owner Samantha Evensen celebrates 10 years of providing dependable, personalized pet care to local families.

When Samantha Evensen recognized a need for more reliable pet care in her community, she knew local pet owners needed someone they could count on. With encouragement from a friend, she started Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care 10 years ago as a one-person operation. Since then, she has grown it into a professional team that provides dependable pet care and peace of mind for owners throughout our community.

The past decade has brought plenty of changes and challenges for Evensen, from working independently to building a team, but she remains proud that the business has stayed true to its original purpose. "We are really proud of what we have been able to accomplish the last 10 years, and essentially, as much as we've grown, the heart of the business really hasn't changed."

That commitment to dependable, personalized care remains central to Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care. The business offers dog walking, pet sitting and in-home pet care throughout the community, helping pet owners feel confident their animals are in good hands when life gets busy.

For Evensen, the job is about more than caring for animals. One of the most rewarding parts is getting to know the pets and their owners, turning everyday visits into lasting relationships within the close-knit community she serves.

That personal approach is reflected in the company's name. For Evensen, "Walk the Walk" means following through on the promise to provide dependable, quality care for every pet. "Our slogan is Walk the Walk. It's not just our name, it's how we do business. Walk the Walk is our promise to the community, because we are not just talking about giving quality service, we are truly living by that standard."

For Evensen, there is something special about knowing that every wagging tail and familiar face represents a relationship built on trust. Getting to know each pet and the people who love them has turned routine visits into lasting connections. It's those relationships that continue to shape Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care and make it more than just a service to the community.

To learn more about Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care, visit walkthrwalkppc.com or call 813-465-3082.

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HALLOWEEN IS HIDING RIGHT IN PLANT CITY



DID YOU KNOW that one of the scariest Halloween experiences around is hiding right in Plant City?

Spooky season is officially here, and if you love Halloween, haunted houses, and that feeling of wondering whether you're brave enough to turn the next corner, there's a local attraction you need to know about.

Pemberton Haunted Acres
4802 W Knights Griffin Rd, Plant City, FL 33565

Pemberton Haunted Acres is a family-owned outdoor haunted attraction bringing a different kind of Halloween experience to the Plant City area.

At the center of the attraction is an approximately 5,000-square-foot haunted maze filled with handcrafted horror rooms, intense scare zones, immersive themed areas, and plenty of surprises waiting in the darkness.

And this isn't your typical walk-through Halloween display.

The experience is designed to put you right in the middle of the action. You'll make your way through dark passages, detailed horror scenes, themed rooms, and scare zones where you never quite know what—or who—is waiting around the next corner.

What makes Pemberton Haunted Acres even more interesting is that it's family-owned and locally created. A tremendous amount of work goes into building an attraction like this, from the sets and rooms to the characters, lighting, sound, and scares that bring everything to life.

So, if you're someone who counts down the days until October, watches scary movies all month, and believes Halloween should actually be SCARY, add this one to your spooky-season list.

You don't always have to drive hours away to find an incredible a experience.

Sometimes one of the best adventures is hiding right in your own backyard.

Now you know!

Have a local attraction, hidden gem, activity, restaurant, trail, park, or something else you think everyone should know about? Send it our way—it might just become the next edition of DID YOU KNOW?

YMCA CAMP CRISTINA UNVEILS NEW 30-FOOT CHALLENGE COURSE

By Marie Gilmore



Adventure is reaching new heights at YMCA Camp Cristina in Riverview with plans for a new 30-foot-high challenge course designed to bring climbing, teamwork, confidence-building and plenty of thrills to the community.

The new course will offer children, families, school groups, businesses and community organizations an opportunity to get outdoors, challenge themselves and experience YMCA Camp Cristina in a new way.

The centerpiece will be a 30-foot adventure tower featuring a climbing wall and elevated platform. From there, participants will navigate a series of high elements suspended above the ground, including platforms, cables, bridges and other obstacles designed to test balance, communication, problem-solving and courage.

The experience is intended to be about more than adrenaline.

Participants will have opportunities to work together, encourage one another and discover what they can accomplish outside their comfort zones.

"The goal isn't simply to see who can climb the highest or move through the course the fastest," according to the YMCA. "It's about creating experiences where people discover confidence in themselves and learn to trust the people around them."

The challenge course will add another attraction to the 65-acre YMCA Camp Cristina and create opportunities beyond traditional summer camp programming.

The YMCA envisions the course being used by families and YMCA members, school groups, teens, corporate teams, community organizations, birthday celebrations, retreats and leadership-development programs.

For businesses, the course could provide an opportunity for employees to participate in team-building activities while encouraging communication and collaboration. For families and young people, it can provide a supportive environment to face challenges, build confidence and celebrate accomplishments.

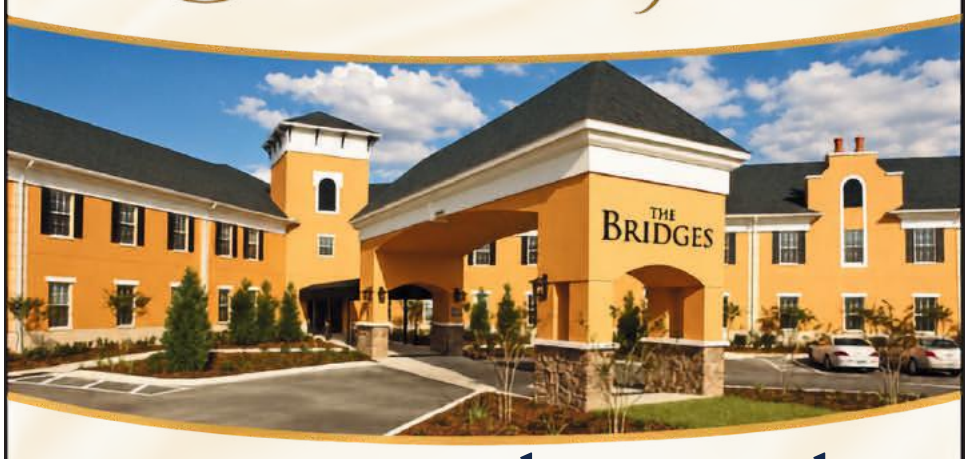
The project also reflects the YMCA's broader goal of making YMCA Camp Cristina a year-round destination.

Located in the heart of South Hillsborough, YMCA Camp Cristina has long provided opportunities for children and families to connect with nature, develop new skills and build relationships. The new challenge course will expand those opportunities with an elevated adventure experience.

YMCA Camp Cristina is located at 9840 Balm Riverview Rd. in Riverview.

For more information about YMCA Camp Cristina, its programs and upcoming opportunities, visit www.tampaymca.org/locations/ymca-camp-cristina or call 813-677-8400.

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JEFF'S BAGEL RUN EXPANDS TO BLOOMINGDALE WITH LOCAL OWNERS

By Brian Bokor





For Rob Shuffield, opening Jeff's Bagel Run in Bloomingdale Square brings a longtime restaurant dream back to familiar ground. The 1990 Brandon High School graduate and his wife, Teresa, celebrated the shop's grand opening on October 2, bringing scratch-made bagels, spreads and coffee to a community they already serve through their Nothing Bundt Cakes bakeries in Winthrop and Brandon.

Located at 875 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon, between Bealls and EOS Fitness, the new shop puts the couple close to the families and schools that drew Rob to Bloomingdale Square.

"From the moment we started preparing to open in Brandon, the community has been incredibly welcoming," company founder Jeff Perera said.

Customers can watch staff mix and shape dough, then boil and bake bagels in small batches throughout the day. Fresh batches continue throughout the morning, with no toasters behind the counter.

"Fresh baked bagels don't need to be toasted," Perera said.

The menu includes spreads such as roasted jalapeño, chive and onion, cake batter and banana pudding, along with hot coffee, iced lattes, cold brew, teas and refreshers..

Perera's bagel-making journey began after he lost his job in 2019. His wife, Danielle, encouraged him to make the bagels they struggled to find near their Central Florida home. The home project eventually became Jeff's Bagel Run, with the first storefront opening in Ocoee in 2021.

The company has since grown to 41 shops.

"It's exciting to see how far the brand has come in a relatively short amount of time," Perera said.

For the Shuffields, restaurant ownership began long before Jeff's. Rob's interest started in high school.

"I wanted to own a Beef 'O' Brady's franchise since I was in 10th grade," Rob said. "We would go there after our tennis matches in high school."

After meeting Teresa at the University of Florida, the couple gained restaurant experience and eventually became CiCi's Pizza franchise owners. They later opened locations in Virginia before returning to Florida.

A fellow franchise owner introduced them to Nothing Bundt Cakes.

