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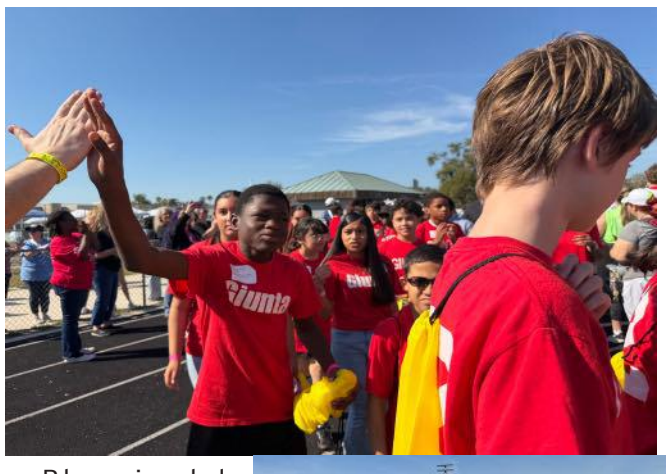
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INCREDIBULL GAMES CELEBRATE 10 YEARS OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS INCLUSION

By Olivia Clark





Bloomingdale Senior High School recently marked a major milestone as it hosted the 10th annual IncrediBULL Games, a Special Olympics-style event that continues to grow in both size and impact across Hillsborough County. This year, the event welcomed 595 student-athletes from 18 schools, supported by nearly 1,000 student volunteers.

"Bloomingdale High School and Newsome High School proudly celebrated the 10th annual IncrediBULL Games, a signature event dedicated to promoting inclusion, teamwork and the spirit of Special Olympics," said Marcos Rodriguez, principal of Bloomingdale High School. "As the IncrediBULL Games mark their 10th anniversary, Bloomingdale and Newsome high schools continue to honor the event's mission of inclusion while strengthening partnerships among schools, students and the broader community."

Athletes participated in a variety of activities, including soccer, track events and softball toss, while also enjoying the Olympic Village, a carnival-style space featuring interactive games and stations led by student clubs. The day emphasized not only competition but also connection.

"The event is the highlight of the year for our athletes, buddies and all of the student volunteers," said Debra Bellanti, director of media and public relations for Hillsborough County Public Schools. "It not only promotes inclusion but helps to build friendships that last over the years."

A defining element of the IncrediBULL Games is its buddy system, which pairs student volunteers one-on-one with athletes for the entire day. This ensures that every participant feels supported and celebrated throughout the experience.

"In addition to the competitive events, athletes spent time socializing and celebrating their special day, which is what makes this event so meaningful," Rodriguez said.

The event's origins date back a decade, when educators at Bloomingdale sought to bring a similar experience to the east side of the county after seeing the success of another local program. That vision has since evolved into one of the area's most anticipated annual events.

"This year's 10th anniversary was especially meaningful," Bellanti said. "Students from the very first games returned to lead the parade of athletes and help honor those who played a key role in starting this incredible tradition."

Community members interested in supporting future IncrediBULL Games can volunteer or contribute financially to help sustain and expand the event's reach.

STILL SERVING, JUST AROUND BACK: COMMUNITY SHOWS SUPPORT FOR FAMILY-RUN RONNIE RON'S BBQ

By Marie Gilmore

In communities like Lithia and the surrounding area, small businesses often become more than places to eat — they become neighbors, supporters and familiar faces at local events. These are exactly the roles Ronnie Thomas and his family-run business, Ronnie Ron's BBQ & Catering, have played for years.





Now, community members are being asked to return the support that Thomas, 29, has so generously given.

Recently, code enforcement required the popular barbecue to relocate to the rear of the property. While still operating at Kenny's Liquors at 5622 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Lithia, he's now just behind the building. Kenny's onner Bobby Patel said,, "We're proud to have Ronnie's on our property but code enforcement said he couldn't be in the easement so we made space in the back, we just ask customers of both businesses to park in the marked parking spaces."

The call for community support comes from families who have benefited directly from Thomas' generosity. Local schools, sports teams and Girl Scout families said Ronnie Ron's BBQ has long been there when help was needed — offering discounted barbecue dinners for events such as Me & My Guy dances, supporting fundraisers and providing meals for hardworking staff members in the community.

"Ronnie has always shown up for our community without hesitation," said Melissa Sharma, a Girl Scout troop leader. "Now it's our turn to show up for him."

Behind the scenes, Ronnie Ron's BBQ has always been a family effort. Over the years, Thomas' late mother often helped serve customers, while his wife worked on preparing the sides and their four children spent time at the truck greeting customers and lending a hand.

The family has also faced personal challenges along the way. Thomas' 14-year-old daughter recently completed treatment for brain cancer. Although in remission, she still has a long road of therapy ahead. Despite these challenges —Thomas says the mission remains the same, "I want to serve the best food while supporting the community that has supported us." Thomas is up at 4:30 every morning to prep his homemade sides and sauces .

The best way to help is simple: Stop by, grab a meal, spread the word about the new setup behind the building and continue showing the same kindness Ronnie Ron's BBQ has shared for years.

Ronnie Ron's BBQ is open Wednesday-Sunday from 11:30 a.m. until sold out. Find him online at www.facebook.com/ronnieronsbbq, email rontomsoup96@gmail.com or call 727-674-3567.

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BELL SHOALS ACADEMY INVESTS IN FUTURE WITH NEW HIGH SCHOOL

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTERNATIONAL LACROSSE RETURNS TO LITHIA: COYOTES YOUTH LACROSSE TO HOST CATERHAM SCHOOL FROM ENGLAND

Staff Report



The "Fastest Game on Two Feet" is going international once again in Central Florida. Coyotes Youth Lacrosse is proud to announce it will host the Caterham School girls' lacrosse team from Surrey, England, for a special cross-continental match-up.



This event marks the second time Caterham School has toured Central Florida to face the Coyotes, reinforcing a growing tradition of sportsmanship and cultural exchange between the two programs. The evening will feature U14 and U15 girls teams from Caterham competing against our Coyotes in a showcase of talent and international flair.

Event Details:

Date: Thursday, April 9, 2026

Time: Games begin at 6:00 PM

Location: Fishhawk Sports Complex, 16120 FishHawk Blvd, Lithia, FL 33547

Admission: Free for all spectators

"We are thrilled to welcome our friends from across the pond back to our home fields," said Mark Derby, President of Coyotes Youth Lacrosse. "This is more than just a game; it's an incredible opportunity for our athletes to experience a different style of play and build friendships that span thousands of miles."

About Caterham School Founded in 1811, Caterham School is one of the UK's leading co-educational day and boarding schools. Located in the picturesque Harestone Valley in Surrey, the school has a long-standing history of academic and athletic excellence. Lacrosse is a premier sport at Caterham, and the school consistently fields highly competitive teams. Their touring program offers student-athletes the chance to develop their skills on a global stage while experiencing American culture and coaching.

About Coyotes Youth Lacrosse Coyotes

Youth Lacrosse is a premier recreational and developmental program based in Lithia, Florida, dedicated to growing the sport in the East Tampa Bay area. Serving boys and girls from kindergarten through 8th grade, the Coyotes emphasize character building, teamwork, and athletic development. Operating out of the state-of-the-art Fishhawk Sports Complex, the program provides year-round opportunities for players of all skill levels to thrive in a supportive and competitive environment. The local community is encouraged to come out, wear their team colors, and cheer on these young athletes in what promises to be an unforgettable night of international competition.

For more information, visit www. www.coyotesyouthlacrosse.org.

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FIT-HER AND 5TH GEAR FITNESS UNITE UNDER ONE WELLNESS ROOF

By Olivia Clark





Fit-Her Health & Fitness owner Ann Gilbert (center) welcomes the 5th Gear Fitness team.

A new chapter in local fitness is unfolding as Fit-Her Health & Fitness and 5th Gear Fitness come together in a strategic collaboration designed to elevate the member experience.

This is a strategic collaboration and shared-space partnership, not a merger," said Ann Gilbert, owner and operator of Fit-Her Health & Fitness. "We are bringing two respected brands under one roof to elevate the fitness experience while maintaining the integrity of each identity."

The partnership is rooted in a long-standing relationship between the two businesses, built through years of collaboration across the Brandon and Valrico communities.

"This was built on a long-standing relationship rooted in trust, shared education and community collaboration," said Gilbert. "We've worked side by side for years hosting charity events, supporting initiatives like the American Cancer Society and even creating the world's largest outdoor step event. This next step felt natural."

For current members, the transition brings expanded access without sacrificing the supportive environment Fit-Her is known for.

"It means more access, more expertise and more opportunity, all while maintaining the supportive, welcoming environment they love," said Gilbert.

The collaboration combines two distinct but complementary approaches to fitness. Fit-Her focuses on women's health and creating an empowering environment for all life stages, while 5th Gear emphasizes performance-driven training and structured coaching.

"Together, we create a full-spectrum fitness experience, from beginner to advanced," said Gilbert.

The result is what Gilbert describes as a "one-stop wellness hub," offering a wide range of services including personal training, small group coaching, cycle classes, strength training, Pilates reformer and aquatic fitness programming.

"This level of variety, expertise and community under one roof is unmatched in the area," said Gilbert.

New offerings are already on the horizon, including Pilates reformer classes launching on Sunday, June 1, expanded cycle and strength formats, summer aquatic fitness programs and small group training led by certified coaches.

FIT-HER Health & Fitness for Women is located at 731 W Lumsden Road. Visit www.fit-her.com.

SENATOR MOODY PRAISES WOMEN VETERANS HONOR FLIGHT

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

- Co-sponsored the Military Spouse Hiring Act to address difficulties service members' families face when looking for work.
- Supported the Veterans Education and Technical Skills (VETS) Opportunity Act, which would expand educational benefits for veterans.
- Supported the Restore VA Accountability Act of 2025, which would help ensure that only the most dedicated individuals can serve veterans.
- Held a town hall with VA Secretary Doug Collins in Tampa to discuss issues facing veterans.
- Requested President Trump to send F-35As to Homestead Air Reserve Base.
- Recognized 200 years of U.S. Navy presence in Pensacola and discussed the critical importance of the Navy and Coast Guard's presence in the Florida Panhandle.

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

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2026 Mitsubishi Outlander Is Attractive Choice

By Nitish Rele



The most underrated and neglected compact SUV on the road? Hands down the Mitsubishi Outlander! And sadly, it's been the case for several years now. That could very well change soon with the 2026 version, which gets a 1.5-liter four-cylinder turbocharged engine to replace the previous 2.5 liter. Basically, it is a mild hybrid with 48-volt starter-generator battery for substantial fuel savings and quick acceleration. The seven-seater puts out an adequate 174 horsepower @ 5000 rpm and 206 pounds-feet of torque @ 3000 rpm. A continuous variable transmission results in a drivetrain that is quiet and responsive.

OUTLANDER (SEL)
Tires: 255/45R20
Wheelbase: 106.5 inches
Length: 185.8 inches
Height: 68.8 inches
Width: 84.4 inches
Weight: 3,942 pounds
Fuel capacity: 14.5 gallons
City/hwy/comb: 26/30/27 mpg
Base price: $40,845
Price as tested: $47,235
Web site: www.mitsubishicars.com

A MacPherson strut front and a multilink rear suspension navigate sharp corners and turns with confidence and poise. The electric power rack-and-pinion steering calibration is spot-on, with superb on-center feel and excellent feedback. Lest we forget, Mitsubishi's all-wheel drive system (Super All-Wheel Control) puts the mind to rest in any untoward road/driving conditions. And if you venture off the beaten path, be rest assured that ground clearance is high enough at 8.4 inches in the 2,000-tow capacity vehicle. A knob in the center console allows the driver to switch to eco, normal, tarmac, gravel, snow and mud modes.

The front fascia shows off a "dynamic shield" black grille with the recognizable Mitsubishi insignia, surrounded by horizontal LED headlights and fog lamps. Step into the clean and simply designed cabin and find yourself staring at dual 12.3-inch screens: one for infotainment and the other the digital driver display. Eight-way front heated/cooled leather seats are sumptuous to touch. Total passenger space of 120.8 cubic feet is plentiful though occupants of the third-row 50/50 seat, which folds rearward into a deep well in the floor, may find the room tight. Tri-zone auto a/c, thick-rimmed leather tilt/telescopic steering wheel, power liftgate/sun roof, heated second-row seat, rear door manual sunshades, wireless phone charger/Android Auto/Apple CarPlay are a few numerous amenities. Fancy semi-aniline leather seats or a 12-speaker Yamaha audio system? Then opt for the $3,050 premium package, which also comes with a 10.8-inch head-up display, digital rearview mirror and a black spoiler.

Dual front and knee airbags, side curtain airbag, multi-view camera, active stability and traction control, blind spot and lane departure warnings, lane keep and hill start assists, rear-cross traffic alert, adaptive cruise control, automatic emergency/four-wheel antilock brakes, anti-theft alarm, electronic parking brake, daytime running lights and tire pressure monitoring system are standard.

Though slightly lacking in power, the 1.5-liter, four-cylinder turbo Outlander is a tempting proposition. After all, it makes up for the deficit with considerable cargo and passenger space, decent fuel mileage and a price that isn't astronomical, so to speak.

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O Most beautiful flowers of Mount Carmel, fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my necessity. O Star of the Sea, help me and show me here you are my mother. O Holy Mary Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth, I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart, to succeed me in my necessity (make request). There are none that can withstand your power. O Mary conceived without sin pray for us who have recourse to thee (three times). Holy Mary I place this cause in your hands (three times).

Say this prayer for three consecutive days and then you must publish and it will be granted to you.

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WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT ANIMAL CRUELTY

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



State Attorney Suzy Lopez.

Animals are more than just pets. They are our companions. They can serve as trusted law enforcement partners and even save lives. It is hard to imagine anyone intentionally harming one of our furry friends, but unfortunately it happens right here in our community.

That is why April, recognized as National Animal Cruelty Prevention Month, is an important time to raise awareness. When people know the signs of abuse and understand how to report it, they can help protect vulnerable creatures who cannot speak for themselves.

And when those cases are reported, our office can take action. Earlier this year, our office secured a conviction against Daniel Kujawa, a former Manatee County deputy, for felony aggravated animal cruelty against his dog, Rex. He was sentenced to 270 days in the Hillsborough County Jail, followed by 36 months of probation. He is also required to register in our county's Animal Abuser Database.

While Rex endured unimaginable cruelty, his story has a hopeful ending. He has since found a safe and loving home after a rescue in Apollo Beach helped him to get adopted.

Pursuing these cases does more than protect our pets. It helps keep our entire community safer. Studies show that people who commit violent crimes against animals are up to five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people. That's why these cases must be taken seriously and why collaboration with other agencies is so important.

I am proud that our office has joined the Central Florida Animal Cruelty Task Force, a partnership of prosecutors, law enforcement officers, veterinarians and animal welfare experts. We will aim to increase collaboration with other agencies and strengthen animal cruelty cases throughout our region. By working together, we can hold offenders accountable while educating the public about responsible pet ownership. But we cannot do that work alone.

Many animal cruelty cases start with a tip from someone in the community. If you see or suspect abuse, please report it to law enforcement immediately. Warning signs can include extreme thinness, untreated injuries, lack of shelter or no access to food and water.

When you speak up, you are helping us to hold these offenders accountable. My office remains committed to aggressively prosecuting these crimes and working with our partners to ensure they are treated with the seriousness they deserve. Together, we can make sure every pet in our community is treated with the care and dignity it deserves.

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.

POWER HOUR HIRING EVENTS BRING 50+ EMPLOYERS TO JOB SEEKERS

Staff Report

Job seekers, take note. Workforce Development Partners (WDP), a Florida-based nonprofit focused on workforce development and local economic growth, is excited to host a series of Best Florida Jobs 'Power Hour' hiring events across Hillsborough County this April, designed to connect job seekers with local employers seeking to fill immediate openings in a fast, focused and high-energy format.

These unique events will be held six times between April 2-23, giving participants the chance to meet more than 50 employers each day, submit resumes and even schedule interviews. Participating organizations include AdventHealth, BayCare Health System, the Florida Army National Guard, HCA Florida Healthcare, Hillsborough College, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Hillsborough Technical Colleges, JPMorganChase, The Mosaic Company, Regions Bank, Tampa General Hospital, TECO and the U.S. Army.

"Our Power Hour events are all about opportunity," said Yvonne Fry, CEO at WDP. "Jobseekers, including bilingual and second-chance hiring candidates, can make meaningful connections with employers in a short, dynamic session: no waiting around, no long lines, just direct access to opportunities."

Each Power Hour is thoughtfully crafted and staffed to maximize networking and hiring potential. Employers from various industries will be present, from trades and construction to health care and tech, ensuring a wide range of opportunities for attendees. Translation support will be offered at each event.

Don't miss your chance to make connections that could launch your next career. Opportunity awaits! Visit https://workforcedevelopmentpartners.com/bfj/ for more information and to register to attend the events. The events are free and open to the public, though advance registration is encouraged.

Event dates and locations (all from 1-2 p.m.):

• Thursday, April 2, for East Tampa at TPepin's Hospitality Centre, located at 4121 N 50th St. in Tampa.

• Wednesday, April 8, for Central and South Tampa at the Tampa Convention Center, located at 333 S Franklin St. in Tampa.

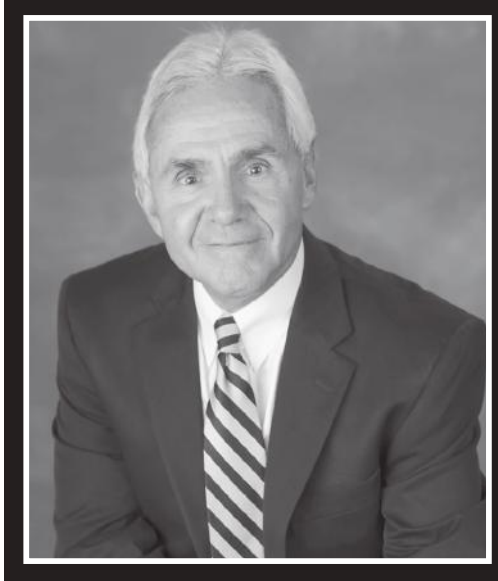
• Thursday, April 9, for NW and NE Hillsborough at the Tampa Convention Center.

• Wednesday, April 15, for South Hillsborough at Hillsborough College at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview.

• Thursday, April 16, for East Hillsborough at Hillsborough College at The Regent.

• Thursday, April 23, for Plant City at Hillsborough College's John R. Trinkle Center, located at 2206 E. Cherry St. in Plant City.

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

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

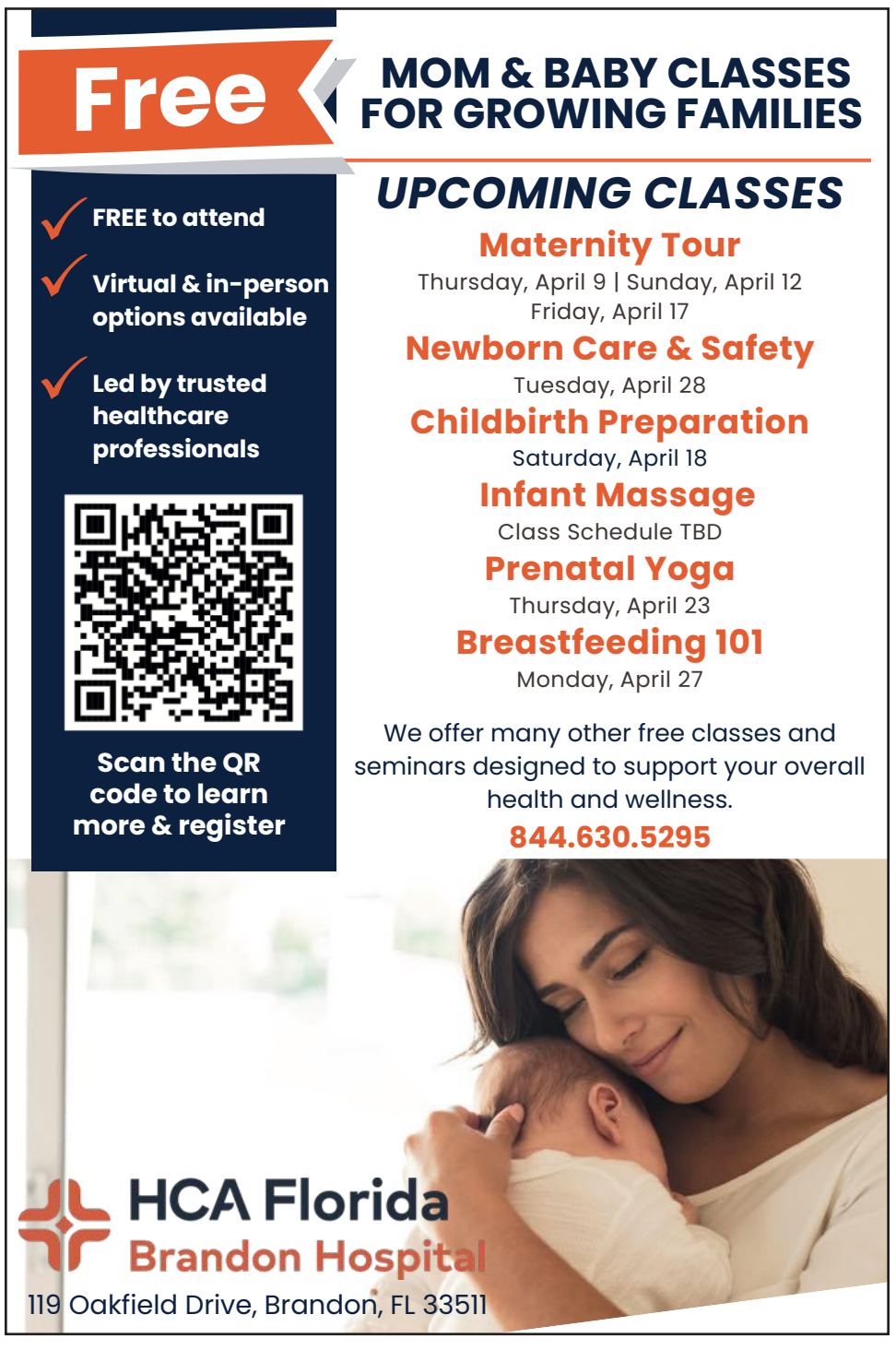
To learn more or register to volunteer, visit ECHO's website or contact event organizers directly.