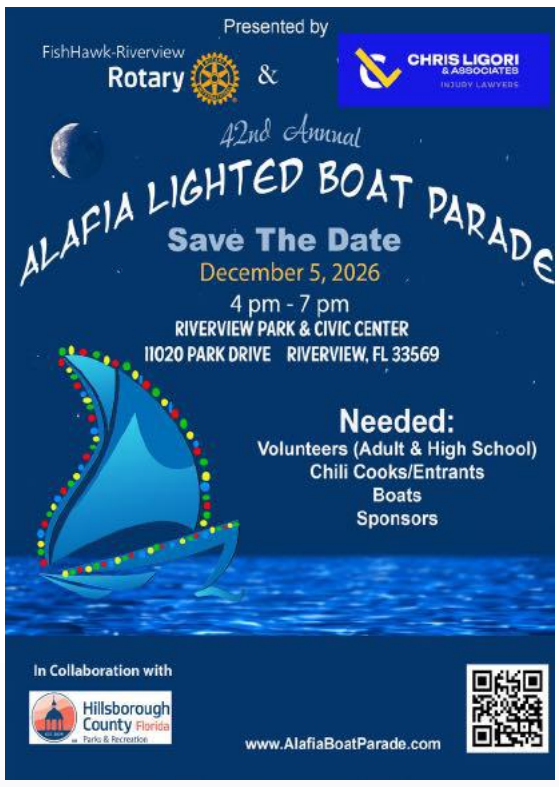
"Teresa and I signed up and opened our first location January 2016," Rob said.

They are now expanding their Jeff's Bagel Run presence, with locations in The Villages, Gainesville and Bloomingdale.

Jeff's Bagel Run is open daily from 6:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Visit www.jeffsbagelrun.com or call 656-272-5774 for information.

ANNUAL ALAFIA LIGHTED BOAT PARADE RETURNS DECEMBER 5

Staff Report



The FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club, in collaboration with Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation and parade sponsor Chris Ligori Law & Associates, is proud to present the 42nd annual Alafia Lighted Boat Parade on Saturday, December 5. This treasured holiday tradition will bring families, friends and visitors together for an evening of festive activities, food, entertainment and a spectacular display of beautifully decorated boats illuminating the Alafia River.

Festivities begin at 4 p.m. at the Riverview Civic Center, where attendees can enjoy a visit with Santa, the annual chili cook-off, family-friendly activities, food, local nonprofits and live entertainment before gathering along the waterfront of the Riverview Civic Center at 5:45 pm for the highlight of the evening — the annual parade of creatively decorated and brilliantly illuminated boats.

Following the parade will be the announcement and awarding of prizes for the chili cook-off as well as an after party downriver at the River's Edge Bar & Grill, where boaters, sponsors, volunteers and community members can gather for the official announcement and awarding of cash prizes for the best decorated boats, recognizing participants for their creativity, holiday spirit and outstanding decorations.

"For 42 years, the Alafia Lighted Boat Parade has brought our community together to celebrate the holiday season along the Alafia River," said Christine Ans, event chair. "From the festivities and lighted boat parade at the Riverview Civic Center to the post-parade celebration at River's Edge Bar & Grill, it's a truly beautiful, magical evening for all ages."

In addition to a holiday celebration, the event helps support the FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club's commitment to service. Proceeds benefit local service projects, scholarships and community initiatives that support children, families and organizations locally and abroad.

The Riverview Civic Center is located at 11020 Park Dr. in Riverview. River's Edge Bar & Grill is located 6226 Ohio Ave. in Gibsonton. For information about attending, sponsorships, boat or chili cook-off registration or volunteering, visit www.alafiaboatparade.com.



BROADWAY IN LAKELAND ANNOUNCES 2027 SEASON WITH THREE HIT SHOWS

Staff Report



Broadway fans can look forward to a new season of theater at the RP Funding Center in Lakeland, with three acclaimed productions scheduled for 2027.

The inaugural Broadway in Lakeland season will feature CLUE, HADESTOWN and The Who's TOMMY, offering audiences a mix of comedy, mythology and rock music.

Season subscriptions are now available, with packages starting at $145 for all three shows. Series price levels are $280 for Level One, $220 for Level Two and $145 for Level Three.

Subscribers receive guaranteed seats for each performance, access to the best available seats at subscription pricing, first options to upgrade seats and special ticket offers. Subscribers also have the opportunity to purchase tickets to select add-on performances before they go on sale to the general public.

The season opens with CLUE on January 31, 2027, at 7 p.m. Based on the popular 1985 movie and classic Hasbro board game, the production brings the familiar suspects and weapons to the stage for a comedic murder mystery. Six guests gather at Boddy Manor, where murder and blackmail lead to a night of twists, turns and unexpected revelations.

On March 2, 2027, at 7:30 p.m., HADESTOWN takes the stage. The Tony Award-winning musical, created by singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell and originally directed by Rachel Chavkin, weaves together the ancient stories of Orpheus and Eurydice and of Hades and Persephone. The production won eight Tony Awards in 2019, including Best Musical, as well as the 2020 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album.

The season concludes on June 1, 2027, at 7 p.m. with The Who's TOMMY, a new production of the iconic rock opera created by The Who in 1969. Featuring songs including "Pinball Wizard," "I'm Free," "See Me, Feel Me" and "Sensation," the production follows Tommy Walker's extraordinary journey from troubled young man to pinball sensation.

Subscriptions can be purchased online at www.rpfundingcenter.com/broadway, by calling the RP Funding Center Box Office at 863-834-8111 or in person at 701 W. Lime St. The box office is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays.

For ticket and ADA seating information, call 863-834-8100. Service fees may apply.

DAVE'S PUMPKIN PATCH CONTINUES 28-YEAR TRADITION IN BRANDON

By Dale Bliss



There is something about the arrival of fall that brings a little extra excitement to the air. Cooler mornings, changing colors and the return of pumpkins, hay bales and fall decorations all signal that the season has arrived.

For families in Brandon, Valrico and FishHawk, one of those familiar signs of fall has been Dave's Pumpkin Patch, a local tradition that has been welcoming families for more than 25 years.

Located at 106 E. Lumsden Ave. at the northeast corner of Lumsden Road and Parsons Avenue in Brandon, Dave's Pumpkin Patch returns each October with pumpkins in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors. The family-owned business has supported local Brandon, Valrico and FishHawk PTAs since 1998.

Owner Dave Morrow got his start in the pumpkin business in 1996 when he helped his son sell pumpkins through school. Two years later, he opened his own pumpkin operation, creating a seasonal tradition that continues today.

"My most favorable part of the operation is seeing how the little kids react to all the pumpkins and how they make them smile," Morrow said.

The pumpkin selection includes pie pumpkins, mini pumpkins, jack-o'-lantern pumpkins, white pumpkins, blue pumpkins and gourds. Families can also find corn stalks, hay and straw bales and garden mums to add a little fall flair at home.

And for families looking to capture the season, the pumpkin lot offers plenty of opportunities for photos. Visitors are encouraged to bring their cameras and take pictures among the pumpkins and fall displays.

Every once in a while, Morrow also brings in some especially large pumpkins, including "Big Mac" pumpkins that can weigh 70-80 pounds.

Dave's Pumpkin Patch is scheduled to operate from now through Saturday, October 31. Hours are Monday through Friday, 1-8 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Pumpkins are listed as starting at $4.

Whether searching for the perfect pumpkin to carve, decorating the front porch or simply taking a family photo to mark the season, Dave's Pumpkin Patch continues to offer a familiar reminder that fall has arrived in Brandon.

For more information, visit https://daveschristmastreelot.com/ or call 813-843-8182.







FORGOTTEN ANGELS GAINS COMMUNITY SUPPORT, PLANS FALL FUNDRAISERS

By Brian Bokor

Community leader visits, television coverage and donated time and supplies are supporting Forgotten Angels as the Valrico nonprofit advances its housing efforts and prepares for fall events.



Forgotten Angels provides housing, educational support and life-skills guidance for young people who have aged out of foster care, are at risk or are experiencing homelessness. Its family setting helps residents work toward stable, independent futures.

The nonprofit welcomed Florida House candidate Ryan Gill on August 19 and Florida State Representative Danny Alvarez Sr. on September 24. Mike Daigle of the Kiwanis Club of Greater Brandon attended both visits.

ABC Action News 28 anchor Deiah Riley also featured Forgotten Angels in her new 'Fostering Greatness' series. Airing every other Friday, the reports introduce young adults navigating life after foster care and seek to connect them with community members who can help them pursue their goals. Riley's visit highlighted the support provided by Forgotten Angels founder Cindy Tilley, executive director David Tyler and their team.

Alongside that growing visibility, donated supplies and volunteer work are helping Forgotten Angels maintain its campus and move housing projects forward. Approximately 30 Starlight Homes volunteers spent two hours cleaning and organizing outbuildings. Karen Adkins organized a household-product donation from Bristol Myers Squibb, supplying everyday essentials for the organization.

Forgotten Angels has completed renovations to its new girls' home on Pearson Road. At its Little Stearns Road campus, the nonprofit is converting a shed donated by the Kiwanis Club of Greater Brandon into living quarters. Home Depot contributed drywall for the conversion and planters for the property.