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

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

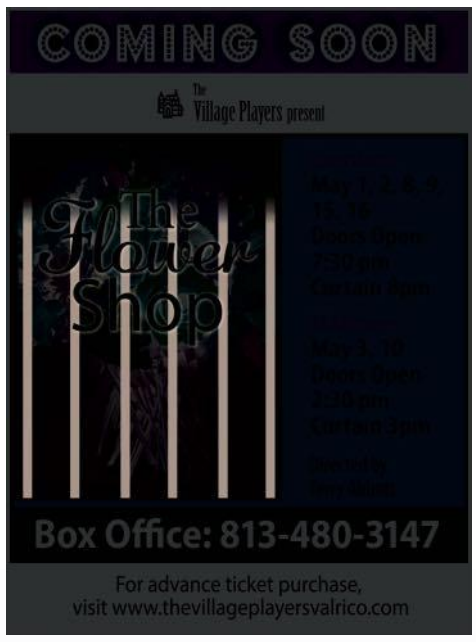






THE FLOWER SHOP, DIRECTED BY VILLAGE PLAYERS' OWN T. ABBOTT

Staff Report



The Village Players invite audiences to experience *The Flower Shop*, a heartfelt drama about second chances, reconciliation, and the fragile work of rebuilding family. The production is directed by acclaimed local performer and storyteller Terry Abbott, a familiar and much-loved presence throughout the Tampa Bay arts community. Abbott is also known to many as "The Captain" with the Lorelei of Florida and as a featured entertainer at the Bay Area Renaissance Festival.

A Florida native, Abbott is widely recognized for his creativity and his ability to connect with audiences through music, performance, and story. His warmth and emotional authenticity bring a distinctive vision to this powerful production.

The Flower Shop follows a man newly released from prison as he steps into the life of the daughter who never knew he existed. As past mistakes collide with the hope for a new beginning, both must navigate the distance between them and decide whether forgiveness is possible. The play explores fractured families, long-buried truths, and the quiet courage it takes to start again, reminding us that even the most damaged roots can grow into something unexpectedly beautiful.

While the production stands on its own, it also continues the story first introduced in the 2010 original show The Prophet, offering longtime audiences a meaningful return while welcoming new viewers into a moving, self-contained theatrical experience.

Cast: John: Jim Sigal, Tiffany: Sara Horrocks, Joyce: Teagan McCarthy, Susette: Heather Horning, Mike: Steve Pruess, Sophia: Lucy Rogers, Judge/Bartender: Chris Duncan

Performance Location: James McCabe Theater, located at 506 N. 5th Street, Valrico. Evening Performances at 8 p.m., May 1, 2, 8, 9, 15, 16 and Matinees at 3 p.m., May 3 & 10. Doors open at least 30 minutes before curtain.

Tickets are Senior, Student, and Military: $20 and General Admission: $23.

This intimate drama continues The Village Players' tradition of bringing powerful, community-driven storytelling to the stage in Valrico. For tickets and additional information, visit thevillageplayersvalrico.com.

About The Village Players

The Village Players is a nonprofit, all-volunteer teaching theater performing in the charming James McCabe Theater in Valrico (506 N. 5th St., Valrico, FL 33594). The organization proudly spotlights local talent, teaches every aspect of stagecraft to performers of all ages, and works to make theater affordable and accessible for the entire community.

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

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

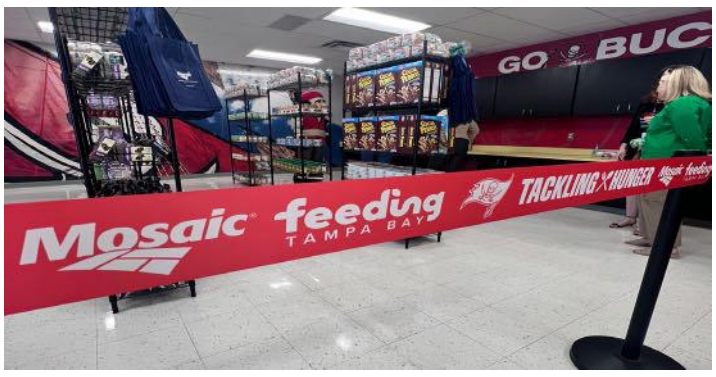
For full schedule and details, visit https://thetampariverwalk.com/.

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MOSAIC AND THE TAMPA BUCS OPEN FOOD PANTY TO TACKLE HUNGER

By Libby Hopkins



Mosaic and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers opened the fifth and final food pantry as part of their Tackling Hunger partnership, marking the completion of a five-year commitment to fight food insecurity in our communities.

Together with Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Feeding Tampa Bay, they worked to ensure families have reliable access to nutritious food, creating lasting impact that extends well beyond game day. This final pantry opening represents the power of partnership and their shared commitment to strengthening the communities we call home. "The food pantry is located

in Plant City, hosted at Robinson Elementary School serving both Robinson and Turkey Creek Middle School," said Chloe Conboy Renard, External Communications Manager of Mosaic. "The Tackling Hunger fueled by Mosaic partnership with the Buccaneers enables Feeding Tampa Bay, part of the Feeding America network, to build and manage school pantries in areas of need.

This new pantry will be available to support the nearly 1,500 students and their families who attend Robinson Elementary School and nearby Turkey Creek Middle School."

Plant City is a diverse community within Hillsborough County. An estimated 17 percent of children in Hillsborough County are considered food insecure and 68 percent income eligible for federal nutrition programs (incomes at or below 185 percent of poverty). A Title I school, Robinson houses 650 students with a student-to-teacher ratio of 14:1. Of its attendees, 78percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. "Food insecurity affects one in four children across Tampa Bay, showcasing the need for pantries like this to support families across our community," said Tampa Bay Buccaneers Chief Impact Officer Kourtney Sanchez. "This work is incredibly impactful, and we are so grateful for our partners at Mosaic who share our commitment to addressing our community's greatest challenges through initiatives like this."

Since the partnership launched in 2021, Mosaic and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers have provided more than 780,000 meals to neighbors in need.

"We are proud of the impact this fifth pantry opening adds to our Tackling Hunger partnership with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and to deepen our support for families in Plant City," said Bruce Bodine, President and CEO of The Mosaic Company. "Together with our partners, we're building stronger, more resilient communities across Central Florida."

Mosaic opened it's pantry location at Pinecrest Elementary School in Lithia last year and additional locations are Bowling Green, Broward and Lamb Elementary Schools.

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POPULAR LADIES GIVING BACK EVENT RETURNS TO SUPPORT LOCAL LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

By Libby Hopkins



THE Confidence & Leadership FOUNDATION

The Confidence and Leadership Foundation helps local girls and boys develop positive self-esteem for a lifetime. The foundation offers workshops for young girls and boys grades K-12 that focus on the development of strong self-esteem.

The foundation recently received a donation of $3,450 from 100 Women Who Care Riverview/FishHawk. "We were super excited that they selected our foundation," said Susan Giffin of The Confidence and Leadership Foundation. "Our community is just so supportive and generous to us."

100 Women Who Care is a global network of giving circles where members collectively donate to local charities, creating a significant impact in their communities. The concept is simple yet powerful. One hundred members each donate $100 per meeting, raising $10,000 for a selected local nonprofit.

Members nominate organizations, and three are randomly chosen to present their cause. Each nonprofit has five minutes to explain how the funds will be used and answer questions. After presentations, members vote, and all present members contribute to the winning organization.

"The donation will be used to fund the various programs we offer through our foundation," Giffin said. "We hold after school workshop series throughout the week at our center, along with Girls and Boys Night Out events on Fridays a couple times a month along with one-day camps on the days kids have off school and week-long summer camps too."

The foundation will also be hosting its Ladies Giving Back event on Thursday, April 23 from 7.-10 p.m. "I like to call this event our raffle basket bonanza," Giffin said. "It's a favorite event with the local ladies and the event sells out every year. We have 65 tickets available and it's a fun night of free food, beautiful desserts, and then we have more than 100 raffle baskets donated from our local community, in addition to 15-20 silent auction times. New this year, we are offering an on-line auction as well for those ladies who may not be ablet to attend or get tickets because of them selling out."

To learn more or to attend their Ladies Give Back event, you can visit their website at www.girlswithconfidence.com or call 813-571-2002. The foundation is located at 10540 Browning Rd. in Lithia.



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

Staff Report

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

About Quest Inc.