Music bingo night will take place on Tuesday, October 27, from 6-9 p.m. at Voodoo Brewing Co., located at 3432 SR 60 in Valrico. The Halloween-themed fundraiser features five music bingo games, raffle baskets and a 50/50 drawing. Costumes are encouraged but optional. General admission is $25; VIP tickets are $50 and include VIP seating and $20 in raffle tickets. Tickets are available at www.forgottenangelsflorida.org/event/music-bingo-night/.

A separate raffle offers a custom Harley-Davidson chopper built by Weems Motor Co. to recreate the motorcycle in David Mann's Dog Gone Hot Dog painting using authentic vintage custom parts. All proceeds benefit Forgotten Angels. Entries close on Saturday, October 31, at 9 p.m. Tickets are $25 each, or five for $100, 10 for $200 or 50 for $1,000. Enter at https://rafflecreator.com/pages/47938/weems-motor-co-harley-chopper.

Call 813-812-0120, visit www.forgottenangelsflorida.org or email ctilley@forgottenangelsflorida.org. Its campus is at 3604 Little Stearns Rd. in Valrico.

PREVENTING DRUG ABUSE, PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITY

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



"Two of the men I depended on the most are gone," Lisa Jo Burke said after losing both her son Brandon, and her husband, John, to fentanyl overdoses less than a year apart.

Her words capture the devastation substance abuse can leave behind. Addiction doesn't only affect the person using drugs. It can tear families apart.

October is National Substance Abuse Prevention Month, and tragedies like this are a reminder that prevention requires more than one approach. As prosecutors, our job is to hold people accountable when they break the law. But there is an important distinction between someone struggling with substance use disorder and someone who profits from selling dangerous drugs in our community.

Sometimes, the person standing in a courtroom is there because addiction has taken over their life. In those cases, jail alone may never solve the problem. For certain nonviolent offenders, drug treatment court gives them a chance to get help while still being held accountable.

It's not the easy way out. Participants are closely supervised and expected to prove that they are serious about changing their lives. When treatment works, communities become safer and fewer people reoffend.

That is very different from someone who profits by selling dangerous drugs. When a dealer puts fentanyl or other deadly substances into our community, the consequences can be devastating and irreversible. Florida law allows prosecutors to pursue first-degree murder charges when the drugs they sell cause someone's death. When a family loses a loved one that way, we will use every tool the law gives us to hold the responsible party accountable.

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

The best outcome is always to prevent the loss in the first place. That starts at home. Talk to your children about the dangers of drugs. If someone you love is struggling, don't wait for an arrest or an overdose to take it seriously.

National Substance Abuse Prevention Month is a reminder that we all have a role. In our office, that means helping people break free from addiction and holding drug dealers accountable for preying on vulnerable people in our community.

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.



CHAMBER CELEBRATES SHEAR STYLE STUDIO'S REOPENING AFTER HURRICANE

Staff Report



The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce joined local business owner Jeanine Dowling and a strong crowd of community members this morning for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Shear Style Studio, marking the salon's grand reopening, eight-year anniversary and hard-won return after the studio was destroyed in the hurricanes.



What was once a devastating loss has been transformed into a beautiful, thoughtfully renovated space. Guests who stepped inside this morning saw a bright, welcoming studio that stands as a clear testament to resilience, determination and the power of community support. The renovation is not only functional — it is lovely, reflecting both Jeanine's care for her clients and her refusal to let the storms have the final word.

"This morning felt like pure triumph," said Bonnie Peacock, executive director of the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce. "Jeanine has rebuilt something truly special. The studio is beautiful, the energy was joyful and the turnout showed just how much this business and this owner mean to people in Ruskin. Watching her cut that ribbon after everything the hurricanes took was one of those moments that remind you why local businesses matter so much."

Shear Style Studio has spent the past eight years building a reputation for beauty, faith and genuine community connection. The reopening celebrates both that history and a hopeful new chapter. Friends, clients, chamber members and neighbors filled the refreshed space to cheer Jeanine on and mark the occasion together.

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce is proud to stand with businesses that choose to rebuild and rise. Shear Style Studio's return is a powerful example of the grit and heart that define the SouthShore community.

For more information about Shear Style Studio, go to https://shearstylestudio.com/ or the visit the salon at 602 W. Shell Point Rd. in Ruskin. For questions about the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce or upcoming community events, contact the chamber's office at 813-645-1366.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY EXTENDS EMERGENCY OVER DENGUE CONCERNS

By Marie Gilmlore



Hillsborough County continued its response to a growing number of locally acquired dengue fever cases by extending its state of local emergency through October 22 as mosquito control crews increase efforts to reduce the mosquito population responsible for spreading the disease.

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 been extended in seven-day increments, including extensions through October 8, October 15 and October 22. A state of local emergency may 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.

Mosquito Management crews are increasing treatments by both air and ground after 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 mosquito-control efforts in impacted areas.

Hillsborough County has reported more than 200 locally acquired dengue cases during the outbreak, making up the vast majority of Florida's reported cases. The outbreak has affected communities across the county, with cases identified in nearly 60 ZIP codes.

Dengue is spread primarily by infected Aedes mosquitoes. Symptoms can include a 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, including severe abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, bleeding from the nose or gums, blood in vomit or stool, extreme fatigue or irritability, or difficulty breathing.

Residents throughout the county are encouraged to help reduce mosquito breeding areas by eliminating standing water around their homes, particularly following recent heavy rains. Residents can also sign up for notifications about localized aerial treatments in their neighborhoods and access information about current mosquito-control activities through the 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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TICKETS: $55/person
• Includes Food & Beverages
• An alcohol-free event
• Includes (1) set of 10 bingo games
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Questions? Email Angie Kagey at akagey@whatisimpact.com
or visit whatisimpact.com/events or the event's page!
All tickets, auction, and raffle sales benefit Impact Program, Inc. presenting healthy lifestyles and relationships to teens, parents, teachers and other youth leaders through classroom education.

PUBLIX SERVES BRINGS 40 VOLUNTEERS AND A $60,000 GIFT TO LOCAL FOOD BANK

Staff Report



More than 40 Publix associates and store managers from 12 area stores spent Sept. 22 volunteering at United Food Bank and Services in Plant City as part of the company's Publix Serves initiative.

The visit also came with a major boost for the food bank. Publix Super Markets Charities presented the organization with a $60,000 contribution to strengthen hunger-relief efforts across eastern Hillsborough County.

John Doran, executive director of Publix Super Markets Charities, joined associates and local store leaders for the presentation. Publix Super Markets Charities, the grocery chain's charitable foundation, supports organizations focused on hunger relief, education and other community needs.

Throughout the day, volunteers worked on a range of projects that keep the food bank running. They assembled Kids Weekend Bags for students at 26 local schools, sorted fresh produce and shelf-stable food, prepared beverage bags and handed out meal boxes to families. Others pitched in on behind-the-scenes tasks that help the organization carry out its mission.

The work touched nearly every part of the food bank's operation, from the warehouse floor to the distribution line.

The Kids Weekend Bags are designed to help students who may not have enough to eat at home when school meals are not available, such as over the weekend.

The impact reaches well beyond a single day. United Food Bank and Services serves about 15,000 people each month, and the Publix donation will help provide food and other essential resources to local children, families, seniors and veterans.

Since 1991, the nonprofit has served as a lifeline for individuals and families facing hunger and hardship. Its mission is to help people move from "a state of hunger" to self-sufficiency, empowerment and self-reliance.

Through its Feeding Our Community program, the food bank offers daily onsite food distribution along with targeted outreach in underserved neighborhoods.

Publix Serves is the company's volunteer program, which encourages associates to give back in the communities where they live and work.

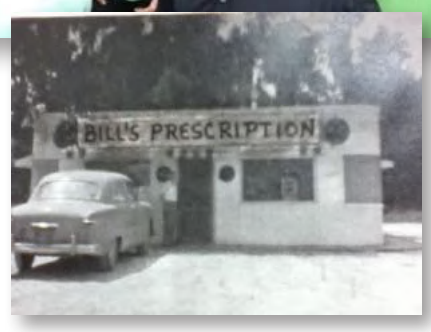
The food bank relies on donations and volunteers to keep up with demand. Contributions, according to the organization, help do more than fill empty plates; they help create lasting change.

For more information or to donate, visit ufbpc.org or follow @UnitedFoodBankAndServices on social media.

BILL'S PRESCRIPTION MARKS 70 YEARS WITH COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

By Marie Gilmore





When a local pharmacist Justo 'Bill' Noriega, opened a small drugstore on Brandon Boulevard in 1956, he could not have known it would one day care for four generations of the same families. Seventy years later, Bill's Prescription Center is still doing just that, and the family-owned pharmacy is inviting the community to celebrate.

The pharmacy will host a Community Wellness Celebration from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, November 7, at its location at 202 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon. The free event will bring together local health care providers, wellness businesses, longtime customers and neighbors for a day focused on health, education and connection.

Visitors can receive free health screenings, including blood pressure and glucose checks, as well as flu shots. Local health and wellness vendors will be on hand, along with giveaways, raffle prizes and family-friendly activities. The day will also include a special tribute to the pharmacy's founder and to the patients, employees, health care professionals and community members who have been part of its history.