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



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MORE THAN A JOB FAIR: ECHO CONNECTS NEIGHBORS TO STABILITY

By Libby Hopkins



ECHO's mission is to assist residents of unincorporated Hillsborough County who are in crisis by providing emergency food and clothing, along with life-stabilizing programs and resources.

ECHO's Opportunity Center works with individuals every day who are ready to work but need support connecting to the right opportunities. The center hosted a job fair this past March at New Hope Church in Brandon. "This job fair was created to address a very real need in Southeast Hillsborough County, helping neighbors move from instability (unemployment or underemployment) into sustainable employment," said ECHO's Director of Opportunity, Dianne Horncastle. "ECHO is partnering with New Hope Church and Better Together Jobs, an organization that hosts highly effective job fairs across Florida and is known for creating an encouraging, supportive experience for job seekers.

Together, this collaboration allows us to create a job fair that is not just about hiring, but about restoring confidence, building connections, and opening doors."

At a previous ECHO hiring event, even with just one employer present, 55 neighbors attended, and more than 30 left with contingent job offers. "It's a powerful reminder of what's possible when opportunity and preparation come together," Horncastle said. "This upcoming job fair expands that impact significantly, bringing together dozens of employers and hundreds of job seekers in one place."

Attendees got more than a traditional job fair; it was designed to be a supportive and empowering experience from start to finish. "We had approximately 40 employers on-site who are actively hiring, along with 20 resource partners offering additional support services," Horncastle said. "Throughout the event, volunteers greeted attendees, walked alongside them, and helped make introductions to employers."

"While employer and resource partner spots for this event were full, there were still meaningful ways for the community to be involved," Horncastle said. "We had 75–80 volunteers who helped to create a welcoming and encouraging environment. Volunteers served as guides and cheerleaders, greeting attendees, walking alongside them, helping make introductions, and offering encouragement throughout the day."

Horncastle and the team at ECHO hoped that every person who attended would leave with more than they came with at the job fair. "That may be a job offer, a new connection, a stronger resume, or renewed confidence in their ability to move forward," Horncastle said. "We wanted neighbors to feel seen, supported, and capable, and for employers to connect with individuals who were ready and motivated to work."

If you would like to learn more about ECHO or their future job fairs, you can visit their website at https://echofl.org.

FREEZE HITS HARD, BUT BLUEBERRIES STILL HEADED TO MARKET

Staff Report



After a winter that hit harder than anyone expected, freezing blossoms and fruit and bruising hopes, Florida blueberry growers are working to recover from this chilly season.

They're coaxing every bit of sweetness they can from the surviving fruit, ready to deliver berries that are as vibrant and nutritious as ever, University of Florida (UF) experts said.

Farmers are always trying to produce the best berries for the market. Florida's harvesting season runs from March through May.

"Growers have already begun their recovery efforts, including debris cleanup from broken plants, resetting dislodged plants, spraying fungicides, repairing irrigation systems and more," said Doug Phillips, statewide blueberry Extension coordinator for the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). "These efforts are intended to promote plant health and recovery, with an eye toward having a full crop for the 2027 season."

"There will be Florida blueberries in the market this spring, although the volume will be less than in a typical season," Phillips said. "Harvest is starting in the south region, that was less damaged by the freeze, as well as in the north in protected tunnels."

For other growers, blueberry season will be in early to mid-April.

The extent of blueberry damage remains to be seen, as UF/IFAS economists put together an official assessment of statewide crop damage from the 2025-26 freezes statewide.

Over the 80-plus-year history of the UF/IFAS blueberry breeding program, researchers have developed about 70 varieties. The latest should please the palate. They include 'Sharper,' 'Falcon' and 'Sentinel.'

Growers are planting those berries throughout much of Florida, Phillips said.

"These varieties provide high yields and flavorful fruit. 'Sharper' and 'Falcon' in particular are large, very firm, tasty fruit, which should help growers be profitable and consumers to have a great eating experience and repeat as blueberry buyers during our market window," he said.

Josh Payne, a registered dietitian with UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County, categorizes blueberries as a 'superfruit,' so consumers eagerly await this fruit at the market.

"Blueberries are one of those foods that check every box," Payne said. "They're sweet, versatile and easy to add to yogurt, oatmeal or just grab by the handful. If you already love blueberries, it makes sense to ask for Fresh From Florida blueberries at the supermarket. You'll likely get better flavor and freshness, and you're supporting Florida farmers at the same time."

If you are a blueberry grower, UF/IFAS wants to hear from you about the extent of the damage you experienced from this winter's freezes. Visit https://ufl.qualtrics.com.

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KEEL FARMS BLUEBERRY FESTIVAL RETURNS EVERY WEEKEND IN APRIL

Staff Report



Keel Farms is excited to announce that the 18th annual Tampa Bay Blueberry Festival will kick off on Saturday, April 4. The Blueberry Festival will be open from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. every Saturday and Sunday in April (except for Easter Sunday, April 5). It has become one of the most attended festivals for both Tampa Bay area residents and tourists.



The Blueberry Festival spans the acreage of the Keel Farms property at 5202 W. Thonotosassa Rd. in Plant City, offering fun for the whole family amid the beautiful backdrop of the Keel + Curley Winery and Keel Farms Agrarian Ales and Ciders.

This family and pet friendly celebration of the blueberry harvest features local food trucks, craft vendors, a kids' zone, bounce houses, camel rides, a petting zoo, blueberry shortcake eating competitions, U-pick blueberries, games and special blueberry releases by Keel + Curley Winery and Keel Farms Agrarian Ciders.

"Our Blueberry Festival is our most popular event," said Clay Keel, president of Keel Farms. "Many families have made this a springtime tradition, and we love welcoming them back every year. For newcomers, get ready to be blown away. There's no other festival in Tampa Bay where you can take a camel ride, drink a blueberry cider, shop local vendors, have a great meal and leave with buckets of blueberries."

The blueberry U-pick will be offered on each day of the festival while supplies last and weather permits. Harvested prepackaged blueberries will also be available for purchase by the pound.

Admission is free and on-site parking is $10.

Water will be available along with food and drinks. No outside food or beverage is permitted. Buckets are provided for the U-pick, and no outside containers are permitted. For more information about everything Keel Farms has to offer, visit www.keelfarms.com. For more festival information, visit www.keelfarms.com/festivals.

About Keel Farms

Keel Farms is home to Keel + Curley Winery and Keel Farms Agrarian Ales and Cider. Its mission is to grow people, community and agriculture by always providing memorable experiences through quality farm products and sustainable practices.

BLOOMINGDALE THEATRE SHINES UNDER NEW CHOREOGRAPHY DIRECTOR

By Jane Owen



Teddi Rollins became the Choreography Director for Bloomingdale High School in November. An upcoming May graduate of University of Tampa, she found out about the position from her UT professor. After meeting with Bloomingdale's Theatre Director Dr. Chad Cornwell about his vision for the program, she took on the role focusing on their April production of "Once Upon a Mattress."

Cornwell says having Teddi part of the program has brought it to the next level.

"Students from UT add a level of professionalism to our program, building a strong foundation of dance and movement, and basic skills and vocabulary that take BSHS student to the next level," Cornwell said.

Rollins brings a refined skill set and passion to the program. She danced competitively for years and teaches the competitive theater classes at the Arts Conservatory for Teens, a not-for-profit organization that provides arts education to students in at-risk communities.

For the "Once Upon a Mattress" show April 10 and 11, Rollins' role is everything show-related—from choreographer director, conducting, makeup, costumes, dancing, singing and acting.

"She demands a lot, but nothing that is out of reach for our students. And the students are responding. They understand and use vocabulary correctly when they talk and physically, they accept challenges optimistically. And I think they are really excited to show what they have been learning." Cornwell said.

Rollins says she has enjoyed getting to know her students and challenge them. She has been teaching them the Solfège breakdown, which is new to many of the students that have not been in choir. Rollins says she likes to see the students blossom.

"We have this one number called Spanish Panic. It's a R&B hip hop number. They were like, 'You're kidding. We are not doing this on stage.' I told them, 'We absolutely are.' And now it's all of their favorite number. You can see the light in their eyes when they do it. It's so fun to watch," Rollins said.

Rollins will graduate in May from the University of Tampa with a degree in musical theater with a minor in professional education and a concentration in in African studies.

For more information about Bloomingdale Theater, visit: https://www.bloomingdaletheatre.org/ For more information about the University of Tampa's Department of Music, visit Department of Music https://www.ut.edu/academics/college-of-arts-and-letters/department-of-music



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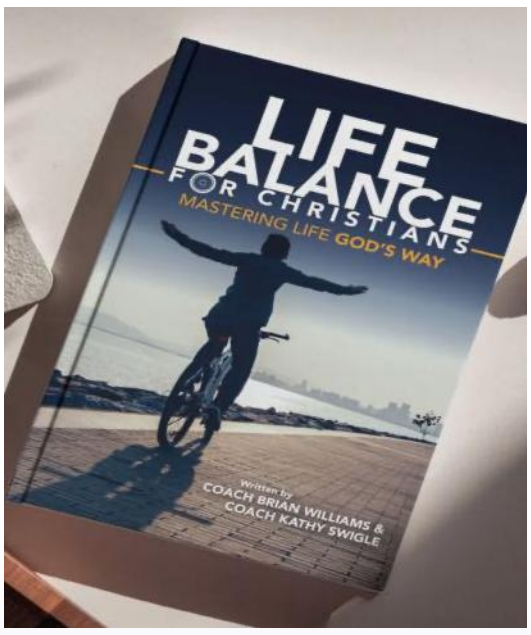
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LOCAL AUTHOR SHARES JOURNEY OF FAITH IN NEW BOOK ON SURRENDER

Staff Report



A Lithia author is inviting readers to rethink what it means to live a balanced life through faith with the release of his new book, Life Balance for Christians: Mastering Life God's Way.

Brian Williams, a longtime member of FishHawk Fellowship Church, said the book challenges a common assumption among believers — that better balance comes from trying harder. Instead, he argues, true peace is found in surrendering every aspect of life to God.

"Many people are striving to manage everything on their own, and it actually leads to more stress and burnout," Williams said. "The message of this book is that lasting peace comes from trusting God fully and daily."

The book is rooted in Williams' personal journey, which began more than 25 years ago during a pivotal moment on a Clearwater Beach. Despite outward success in his career and personal life, he recalls feeling deeply unfulfilled. That experience led him to surrender his life to Jesus Christ, setting him on a path that would shape both his faith and work.