Chelsea Noriega West, the founder's granddaughter and the daughter of the pharmacy's current owner, said her grandfather's philosophy of treating every patient like family remains at the heart of the business.

"My grandfather could never have imagined in 1956 that the small pharmacy he opened would become part of the lives of so many Brandon families," she said. "We have cared for grandparents, parents, children and now grandchildren of many of the same families who first walked through our doors decades ago."

Now a three-generation family business, Bill's Prescription Center has remained independent through seven decades of change in the health care industry. Noriega West said the anniversary is about more than the passage of time.

"It is a celebration of the people who have trusted us with their care, the dedicated staff members who have served generations of families and a community that has supported a local independent pharmacy," she said.

As health care continues to evolve, she added, the family hopes its story highlights the lasting value of accessible, personal, community-based care and the vital role local providers continue to play in the lives of Brandon residents.

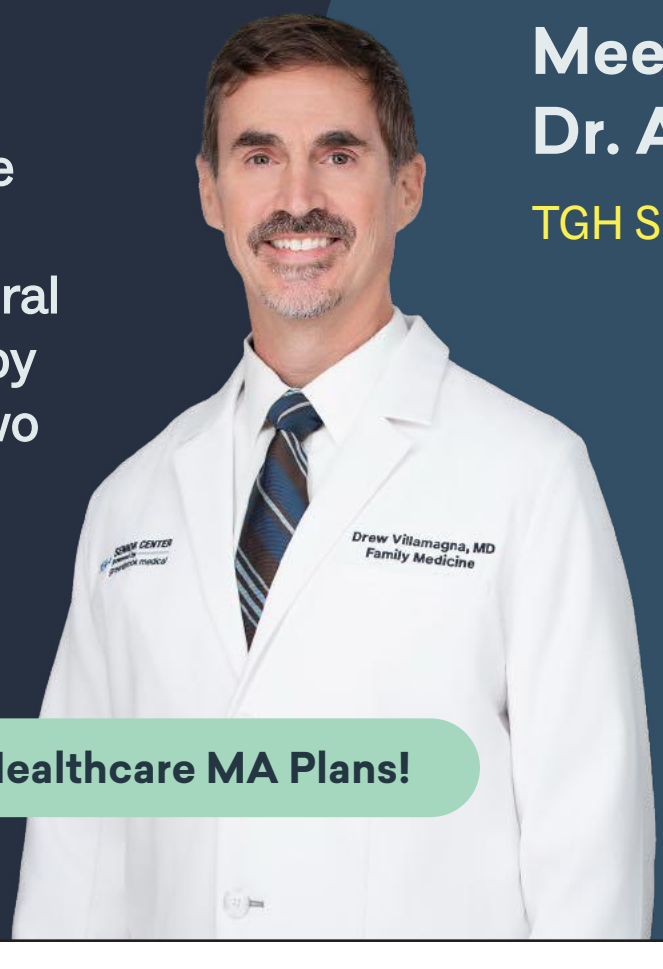
For more information about the celebration, call Bill's Prescription Center at 813-277-8242.

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TGH Senior Center of Brandon

Scan to learn more or schedule a Meet & Greet

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WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

BALLOT EXPLAINED: THREE AMENDMENTS AND THREE REFERENDUMS

By Marie Gilmore

Voters will decide three statewide constitutional amendments and three Hillsborough County questions in the November 3 General Election. Statewide amendments require at least 60 percent approval. County referendums require a simple majority.

Statewide Amendments

Amendment 1: A Bigger "Rainy Day Fund" for the State

Florida maintains a Budget Stabilization Fund to cover emergencies and budget shortfalls. The amendment would increase the amount that can be retained from 10 percent to 25 percent of the state's general revenue collections.

It would also require the Legislature to transfer the lesser of $750 million or the amount needed to reach 25 percent each year, unless specified conditions allow the transfer to be suspended. Lawmakers could continue withdrawing money for critical state needs.

A YES vote supports increasing the fund's maximum balance and requiring annual transfers.

A NO vote opposes the proposed changes.

Amendment 2: Property Tax Exemption for Certain Agricultural Equipment

This amendment would exempt certain tangible personal property from property taxes when located on agricultural land and used to produce agricultural products or for agritourism activities.

The property must be owned by the landowner or leaseholder. Examples include qualifying farm equipment, tools and machinery.

If approved, the exemption would apply beginning January 1, 2027.

A YES vote supports exempting qualifying agricultural and agritourism-related property from taxes.

A NO vote opposes the proposed exemption.



Amendment 3: Larger Homestead Exemption and Changes to Property Assessments

This amendment would make several changes to Florida's property tax system.

Larger homestead exemption: The exemption for non-school taxes would increase to $150,000 in 2027 and $250,000 in 2028, with adjustments for inflation beginning in 2029. It would not apply to school district taxes.

Local option: Counties and municipalities could increase the homestead exemption for their respective taxes up to the property's full assessed value. Special districts could do the same with voter approval.

New Florida residents: People who are not Florida residents as of December 31, 2026, would initially receive the existing homestead exemption when they qualify.

Lower assessment cap: The annual cap on increases in assessed value for non-homestead property would decrease from 10 percent to 5 percent. This does not apply to school district taxes.

Property tax spending: Counties and municipalities would be required to use property tax revenues for public safety, education, infrastructure, natural resources, bond debt service, employee retirement benefits, and government operations.

The amendment would take effect January 1, 2027.

A YES vote supports the proposed changes.

A NO vote opposes those changes.



Hillsborough County Referendums

Referendum 1: Should Voters Elect the School Superintendent?

Currently, the Hillsborough County School Board appoints the superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools. This referendum asks whether the superintendent should instead be elected by voters in a partisan election.

If approved, the change would take effect with the 2028 general election, with the superintendent serving a four-year term.

A YES vote supports electing the superintendent.

A NO vote keeps the superintendent appointed by the School Board.

Referendum 2: More County Commissioners, All Elected by District

Hillsborough County currently has seven county commissioners. This referendum would increase the number to nine and eventually to 11 when the county reaches a population of 2.5 million.

It also would require every commissioner to be elected from a single-member district, meaning only district voters would elect that commissioner.

A YES vote supports expanding the commission and making all seats district-based.

A NO vote leaves the current seven-member structure in place.

Referendum 3: Continue the Half-Cent Sales Tax for Schools

Hillsborough County voters approved a half-cent school capital outlay sales surtax in 2018. The tax is scheduled to expire in 2028.

This referendum asks whether to continue the half-cent sales tax for another 10 years beginning January 1, 2029. Revenue would fund air conditioning replacement and repairs, school construction and improvements, security enhancements and other maintenance needs.

A YES vote supports continuing the tax through 2038.

A NO vote allows the tax to expire as scheduled.



A PLAN TO MEET TODAY'S CHALLENGES

KAREN PEREZ' PRIORITIES FOR OUR SCHOOLS

- BUILD ON OUR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAINS
- CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR HIGHER TEACHER PAY
- INVEST IN SCHOOL SAFETY
- RETAIN QUALITY TEACHERS
- FOCUS OUR LIMITED RESOURCES ON THE CLASSROOM

re-elect KAren Perez
for school board district 6

Karen's experience as Chair of the School Board, mother, business owner and mental health specialist, makes her uniquely prepared to face today's challenges.

- Elected to Hillsborough County School Board in 2018 and serves as Chair
- Owns a small business that works with children, families, and veterans on mental health issues
- Mother of three adult children, eight grandchildren and lives in New Tampa with Riley and Baxter, certified Therapy Dogs for comforting her clients
- Florida School Board Assoc. Member
- Serves on Value Adjustment Board
- Safe and Sound Leadership Council
- National Assoc. Social Workers Member
- Trilingual – English, Spanish and American Sign Language

/KarenPerezTampa | (813) 493-7705 | kperezhsb2004@aol.com

www.KeepKarenPerez.com

Political advertisement paid for and approved by Karen Perez, non-partisan, for Hillsborough County School Board District 6.