Williams, a master certified coach, ordained pastor and author of multiple Christian living books, has spent decades helping others navigate personal and spiritual growth. His latest work builds on that foundation, introducing what he calls the 'Whole Life Balance System,' designed to guide individuals toward a more faith-centered approach to daily living.

A significant portion of the book was written during a particularly challenging season for his family. Last year, Williams' 9-year-old daughter, Ellie, faced serious health issues that required multiple hospital stays totaling 28 days.

"During that time, I had to live out exactly what I was writing," he said. "It became real in a way I never expected."

Out of that experience came the concept 'STAY SLOW,' an acronym that encourages believers to yield their spirit, thoughts and actions to God while learning to surrender, listen and obey as they walk by faith.

Williams co-authored the book with Kathy Swigle, a certified coach and ministry leader based in Colorado, who shares a similar message about moving from self-reliance to spiritual trust. Together, they aim to help readers discover greater peace, clarity and purpose.

Williams and his family, longtime readers of the Osprey Observer, hope the book will resonate with others in the community seeking a deeper, more meaningful faith journey.

For more information, visit https://lifebalanceforchristians.com/.

WOLFPACK MARCHING BAND RAISES FUNDS FOR DUBLIN PARADE INVITE

Staff Report





The Joe E. Newsome Wolfpack Marching Band has been selected to march in the Dublin, Ireland, Saint Patrick's Day Parade in 2027!

John Owen Davis II, director of bands, said, "It's a tremendous honor to be accepted to perform and be selected from among some of the finest bands in the country, and we are so excited to perform and experience this incredible opportunity."

Only 10 bands are selected for the Saint Patrick's Day parade in 2026, of which two were at the U.S. collegiate level, the University of Illinois Marching Illini and the Ohio State University Marching Band, and six U.S. high school level bands.

The Newsome Marching Band participates locally in the Brandon 4th of July Parade and Brandon Parade of Lights. They received the Best Band award in the 2026 Brandon Parade of Lights. The Ireland trip in 2027 will be their first international trip.

Davis led the band on a stateside warm-up travel trip in January to march the Collegiate Football Playoff Sugar Bowl Parade in New Orleans, Louisiana. In this trip, they performed a static performance in the historic Jackson Square followed by the parade, where they won Best Music and Best Marching in their class and second place overall. This relatively short trip provided the band the confidence to move forward with an overseas adventure.

There is an unprecedented logistical expense in sending only half the band to represent the United States in Ireland, and the band hopes to bring more. The Newsome Band Boosters will be hosting Saint Patrick's Day-themed fundraisers to help offset the cost. The first event is a Shamrock Skeet Shoot at the FishHawk Sporting Clays, located at 13505 Hobson Simmons Rd. in Lithia, on Sunday, April 19, starting at 1 p.m. Participation is open to the community where teams of 4 will compete for prizes. To register for the event, go to www.newsomeband.org/ireland or reach out to fundraising@newsomeband.org, as electronic registration will open closer to the event.



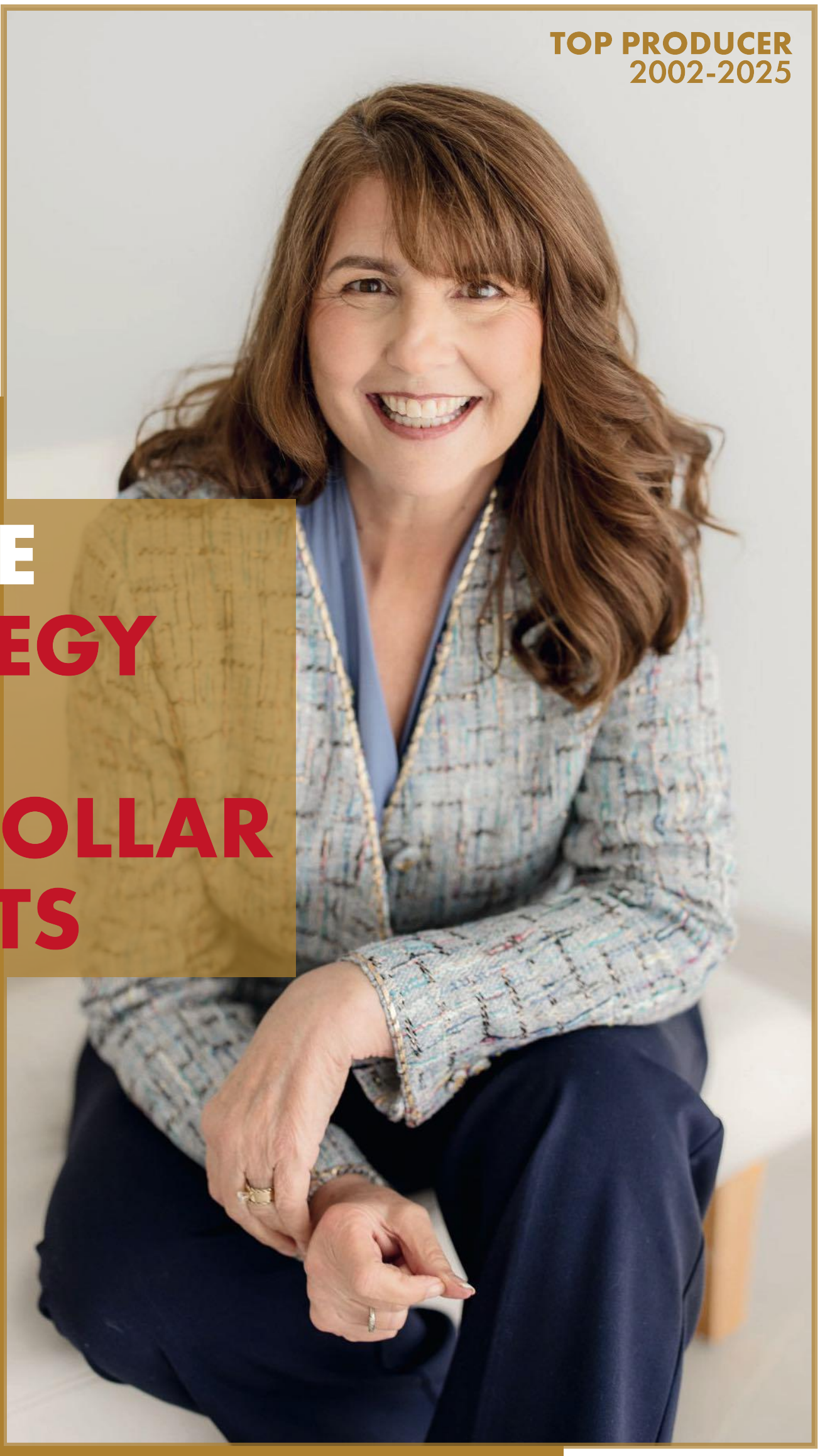
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STOWERS STUDENT WINS 'BEST IN FAIR' AT HILLSBOROUGH STEM FAIR

By Libby Hopkins





Olivia Proulx, a fourth grade student at Stowers Elementary, earned the 'Best in Fair' award for the fourth grade division at the Hillsborough County STEM Fair, rising to the top among more than 1,200 student projects from across the district.

The STEM fair was held this past February at the Tampa Convention Center. The Hillsborough County STEM Fair brings together young innovators from across the district to present projects in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Winning Best in Fair recognizes the top project in the fourth grade division.

"Olivia is 9 years old and a fourth grader at Stowers Elementary School in Lithia," said her mother, Stephanie Proulx. "She's creative, curious and loves animals, especially her dog, Banksy, who inspired her STEM project, The Ruff Roller, which is an invention designed to help keep pets off household furniture using a combination of sound and texture. The retractable mat discourages pets from jumping onto couches and chairs while remaining safe and humane."

Olivia first entered the STEM fair last year as a third grader. She enjoyed presenting her project at the convention center and learning how to test her ideas through research and experimentation.

"This year, she wanted to take it a step further by inventing something that could solve a real problem for pet owners," Stephanie Proulx said. "Her science teacher, Dina McCullough, was a great source of encouragement and support along the way."

Olivia used her creativity to make The Ruff Roller.

"It's a roll-up furniture protector that's lightweight and easy to store," Olivia said. "I used mylar to create a sound and texture that dogs don't really like. I invented it because our dog loves jumping on the couch, and I wanted a way to train him that was safe and gentle."

Winning Best in Fair was something Olivia did not expect.

"I was really surprised and excited when I found out I won Best in Fair," Olivia said. "When people came to my classroom with a giant trophy, balloons and prizes, it felt like I was famous for the day. The STEM fair is an amazing experience and a fun way to learn about solving real problems. I'm excited to start thinking about my project for next year."

HILLSBOROUGH SENIORS MEET EMPLOYERS AT FCA HIRING EVENTS

By Emily Harper



After a year spent exploring career pathways and preparing through professional development lessons, including elevator pitches, resume building, and mock interviews, thousands of Hillsborough County Public Schools seniors will take the final step in their Future Career Academy (FCA) journey this April, meeting face-to-face with employers ready to hire.

Six large-scale hiring events taking place April 2 - 23 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. across Hillsborough County will serve as the capstone experience for students enrolled in the Future Career Academy curriculum, a program designed by Florida-based nonprofit Workforce Development Partners (WDP) to help high school seniors transition directly from the classroom into the workforce, job training programs, and continued education.

Throughout the school year, FCA students complete career readiness lessons that include resume development, mock interviews, professional communication, and workplace expectations. The April hiring events are designed to put those skills into action with real employers.

"These events represent the culmination of everything our students have worked toward this year," said Van Ayres, superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools. "Future Career Academy prepares students with real-world skills, and these hiring events give them the opportunity to apply those skills in front of employers who are looking for the next generation of talent. This is a recipe for post-graduation success."

Each event will feature more than 50 local employers and training organizations from 16 industries, including healthcare, construction, retail, manufacturing, and technology, offering on-the-spot interviews, internships, and entry-level positions. Recruiters from the Armed Forces will also be on-site. Participating organizations include AdventHealth, BayCare Health System, Florida Army National Guard, HCA Florida Healthcare, Hillsborough College, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Hillsborough Technical Colleges, JPMorgan Chase, The Mosaic Company, Regions Bank, Tampa General Hospital, TECO, and The U.S. Army.

"College isn't the only option after graduating," said a Chamberlain High School alumnus. "There are entry-level positions and apprenticeships that not only prepare us for a desired career but also pay reasonably."