POLITICALLY SPEAKING

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

U.S. SENATOR



Ashley Moody
www.ashleymoody.com



Angie Nixon
www.angienixon.com



Neil J. Gillespie
www.neilgillespie4senate.blogspot.com

REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS DISTRICT 14



Mike Beltran
www.beltranforcongress.com



Kathy Castor
www.castorforcongress.com



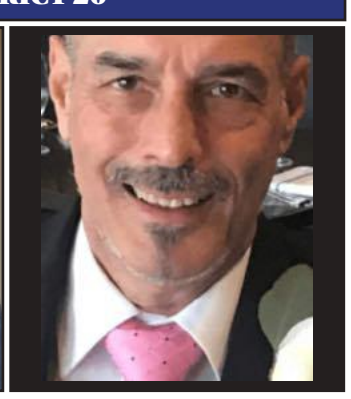
Brian Lambert
www.brianlambertforcongress.com

VOTE by MAIL

STATE SENATOR DISTRICT 20



Jim Boyd
www.boydforflorida.com



Gerald Baldi
www.baldiformanatee.com

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 69



Daniel Alvarez
www.electdannyalvarez.com



Ashley Elizabeth Hermann
www.ashleyforfloridahouse.com

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 70



Michael Owen
www.owenforflorida.com



Luther Keith Wilkins
www.lutherforfl.com

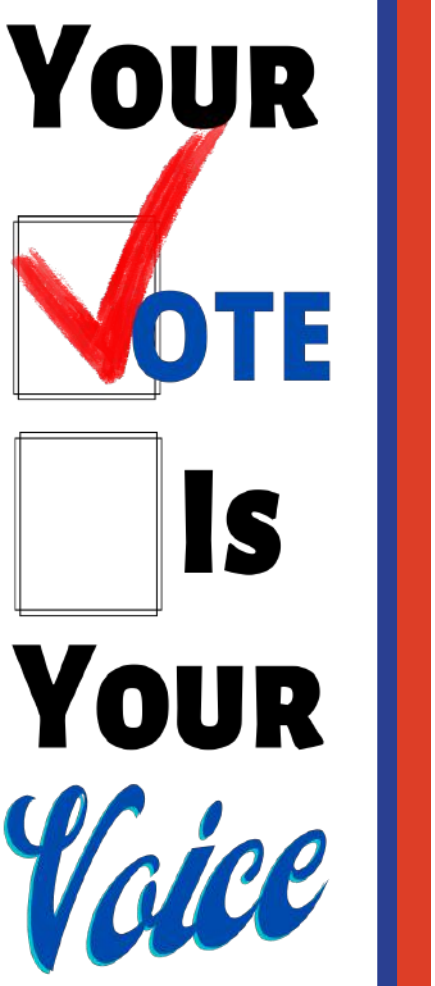
COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 3



Gwen Myers
www.votegwenmyers.com



Luiz F. Garcia
www.electluizffgarcia.com



COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 5



Stacy Hahn
www.votestacyhahn.com



Neil Manimala
www.neilmanimala.com

COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 7



Joshua Wostal
www.joshuawostal.com



Aileen Rodriguez
www.voteaileen2026.com

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DISTRICT 2



Brittany Lyssy
www.votebrittanylyssy.com



Daniela Simic
www.danielaforschools.com

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DISTRICT 6



Kenneth Gay
www.votekennethgay.com



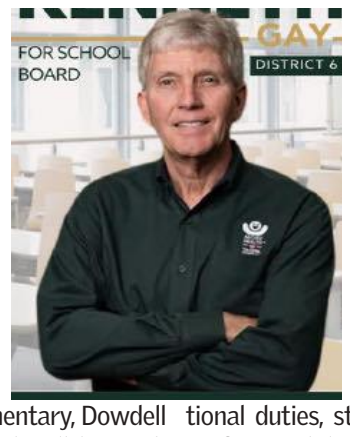
Karen Perez
www.keepkarenperez.com

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

KENNETH GAY
SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 6

Staff Report



Kenneth 'Ken' Gay is seeking a seat on the Hillsborough County School Board, District 6, drawing on nearly four decades of experience in public education and a lifelong connection to the community he hopes to serve.

A fifth-generation Floridian, Gay was born and raised in Tampa Bay and is a graduate of Palm River Elementary, Dowdell Middle Magnet School and Hillsborough High School. He continued his education at Hillsborough College, the University of South Florida and Nova Southeastern University, earning two master's degrees and a doctorate in child and youth studies.

Gay devoted 39 years to Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) as an educator and administrator before retiring in 2022. He continues working with students through MORE HEALTH and mentors teachers entering the profession through alternative certification.

His decision to run, he said, is rooted in a desire to keep students at the center of school district decisions while supporting educators, strengthening family partnerships and ensuring taxpayer resources are used effectively.

Gay identifies student achievement as a central priority, emphasizing the importance of identifying learning gaps early, strengthening instruction and expanding opportunities that prepare students for college, military service, careers and life.

He also points to teacher recruitment and retention as essential to student success. His priorities include competitive compensation, reducing unnecessary paperwork and noninstructional duties, strengthening mentoring and professional development and giving educators meaningful input before decisions affect classrooms.

School safety and discipline are another focus. Drawing on his experience as an assistant principal, Gay supports clear behavior expectations, consistent enforcement of discipline policies, family involvement and partnerships with school resource officers.

Beyond education, Gay serves as clerk of session at First Presbyterian Church of Brandon and has volunteered with Tampa Bay Watch, helping restore marine habitat.

After a lifetime in Hillsborough County, Gay said he is seeking the District 6 seat to continue serving students, educators and families through experienced leadership, fiscal responsibility and a focus on stronger student outcomes. District 6 is a countywide seat, meaning all Hillsborough County voters can participate in the election. For more information, visit www.votekennethgay.com.

NEIL MANIMALA
COUNTY COMMISSIONER, DIST. 5

By Amanda Castillo



For Neil Manimala, Hillsborough County has been the backdrop to nearly every chapter of his life, from growing up in Valrico as the son of two health care workers, to building a career as a physician serving the local medical community and now raising a family of his own.

Manimala's parents, both immigrants, worked in opposite hospitals while raising their family. His mother was a nurse and his father a respiratory therapist, an upbringing that cultivated his understanding of hard work, family, and service.

Looking back on their journey, he sees it as a reflection of what they were able to build.

"There is something to be said about the American dream," he said.

That example eventually led Manimala into health care. After graduating from Hillsborough County public schools, he earned his Medical degree from the University of South Florida. Today, he's a board-certified urologist caring for patients throughout Brandon, Riverview, Plant City and Sun City Center, and serves as the president of the Hillsborough County Medical Association.

His connection to the community extends beyond his medical practice. Manimala has served on the county's Health Care Advisory Board and the Health Council of West Central Florida, experiences that have kept him connected to issues affecting Hillsborough County.

His background in medicine and community shaped Manimala's decision to pursue public service as he campaigns for Hillsborough County Commission, District 5. His campaign has outlined priorities including health care access, public safety and economic opportunity.

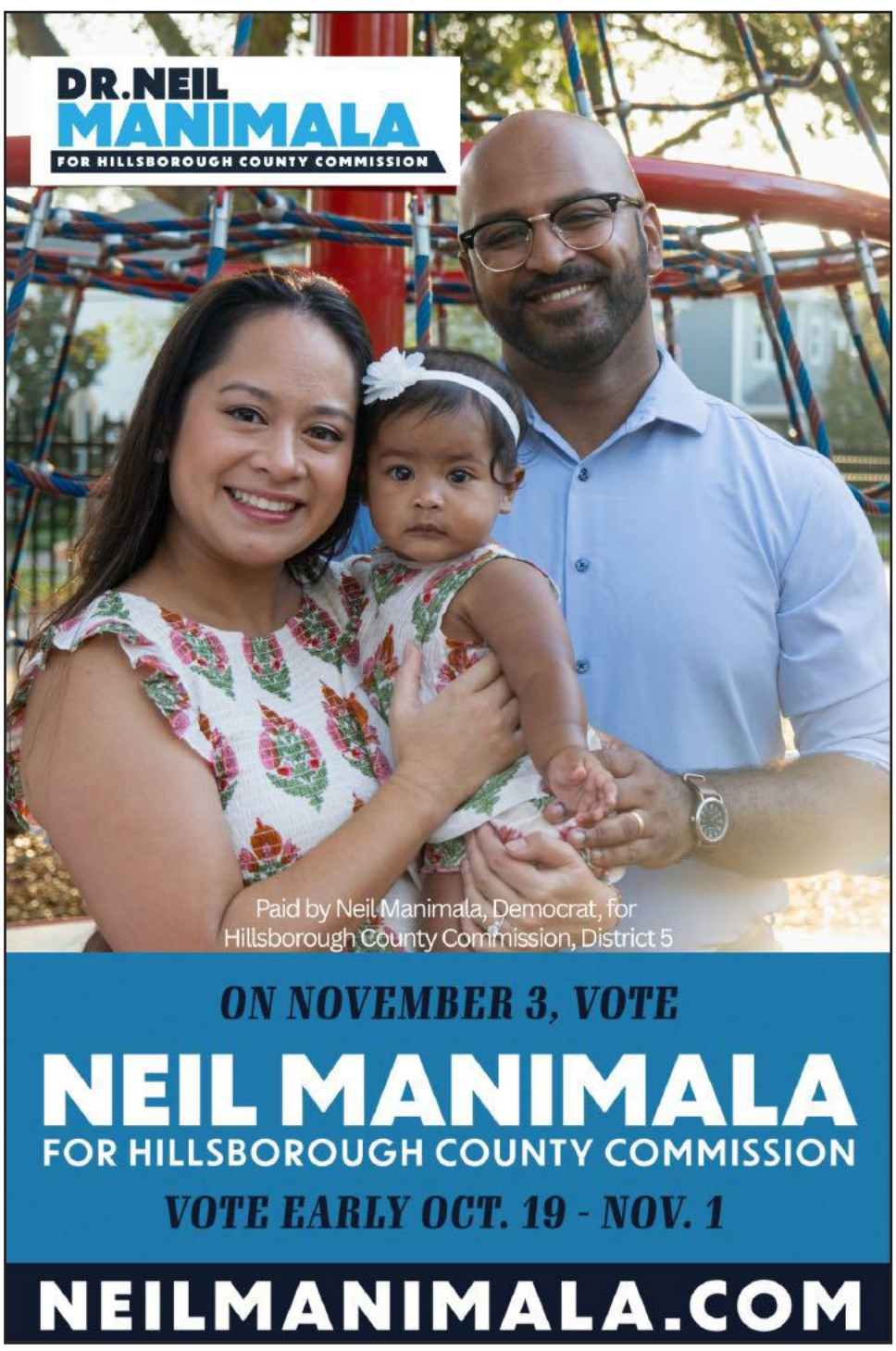
Since welcoming his daughter, Manimala's connection to Hillsborough County has taken on a new meaning. Becoming a father has sharpened his focus on the county's future and the community where his daughter will grow up.