While the events serve as a final step in the Future Career Academy experience for seniors, organizers emphasize they are also designed to benefit the wider community.



HOW MCAULEY FINE JEWELRY TURNS MEMORIES INTO MASTERPIECES

By Kelly Wise Valdes



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

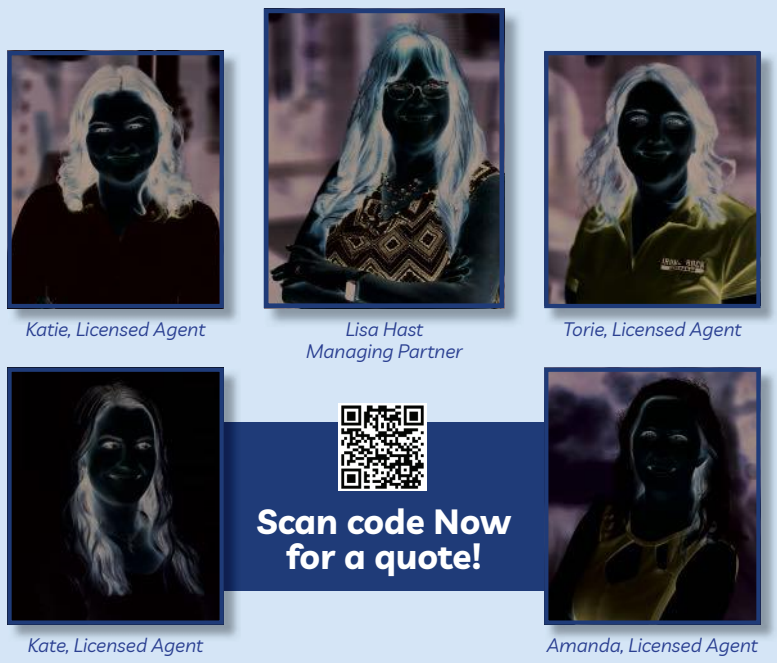
"We recommend an appointment [for custom designs]," said Jenn McAuley. "We typically will have two consults. If you don't know what you want, Ed listens for styling cues. Also, we'll talk about using any old scrap gold jewelry you may have."

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

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

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52ND SUN 'N FUN AEROSPACE EXPO PROMISES HIGH-FLYING FUN AND FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

Staff Report



Aviation enthusiasts and families alike are gearing up for the 52nd SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo, set for April 14–19, 2026, at Lakeland Linder International Airport. Recognized as one of the world's largest aviation events, the week-long expo promises high-flying excitement with daily and nightly airshows, educational forums, on-site camping, and live entertainment.

This year's event features a special extended Night Airshow on Wednesday, April 15, and a milestone 50th-anniversary celebration of the Red, White & Blue aerobatic team. Attendees can also take part in camping options, including early arrival sites starting April 11. Registration for camping opens April 7, 2026.

Adding a special touch to the opening night festivities, eight honorable World War II veterans will be honored during the Opening Night Concert on Tuesday, April 14, at the Warbird Ramp. The evening kicks off at 5 PM with performances by Angie K, Thomas Mac, and headliner Cooper Alan. This patriotic tribute is included with daily admission, ensuring every visitor can join the salute to America's heroes.

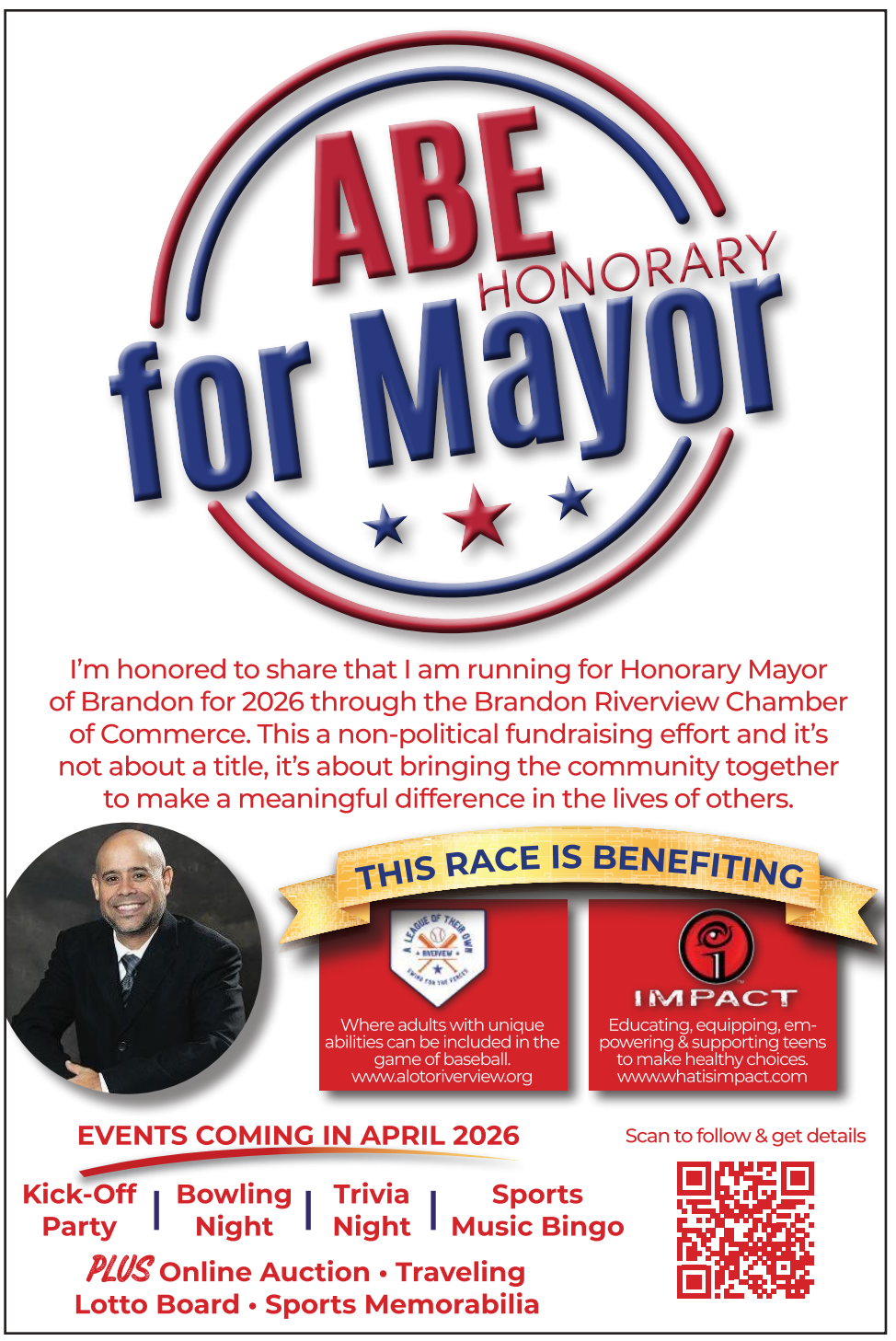
The expo continues the Franklin family's legacy of showmanship, led today by Kyle Franklin, a third-generation pilot and professional wingwalker. Franklin's career spans more than 25 years and includes jaw-dropping acts like comedy flying, motorcycle-to-airplane transfers, and thematic performances such as Pirated Skies and Dracula. Together with his wife, Liz, Kyle continues to push the boundaries of airshow entertainment while honoring his family's decades-long tradition.

EarlyBird tickets are $45 for daily general admission and $170 for weekly, rising to $50 and $180 respectively at the gate. Youth tickets (13–17) are $20 daily/$70 weekly, while children 12 and under are free. Parking is $20 onsite and available online in advance for $10. For more information on schedules, performers, and ticketing, visit the official SUN 'n FUN website at www.flysnf.org.

With thrilling performances, educational experiences, and unforgettable night shows, SUN 'n FUN 2026 promises to be an aviation event not to be missed.



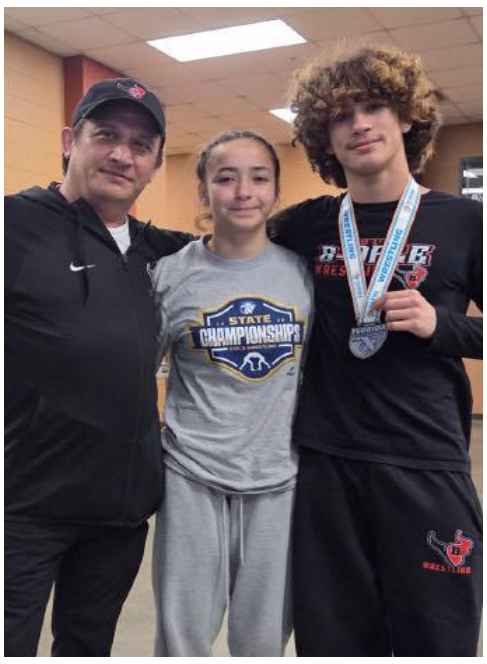




FERRET IS FIRST BLOOMINGDALE FEMALE WRESTLING STATE QUALIFIER

By Jane Owen

Bloomingdale High School Senior Hannah Ferret wrestled at the 2026 FHSAA (Florida High School Athletic Association) Girls State Championships in Kissimmee, Florida. Ferret is the first girl from Bloomingdale to wrestle at the state level.



Hannah with Coach Church and teammate Leo Perdomo at the state meet.

According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, high school girls wrestling is growing at record speed. This year's Florida girls state championship meet was the fifth annual. Ferret wrestled in the 100-weight class. Her 2025-26 record is 45-9, and her high school record is 81-40.

Ferret's journey to the state competition was hard work and started with a desire to try a new sport. In 8th grade, Ferret selected wrestling as a high school elective for her freshman year. She qualified for Regionals all four years. At States, she was one match away from being a state placer.

Bloomingdale Wrestling Head Coach Mark Church is proud of Ferret's resilience.

"I am super proud of Hannah. She was the only girl to show up my first year as head coach. This little freshman had never wrestled a day in her life, but was up for the challenge no matter how hard it was. Not one time did she back down from any challenge I put in front of her," Church said.

At the state meet, Ferret was impressed by the competition and support.

"It was crazy to see how good everyone was and all of the people that came out to support. I loved being there and being with my teammates." Ferret said.

Ferret says her inspiration comes from her teammates. Her resolve at states was strengthened by the other senior on the team competing, Leo Perdomo. Perdomo placed 7th in the 132 weight class.

Church says Ferret is inspiring her teammates.

"She has become the standard for girls wrestling at Bloomingdale. Four years ago, Hannah was the only girl on the team. Every year since then, the team continues to grow." Church said.

This year, there are six girls Bloomingdale's team. Four out of the six made the regional tournament.

After high school, Ferret plans to attend Hillsborough College, pursue a career in Optometry and continue to support her teammates as she can at practice and meets.

To learn more about wrestling at Bloomingdale High School, email Coach Church at: mark.church@hcps.net.

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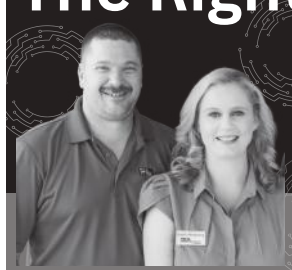
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COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING ENHANCED BY AI

Staff Report



By the time some patients report symptoms of colorectal cancer to a care provider, tumors have had a chance to grow or metastasize out of colon. At later stages, cancer is much more difficult to treat. Fortunately, more people are aware of the lifesaving value of routine colon cancer screenings, including colonoscopies. Now, when specialists enlist smart technologies like GI Genius, colon cancer screening can be more powerful and effective than ever. Used to assist in polyp detection through enhanced visualization during a colonoscopy, GI Genius was the first artificial intelligence system of its kind available in the U.S. It offers immediate analysis of video-imaging data, flagging potential problem areas so physicians can take a closer look to identify and remove precancerous polyps.

"It's an intelligent endoscopy module," says Adnan Muhammad, MD, FACG, a board-certified gastroenterologist and physician lead for AdventHealth West Florida Division Gastroenterology. "AI-assisted colorectal screenings using the GI Genius give us accurate, real-time analysis of lesions, including precancerous polyps and other abnormalities. It enhances our viewing and diagnostic capabilities."

Guided by the physician, the GI Genius module adds the power of AI to routine colonoscopy. By instantly flagging trouble spots for the gastroenterologist to assess, the GI Genius module offers an extra level of accuracy. The GI Genius module has been shown to increase adenoma (precancerous lesions) detection rate by up to 14.4%.

"The GI Genius works in concert with our routine screening equipment," says Dr. Muhammad. "It examines the video feed from the endoscope as we work, offering accurate identification of lesions. It is highly effective."

Recent research shows that the GI Genius positively identified 99.7% of lesions. It is a smart guide and a step forward in protecting patients' health and wellness with early, lifesaving colon cancer screening.

The GI Genius is now offered at AdventHealth Riverview. To learn more, visit online at www.YourColorectalExperts.com.

CHAMPIONSHIP BANNER RISES AS TAMPA BAY SUN FC CELEBRATES TITLE

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Emily Harper



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



A McDonald's being built that still stands on U.S. Hwy60 today.



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

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

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

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

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

Martin reminisced on a funny story, telling how rural the area once was: "My job as an elementary-age kid was to stand in the middle of Bloomingdale Avenue and hold my hands up, to stop any traffic that might come. Which I stood there, hoping that a car would come so I would get to stop them. But typically, there was none. It was nothing but a loose gravel road at that time."



The Quick family homestead around the year 1925.

In the late 1960s and early '70s, her family had an unoccupied barn on the property. This barn was then utilized and became the first station for the Bloomingdale Volunteer Fire Department.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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BLOOMINGDALE STUDENTS HOST MONSTER EXCHANGE WITH CIMINO

By Jane Owen

Students from Cimino Elementary visited Bloomingdale High School in March and were greeted with a surprise of monstrous proportion.



Cimino Second Grade Teacher Ms. Gonsalves, Cimino second grader Sophia Ortiz, and Bloomingdale 2D2 Art Student Nina Aristondo

Months before, Bloomingdale's Chief Art Teacher Pamela Reeves collaborated with Cimino Second Grade Teacher Mary Anne Gonsalves on a creative project all about making monsters. The second-grade class drew friendly monsters and wrote descriptive words about them. The monster pictures and descriptions were given to Bloomingdale's Art Department. Art students recreated the monsters in 2D drawings and wrote a small story using the second graders' descriptions. Bloomingdale's ceramics class created figurines of the monsters. During the Monster Exchange, the second graders were surprised by a framed picture of their monster, the figurines and high school students reading a story based on their monster.

Reeves said the project was a big undertaking, but the greatest reward was seeing the reactions from both the elementary students and high school students. At the Monster exchange, Reeves thanked and commended the second-grade students for their creativity and imagination.

"These monsters started with your imagination and our high school students had so much fun bringing them to life for you," she told the students.

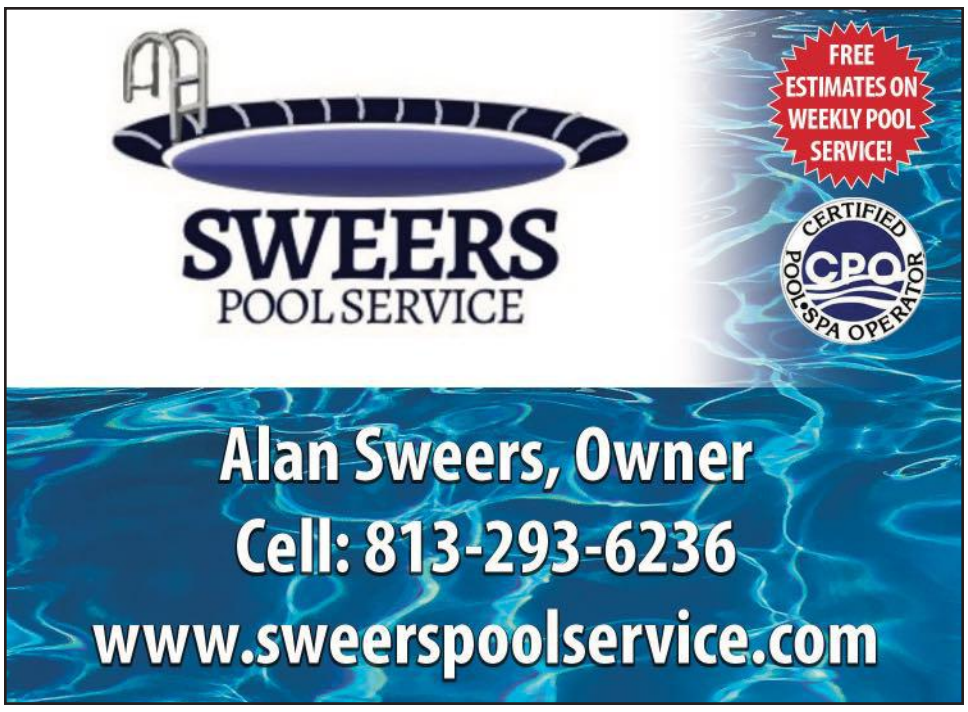
"It is heartwarming to witness the impact art can have on our young people. Arts bring people together; building community and remind us that creativity has no age limit," Reeves said.

The high school students worked on the project for weeks. Reeves said that she was proud of all of her students. She commended Junor Madison Taverez, President of the Art Club, for the time and energy she spent ensuring the event was successful.

"This event means a lot to me because it shows how art can connect different age groups and bring creativity to life. My favorite part is seeing the original second-grade drawings next to the finished artwork and sculptures. It's amazing to see how the high school students interpreted the monsters and brought them to life in a completely different way." Taverez said.

The second graders received a monster backpack for their monster items and could visit three activities centers. Bloomingdale's Culinary department provided appetizers and refreshments.

For more information, email Pamela Reeves: pamela.reeves@hcps.net.





APRIL HONORARY MAYOR'S RACE BENEFITS LOCAL CHARITIES

Staff Report



Abe Agosto



Sunni Moreno

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is excited to announce the upcoming Honorary Mayor's Race, taking place throughout the month of April. This highly anticipated annual event brings together community leaders for a fun, high-energy fundraising campaign that celebrates local pride while making a meaningful impact.

Two outstanding candidates will step into the spotlight, each rallying support for charitable organizations close to their hearts:

- Abe Agosto, "Mortgage Coach Abe," of United Direct Lending, representing Impact Program and A League of Their Own Riverview
- Sunni Moreno of After Glow aesthetics & wellness, representing Angel Foundation Florida and Hope for Her

Throughout April, the candidates will engage the community through a series of exciting and creative fundraising events, all in the spirit of friendly competition. Every dollar raised counts as a "vote," with proceeds directly benefiting the candidates' selected charities.

"This event is a perfect example of how our business community comes together to create a positive impact," said Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce President, Amber Aaron. "The Honorary Mayor's Race is not only a fun and engaging competition, but also an opportunity to support incredible organizations that are doing meaningful work right here in our community."

The Honorary Mayor's Race highlights the Chamber's commitment to strengthening connections between businesses, nonprofits, and residents. By participating, attending events, or contributing to a candidate's campaign, community members play a direct role in supporting important local causes.

A full lineup of fundraising events will take place throughout April. Community members are encouraged to attend, participate, and show their support.

For event details and ways to get involved, please visit the Chamber's event calendar at www.centralhillsboroughchamber.com.

About the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to helping local businesses grow by fostering connections, promoting economic development, and supporting a thriving business community.

Through advocacy, networking, and community engagement, the Chamber serves as a catalyst for success in the Brandon and Riverview areas.

GRASSROOTS GROUP RALLIES TO PRESERVE RURAL CHARACTER OF LITHIA

Staff Report



A small but determined group of Lithia residents is rapidly growing into a powerful grassroots movement, in its mission to protect the area's rural character and agricultural heritage.

The organization, Preserve Rural Lithia, began as a handful of neighbors concerned about changes in their community. Today, it has grown to nearly 9,000 followers online and continues to gain traction as development proposals and zoning requests increase across the region.

"Our goal is to communicate clearly and effectively to the Hillsborough County Zoning Master and County Commissioners our plea to keep our local community zoned Agricultural Rural," said Lea Heyer, one of the group's organizers. "This designation exists to protect viable long-term agricultural lands from urban and suburban encroachment."

At the heart of the group's efforts is the preservation of Agricultural Rural (AR) zoning, which requires a minimum of five-acre parcels and is intended to support farming and related uses. Members say they are increasingly concerned about investors purchasing these properties, not to live on them, but to operate commercial businesses in residential agricultural areas.