"I couldn't sit on the sidelines," he said, "I couldn't let my daughter be my age 36 years from now looking back at this generation and saying we didn't do enough."

His campaign is rooted not only in the place he has called home for his whole life, but also in his determination to help build a healthier, more equitable Hillsborough County for the next generation.

For more information, visit his website at www.neilmanimala.com.





POLITICALLY SPEAKING

KAREN PEREZ
SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 6

By Amanda Castillo



Karen Perez's connection to Tampa began when she was 15 years old. In 1979, her mother moved her to Tampa to continue her education. What began as a move would eventually become the foundation for a life spent helping others find their own opportunities.

For Perez, education has never been just about a diploma. It is something she carries with her and believes needs to be shared with others.

"Education does not make us superior to others but helps us level the playing field," she said.

Today, Perez serves as chair of the Hillsborough County School Board and is running for reelection to the District 6 at-large seat. She was first elected to the school board in 2018 and reelected in 2022.

Prior to entering public service, Perez spent years working in social work and mental health. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in social work from the University of South Florida and became a licensed clinical social worker. Throughout her career, Perez has worked closely with children, families and veterans, focusing on mental health and the challenges that shape people's lives.

That experience continues to shape the way Perez approaches her work on the school board. Her years in social work taught her to look beyond what is visible and to understand that there is often more to a person's circumstances than what others see.

"Every person has a story," Perez said, a perspective she has carried into her work with students, families and the community.

As she addresses challenges facing Hillsborough County Public Schools, Perez emphasizes the importance of understanding the people behind the issues, not just the issues themselves.

Perez is running for another term because she believes "there is still work to be done." For her, that work begins with listening to the people behind the issues and making sure their experiences are heard.

Now, Perez hopes that the work she leaves behind will continue after her time in public service ends. She wants students and families to know that their stories matter, their voices deserve to be heard and someone will advocate for them. The opportunity her mother once fought to give her became a lifelong commitment to opening doors for others. Visit the website at www.keepkarenperez.com.

STACY HAHN
COUNTY COMMISSIONER, DIST. 5

By Libby Hopkins



Stacy Hahn has called Hillsborough County home for 25 years.

"My husband, Jeff, and I raised our three sons here because we believe in this community and the opportunities it offers families," Hahn said. "For the past eight years, I've had the privilege of serving on the Hillsborough County School Board, overseeing one of the nation's largest school districts, managing a multibillion-dollar budget and working to protect taxpayer dollars while improving outcomes for students."

Throughout her service, she has listened, turned conversations into action and built partnerships that solve complex challenges. Before serving in elected office, she was professor at the University of South Florida.

"Public service has always been about giving back to the community that has given so much to my family, and I'm committed to continuing that service by helping Hillsborough County remain a place where families and businesses can thrive," Hahn said.

Hahn earned a reputation for fiscal responsibility, transparency and delivering high-quality outcomes for students. She is now running for County Commission, District 5, to bring the same disciplined, results-driven leadership to the community.

"I'm running for county commission to bring that same leadership, accountability and problem-solving approach to the decisions that will shape our community's future," Hahn said. "My priorities are straightforward: protect taxpayers, improve infrastructure, support law enforcement and first responders and ensure growth is planned responsibly so our quality of life is protected."

"Through initiatives like the Early Childhood Literacy Fair, Storytime Online, the Early Childhood Literacy Bus and community book distributions, we've helped thousands of children develop a love of reading before they enter the classroom," Hahn said.

"If elected, I want people to know they have a commissioner who is accessible, prepared, fiscally responsible and committed to making thoughtful decisions that strengthen our community for generations to come," she said. "When we work together, we create deeper, more lasting impacts."

To learn more about Hahn or become involved in her campaign, you can visit her website at www.votestacyhahn.com.



WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

BRITTANY LYSSY
SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 2

Staff Report



Brittany Lyssy is a mom raising her children in Hillsborough County who said she often thinks about the questions facing local schools: Are children learning what they need to succeed? Are classrooms safe? Are teachers being supported? And are taxpayer dollars being used responsibly?

Those questions, she said, are why she is running for Hillsborough County School Board, District 2.

Lyssy has a background in education policy and law and has worked with school boards nationally on ethics, governance and policy. She also brings the perspective of a parent and said she understands what families expect when they send their children to school. In her view, strong schools begin with strong academics, supported teachers, safe classrooms and parent partnerships.

Lyssy said she respects educators and the work they do every day. She believes teachers should have the support and resources needed to help students learn, grow and succeed. She also believes School Board members have a responsibility to ask questions, examine how taxpayer dollars are spent, measure whether policies are producing results and make sure parents have a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their children.

Her priorities include strengthening core academics, particularly reading and math; identifying struggling students early; supporting and retaining great teachers; maintaining safe and orderly classrooms; and directing resources toward students and classrooms.

Lyssy supports school choice and said parents should have the freedom to choose the educational setting that best meets their child's needs. She believes strong public schools and educational choice can coexist and that families deserve options.

Fiscal responsibility is another priority. Lyssy supports transparency and accountability, including a line-by-line review of spending and a budget that keeps classrooms at the forefront.

She also believes schools should prepare students for a variety of paths after graduation, including college, career and technical education, apprenticeships, military service or the workforce.

Brittany Lyssy is running for Hillsborough County School Board, District 2. Learn more at www.votebrittanylyssy.com.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OFFERS FOUR WEEKLY NETWORKING GROUPS

Staff Report

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) offers four weekly networking opportunities designed to help local professionals build relationships, exchange ideas and become more connected to the business community.



The chamber encourages members to view networking as an ongoing investment rather than a one-time interaction. Regular participation helps members build familiarity and trust that can lead to referrals, collaborations and new business opportunities.

"Showing up consistently gives members the opportunity to move beyond simply knowing someone's name or business," said Amber Aaron, president of the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce. "Our networking groups create an environment where members can build relationships, learn how they can support one another and become a trusted resource within our business community."

INSPIRE Networking Group meets on Mondays at 3 p.m. at First Citizens Bank, located at 10670 Palm River Rd. in Tampa, next to Topgolf. The faith-based group is led by Dave Lechuga of Florida Executive Realty and Mikey Blewett of Generations Church and incorporates faith, encouragement and relationship building.

RISE Networking Group meets on Thursdays at 8 a.m. at the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce office, located at 6437 Watson Rd., Lower Level, in Riverview. Attendees should enter from the back of the building. The group is led by Me'Lanie' Munusami of G-FORCE Parking Lot Striping of Tampa and John Plumstead of East of Tampa.

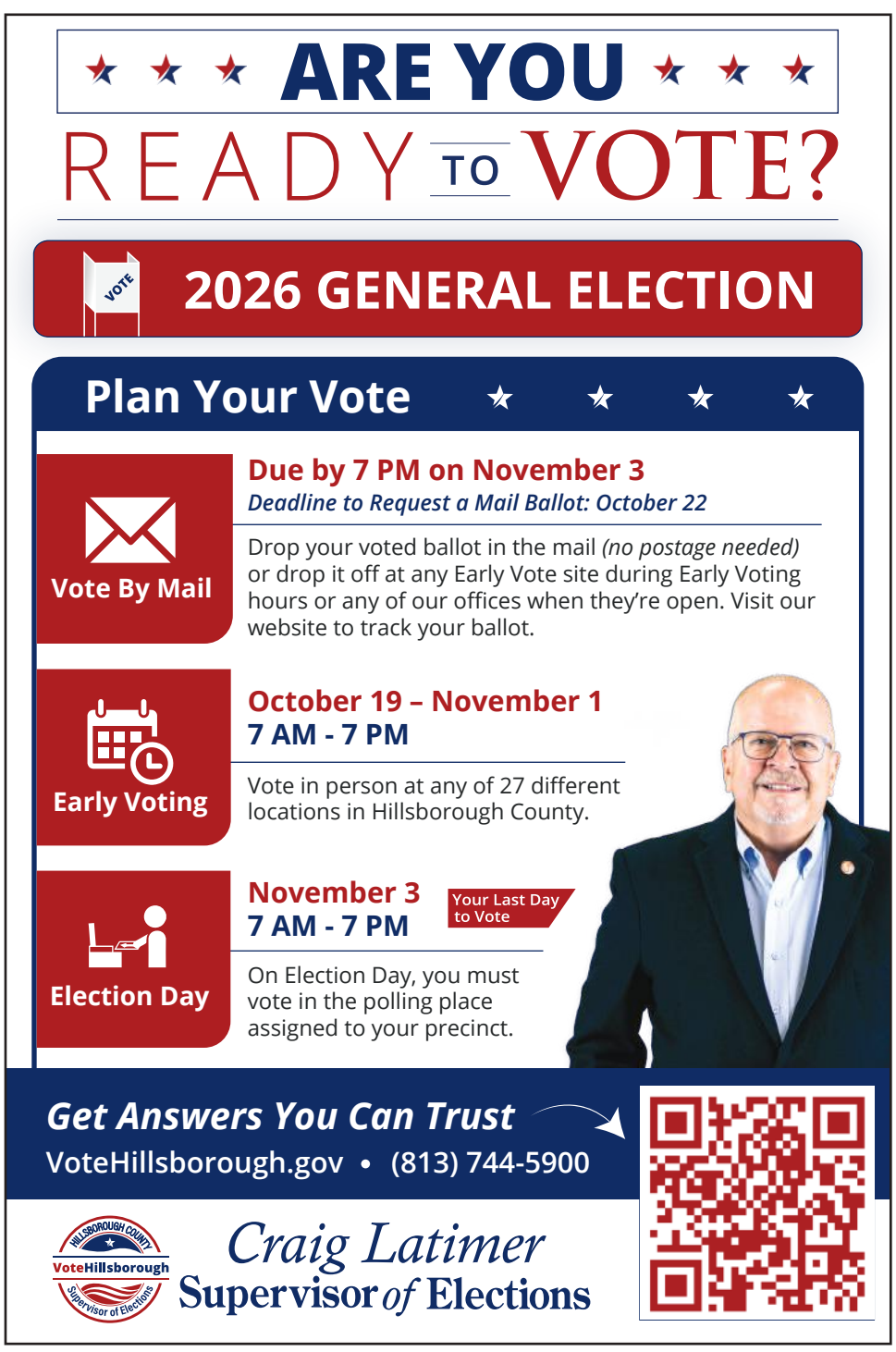
Networking@Noon EAST meets on Fridays at 12 Noon at JF Kicks Restaurant and Patio Bar, located at 3345 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. It is led by Michael May of All American Title and Troops in Contact and Yolonda Young of WeWed.

Networking@Noon WEST meets on Fridays at 12 Noon at Brandon Crossroads Bowl, located at 609 Crater Lane in Tampa. The group is led by Barb Smith Gray of Flutterby Media and Joseph Brace of Primerica Financial Services.

All four groups are free and open to BRCC members. Visitors interested in experiencing the chamber's networking community may attend each group up to two times.

For more information, visit the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce or call 813-689-1221.





FLIGHT TO HONOR MISSION 12 ACCEPTING GUARDIAN APPLICATIONS

By Brad Stager



They're gearing up for Flight to Honor Polk Mission 12 to fly local military veterans to Washington, D.C., where they will spend a day visiting monuments and shrines dedicated to the historical sacrifices of their youth.

The airborne missions began in 2015 and give veterans a chance to visit the places where the nation honors those who have served in the armed forces and shaped its history as called upon to do so in times of war and peace.

The process of accepting applications from veterans who fly free of charge and guardians who accompany them on the daylong roundtrip journey that begins the morning of April 27, 2027, has begun. The flights take off from Lakeland Linder International Airport for the approximately two-hour journey early in the day and return that night. An orientation for participants is scheduled for April 25, 2027.

Priority for the flights is given to those dealing with severe medical conditions first, followed by veterans who served in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Designated guardians who volunteer to serve on the missions accompany the veterans during the honor mission. The guardians' purpose is to assist veterans with the travel and memorial sightseeing activities. If a guardian applicant is chosen to participate, a $500 donation to defray the cost of the mission will be requested. Guardians are assigned to a veteran in the order that applications are received.

The Flight to Honor missions are one way the Polk County Veterans Council fulfills its mission to support veterans and the military community.

"The Polk County Veterans Council is committed to recognizing and supporting Military Veterans," Gary Clark, chairman of the Polk County Veterans Council and a retired Air Force colonel, wrote in an email. "Flight to Honor #12 veteran participants will be largely Vietnam War and Vietnam Era veterans. Our goal is to show these veterans that their service was appreciated. The support we receive from the community attests to this goal not just in the Welcome Home celebration but also in the monetary donations received to fund the mission."

You can get the latest details about Flight to Honor Polk including an application and information about donating to support Mission 12 at https://polkveteranscouncil.com/.



CREDIT CARD FRAUD: TECHNOLOGY KEEPS CHANGING



Credit card fraud is nothing new — but the technology scammers use to commit it is constantly evolving. Criminals are becoming more sophisticated, using technology to make their scams look legitimate and to turn stolen credit card information into quick profits.

A recent example involved Florida Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (FLHSMV) scam texts and toll-payment scams. Millions upon millions of fraudulent text messages were sent claiming that the recipient's driver's license would be suspended or that they owed money for an unpaid toll or traffic violation. The message included a link directing the victim to a convincing payment page.

After entering their credit card information, the victim might receive a legitimate text from their financial institution containing a six-digit authentication code. At the same time, the scammer would send another message claiming that the code was needed to 'verify' or complete the payment. In reality, the victim was unknowingly providing the scammer with the final piece of information needed to compromise the card.

Criminals have also found ways to use stolen card information with Apple Wallet or Google Wallet. This does not mean Apple Pay or Google Pay has been compromised. These digital payment systems use strong security features, including tokenization, to protect your actual card number. Instead, criminals are abusing the wallet technology after obtaining stolen card information and authentication credentials. They can make fraudulent transactions appear more like legitimate digital-wallet purchases, making the technology another tool in their fraud scheme.

The best defense is vigilance. Monitor your credit card and bank statements regularly. If you see a transaction you do not recognize, contact your financial institution immediately using the phone number on the back of your card or through its official app or website.

Set up text or email alerts for purchases and other account activity so you know when transactions occur.

Most importantly, use two-factor authentication whenever it is available — but never give an authentication code to someone who contacts you. That six-digit code is designed to protect you. Giving it to a scammer can give them the final authorization they need.

The technology may change, but the safest rule remains the same: Protect your information, verify before you act and never share your authentication code.





THE OSPREY OBSERVER **Brandon/Winthrop Edition**

Eye *on* Business

EDITED BY **Jenny Bennett**

October 2026, Vol. 21, Iss. 10

SUBMIT BUSINESS NEWS & PRESS RELEASES

Send to **Business Editor**
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DEADLINE: 15TH OF EACH MONTH

Floating Springs Celebrates One Year Anniversary

Floating Springs Acupuncture & Wellness 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. We take 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 us understand your individual needs and develop an approach that is right for you.

Floating Springs Acupuncture & Wellness is located at 500 Vonderburg Dr. West Suite 214B in Brandon. For additional information call 813-535-0693 or visit its website at floatingspingsacu.com.

Blissologie Donates 3D Tattoos

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Blissologie Beauty, located at 101 Flamingo Dr. in Apollo Beach, is launching a special community initiative to provide two breast cancer survivors with complimentary 3D areola tattoo restoration services. 3D areola tattooing is a specialized paramedical tattoo technique that recreates the natural appearance of the areola and nipple following breast surgery and reconstruction. For many breast cancer survivors, this can be a meaningful final step in their reconstruction journey and help restore a sense of confidence and wholeness.

Throughout October, Blissologie will be accepting applications from local breast cancer survivors who have undergone breast reconstruction and are interested in receiving this service. Those interested in applying or learning more can contact it privately at blissologie.info@gmail.com.

Veterans Day Appreciation Event

RAZZLEDAZZLE Barbershop is teaming up with VetAble Technologies, a service-disabled veteran-owned small business focused on serving the federal government with technology solutions, to honor all who served. As a small token of gratitude, they are offering free professional haircuts to all U.S. veterans on Veterans Day — Wednesday, November 11. A complementary men's haircut has a $35 value. If the shop reaches capacity, veterans who visit in person on November 11 will receive a free haircut gift card to redeem at a later date. Food and refreshments will be sponsored by Gasparilla Pizzeria. Veterans only; to reserve an appointment, please call 813-820-3757. RAZZLEDAZZLE is located at 11296 Sullivan St. in Riverview and is open from 10 a.m.-7 p.m.

Dementia And Alzheimer's Support Groups For Caregivers

Ambiance at Brandon understands the journey of caregiving for a loved one with memory loss and the importance of having support along the way. It offers dementia and Alzheimer's support groups for care partners and families in the community, providing connection, encouragement, education and understanding in a compassionate environment, focused on creating the best day possible. Meetings are held every third Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. and every fourth Wednesday at 2 p.m. Meetings are available in person and virtually. For additional information, call Jill at 813-607-6880. Ambiance at Brandon is located at 1320 Oakfield Dr. in Brandon.

Preservation 1st Has Moved

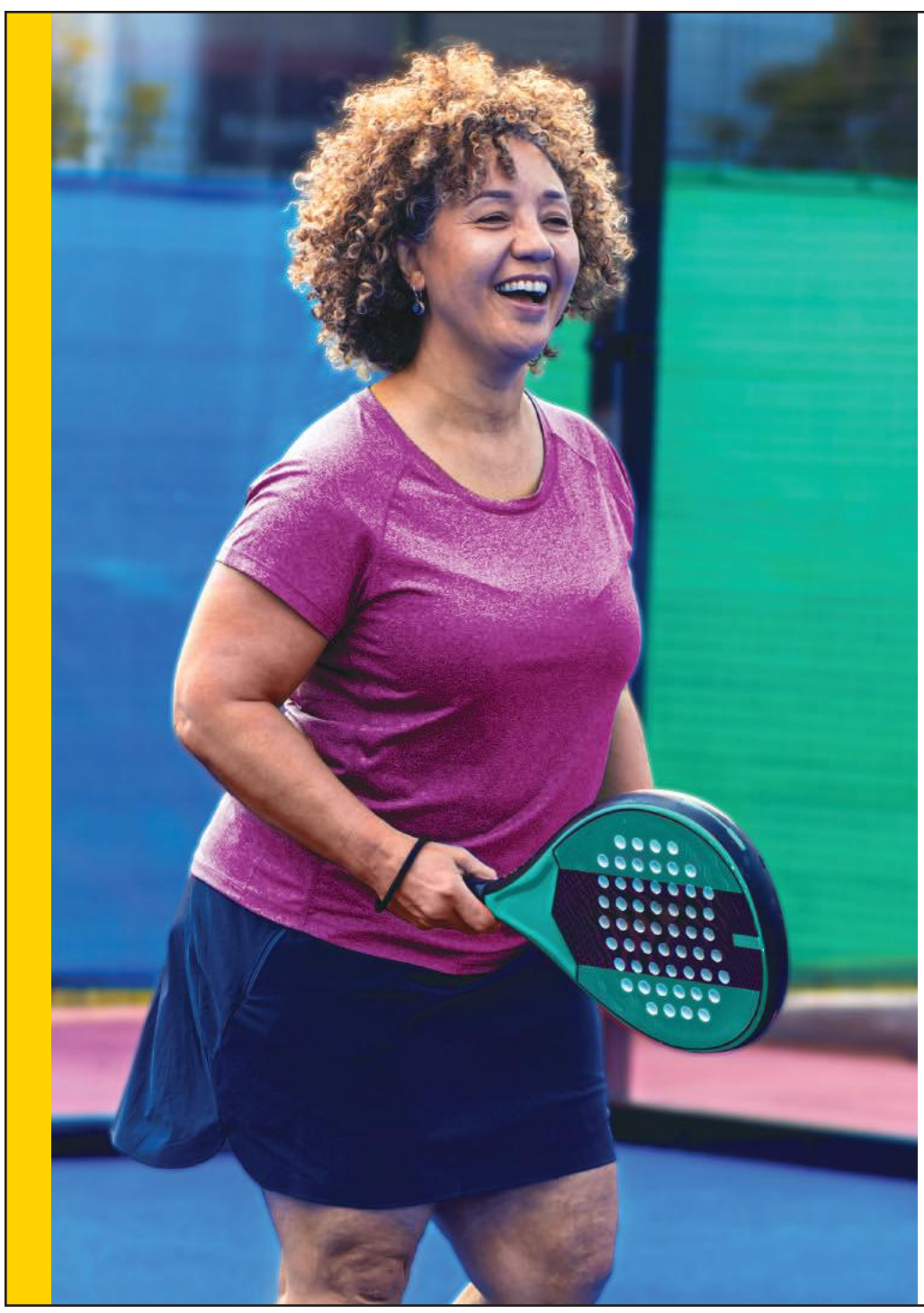
Preservation 1st Financial Group LLC, which offers financial planning and insurance services, has moved to its new location at 3433 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., #357, in Valrico. Let it take the burden of retirement and estate planning off your mind. Call 813-627-0872 for your free consultation, and visit its website at www.preservation1st.com.

Annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run Benefiting A Kitten Place

Animal lovers are invited to lace up their sneakers and make a lifesaving difference at the sixth annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run, presented by The Fuddy Fund and benefiting A Kitten Place, a local nonprofit rescue dedicated to saving homeless cats and kittens throughout the Tampa Bay area.

The untimed 5K fun run and 1-mile walk will take place on Saturday, October 24, in the Twin Lakes neighborhood at 3002 Beaver Pond Trail in Valrico, bringing together runners, walkers, families and animal lovers for a morning of fun while raising funds for cats in need.

This year's event has an exciting new focus: fundraising through teams and individual participants. Organizers hope to expand the event's impact by encouraging supporters to create fundraising teams, invite friends and family to donate, and compete for fun prizes along the way. Registration is now open. For registration, fundraising information, sponsorship opportunities or more information about A Kitten Place, visit https://akittenplace.org/events/.



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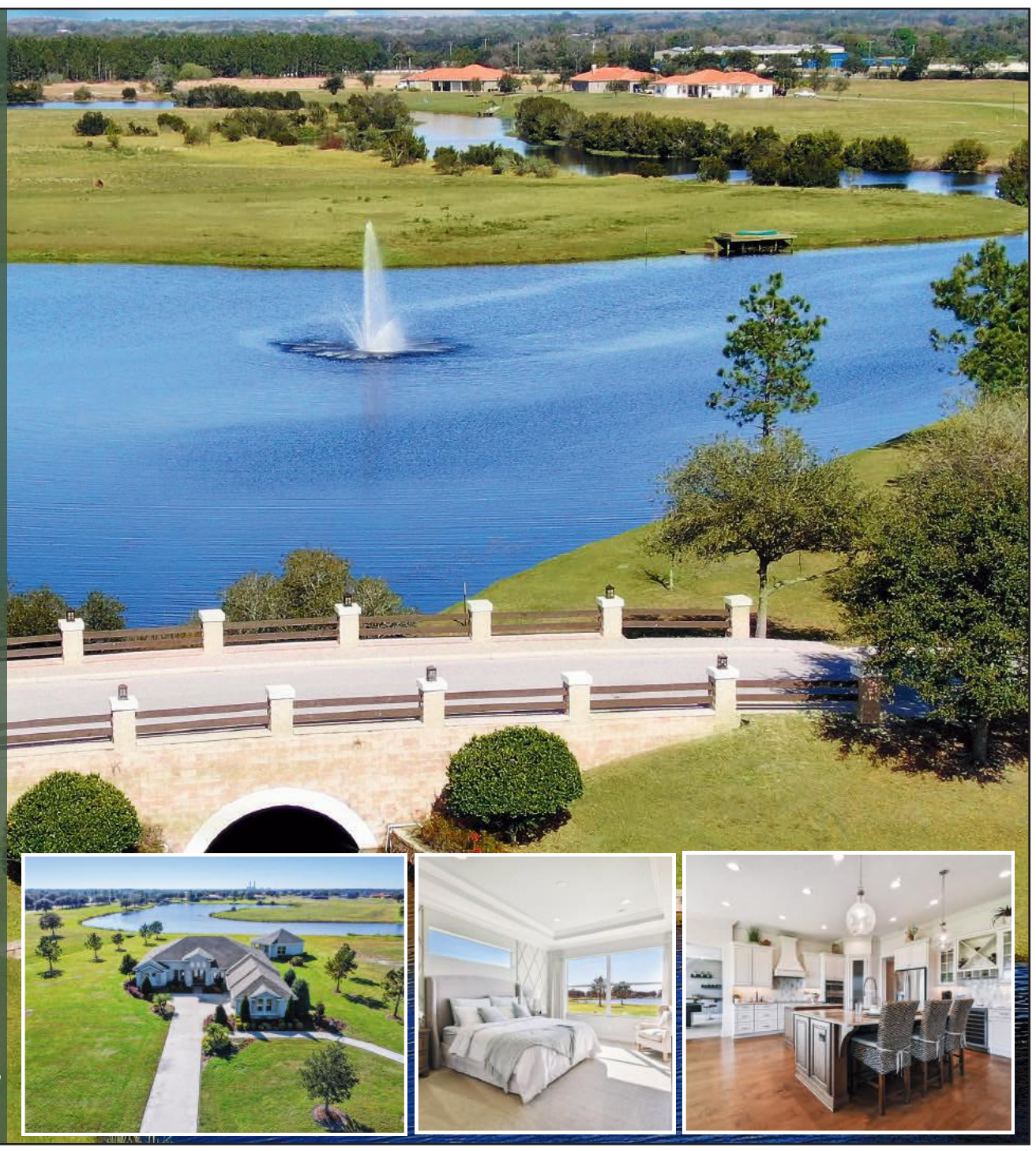
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2901 TURKEY CREEK RD
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