"There is a larger trend than we first believed," Heyer said. "We're seeing business uses that don't align with the intent of AR zoning, and that impacts the quality of life for residents and the sustainability of agricultural land."

The group is also closely monitoring several major development proposals, including a rezoning request for approximately 190 acres along Lithia Pinecrest Road near Dorman Road. The proposal could bring up to 380 single-family homes, requiring changes to the Comprehensive Plan and shifting the land from Agricultural Rural to Residential use.

Additional proposals under review include use change near County Road 39 and Old Welcome Road, as well as a commercial rezoning request for a sports training facility on Boyette Road.

While Preserve Rural Lithia members emphasize they are not opposed to growth, they advocate for what they call "the right development, in the right place, at the right time."

The group has hosted community meetings, including a recent gathering at Thatcher Park that brought together residents and local candidates to discuss growth, zoning and the future of Lithia. Organizers say these meetings are critical as key county hearings approach.

"We need voices to speak up as loudly as possible," Heyer said. "The more people who get involved, the stronger our community becomes."

With momentum building and important decisions on the horizon, Preserve Rural Lithia is urging residents across the area to stay informed, attend meetings and help shape the future of their community.

To connect to the group, visit the website www.preserverurallithia.org or email preserverurallithia@gmail.com

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HONEST FOOD GUY GIVES REVIEWS AT A LOCAL RESTAURANT NEAR YOU

By Libby Hopkins



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HILLSBOROUGH UNVEILS NEW ONLINE SYSTEM TO RESERVE CAMPING SPOTS

Staff Report





Want to get away somewhere close to nature, with plenty of room to relax and just feet away from a wide array of recreational opportunities? Booking a spot at one of Hillsborough County's almost 200 campsites in three of its most popular conservation parks just got a lot easier.

The county has unveiled a new online reservation system, which means that prospective campers no longer need to arrive early and in person to reserve a spot at Edward Medard, E.G. Simmons, or Lithia Springs Conservation Parks. The online system allows campers to see when and where vacant campsites are available and to reserve and pay for the specific site(s) up to six months in advance. Additionally, campers can search for sites with the amenities they desire, including electricity, water, picnic tables, grills and campfire rings.

Camping fees remain the same: $24 per site per night, $18 for those ages 55-64 and $12 for Hillsborough County residents ages 65 and older. All three conservation parks allow for both RV and tent camping.

In addition to camping, these conservation parks offer many other distinct amenities. Edward Medard Conservation Park, located at 6140 Turkey Creek Rd. in Plant City, is home to a 700-acre reservoir, observation tower, hiking trails, a disc golf course, picnic shelters and a large playground area. Lithia Springs Conservation Park, located at 3932 Lithia Springs Rd. in Lithia, includes picnic shelters, hiking trails, canoe rentals, an ADA-accessible playground and picturesque views of the Alafia River. The centerpiece of the park is a large freshwater spring that is popular with swimmers year-round. E.G. Simmons Conservation Park, located at 2401 19th Ave. NW in Ruskin, borders Tampa Bay and offers a large boat ramp facility, canoe/kayak rentals, a beach and swimming area, picnic shelters, fishing areas, two playgrounds and 200 acres of mangroves reserved for a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

The following number of campsites are available:

- E.G. Simmons Park, 103 sites.
- Lithia Springs Park, 45 sites.
- Edward Medard Park, 43 sites.

RV campers are limited to stays of 30 consecutive days per park; tent campers can stay up to 14 days within a 30-day period. A maximum of two dogs or cats is allowed. Also, the individual who reserved the campsite must be physically present at check-in.

For more information regarding camping options at Hillsborough County's conservation parks, please visit www.hcfl.gov/camping.

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Spring Tea, ECHO Derby, Cracker Country Day & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Angel Foundation FL Ladies Spring Tea

The Angel Foundation FL invites you to join them for its 2026 Ladies Spring Tea event on Thursday, April 23, at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview. This fundraiser provides the Angel Foundation FL with gift cards to distribute to its Angel families facing a crisis, such as cancer or other catastrophic events, throughout the year.

You and your guests will enjoy a wonderful evening to celebrate with friends, including a fashion show, a silent auction and an inspiring message from an Angel family served by the Foundation Angel program.

Learn more and register at https://angelfoundationfl.com/spring-tea/.

Community Service Scholarship

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

nevertheless, she persisted.
Democratic Women's Club of Southeast Hillsborough County

The Derby: A Fundraising Event Benefiting ECHO

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

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

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

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

Register at https://host.nxt.blackbaud.com/registration-form/?formId=076c-3d4a-096f-4c61-91ca-fe4f503076dc&envId=p-R_SIAr_08kaEfm_tZ_laVw&zone=usa.

Experienced Autism Alliance Fundraiser At Voodoo Brewing Co.

Experienced Autism Alliance is hosting a music bingo fundraiser on Thursday, April 16, at Voodoo Brewing Co., located at 3432 SR 60 in Valrico. Sing, laugh and win prizes, all while supporting Autism Alliance. Proceeds from the event will help provide door alarms, locks and safety tools for families in our community. The doors open at 6 p.m., and bingo starts at 7 p.m. Tickets cost $25 for five games of bingo; there will also be a raffle and prizes. Food and drink will also be available to purchase from Voodoo Brewing Co. Visit www.autismalliancefl.org for more information.

Ian Cribbs Named As Finalist In National Merit Scholarship Program

Ian Cribbs, a senior at Foundation Christian Academy, has been named a finalist in the National Merit Scholarship Program, one of the nation's most prestigious academic competitions. Finalists are selected based on exceptional PSAT scores, outstanding academic records, leadership, extracurricular involvement and a rigorous application process that includes an essay and a school recommendation.

Foundation President Jonathan Smith said, "Ian exemplifies the academic excellence, Christian character and dedication we strive to cultivate at Foundation Christian Academy."

Pelican Players Community Theater Presents Farce Of Nature



The non-stop hilarity of Farce of Nature, penned by the noted playwriting team of Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope and Jamie Wooten, focuses on one chaotic day in the life of the Wilburns, the owners of a struggling fishing lodge in the Ozarks. As in every farce, there are wild and unusual happenings, mistaken identity, frenzied confrontations, ridiculous disguises and secrets exposed as the family deals with a Witness Protection snitch, a cop dressed as a maid, a discontented wife and outrageous, unexpected guests.

All performances are at the Kings Point Veterans Theater in the North Clubhouse, located at 1900 Clubhouse Dr. in Sun City Center, and audiences will have four opportunities to see the play, starting on Thursday, May 14. Tickets are on sale now at the Kings Point Box Office from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Impact Teen Huddles

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

Music And Art Homeschool Day At Cracker Country

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

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

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







LITHIA RESIDENT SETS SIGHTS ON WESTMINSTER DOG SHOW

By Libby Hopkins

Chelsea Morris of Lithia is a dog lover and competitor. Her favorite dog breed is the whippet, and she has three of them. This past year, she placed number one in the juniors' competition for the *Canine Chronicle* and placed second in the American Kennel Association in her breed of whippets, and eighth overall in the Hound Group as well.





Chelsea Morris of Lithia has been showing whippets in dog show competitions all over the state since she was 4 years old.

She has set her sights on qualifying for the Westminster Dog Show Competition — and did I mention she is only 11 years old?

"Bo-Bett's Sandbar Moonlight Chase, aka Luna, is the main dog I show and co-own with my aunt, Christine Perry," Chelsea said. "I also co-own two other dogs, Mando and Uga. My aunt is the owner of Sandbar Whippets, and her business is how I got started showing them. Her friends, Brianne Slade and Rylan Cunningham, are my mentors and coaches."

For 140 years, the American Kennel Club has been the country's leading authority on all things dogs, acting as the premier resource for dog lovers, from the fancier to the everyday pet owner. Along with its affiliated organizations, it encourages dogs as family companions, advances canine health and well-being, advocates for dog owner rights and educates the public about responsible dog ownership.

Being a dog lover is not a pastime; it's a way of life for Chelsea and her family.

"I started showing dogs when I was four years old," Chelsea said. "I started in the peewee division when I was 4 years old and I showed in Whippets since I was 6 years old. I've been showing in the junior division since I was 9 years old and have been showing dogs for the last eight years. I want to finish Luna's championship and make it to Westminster in the junior division one day in Whippets."

Chelsea's mother, Michelle, is very proud of all her daughter has accomplished at such a young age.

"I am very proud of her sportsmanship and her desire to help others, including juniors and kids," Michelle said. "Judges have approached me to say how great she is, both inside and outside the ring. I honestly could not be prouder. I am also grateful to my sister, Christine, for being so supportive of Chelsea's dreams. The three of us spend many weekends traveling around Florida, and Chelsea loves every minute of it. I have no doubt she will achieve her ambitious goals of Westminster."

BLOOM IS BACK: SPRING INTO FLOWERS AT BONNET SPRINGS PARK

Staff Report



Bonnet Springs Park will welcome the community to Bloom, a vibrant two-day flower festival celebrating nature, creativity and horticulture, on Saturday and Sunday, April 11-12, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. The family-friendly event is free and open to all ages.

The park will transform into a lush wonderland filled with floral installations, botanical art displays, garden tours, a makers market, live entertainment and a variety of food and beverage vendors.

"We intentionally designed Bloom as an opportunity for families and visitors to experience the beauty of spring, discover local artists and vendors and celebrate the joy of flowers and plants," said Kirsten Hein, vice president of engagement at Bonnet Springs Park. "It's a chance for families from Tampa, Orlando and Lakeland to unplug, step outside and quite literally stop and smell the roses while connecting with nature and one another."

Throughout the weekend, guests can explore a sprawling outdoor market featuring local artists and makers, including Apothic Fox, Wild Within Flowers and Mamacita Lifestyle Co. The Bonnet Springs Park Plant Sale will also take place during the festival.

The market will be buzzing with energy all weekend long. Guests can catch live performances on the main stage while they explore, then wander over to the lounge, where a DJ will be spinning all day for both days, along with stunning aerialist performances soaring overhead. Local florists, including Montepuy, Taylormade Floral & Event Design, Blue House Florals, Lemon Drops Weddings & Events and In Bloom Florist, will create fresh and colorful installations across the festival grounds, forming a village of floral and botanical art for attendees to explore.

Free guided garden tours led by the park's horticulture staff and volunteers will be offered both days, along with pollinator and native plant education, horticulture demonstrations and interactive workshops. and food and beverage vendors.

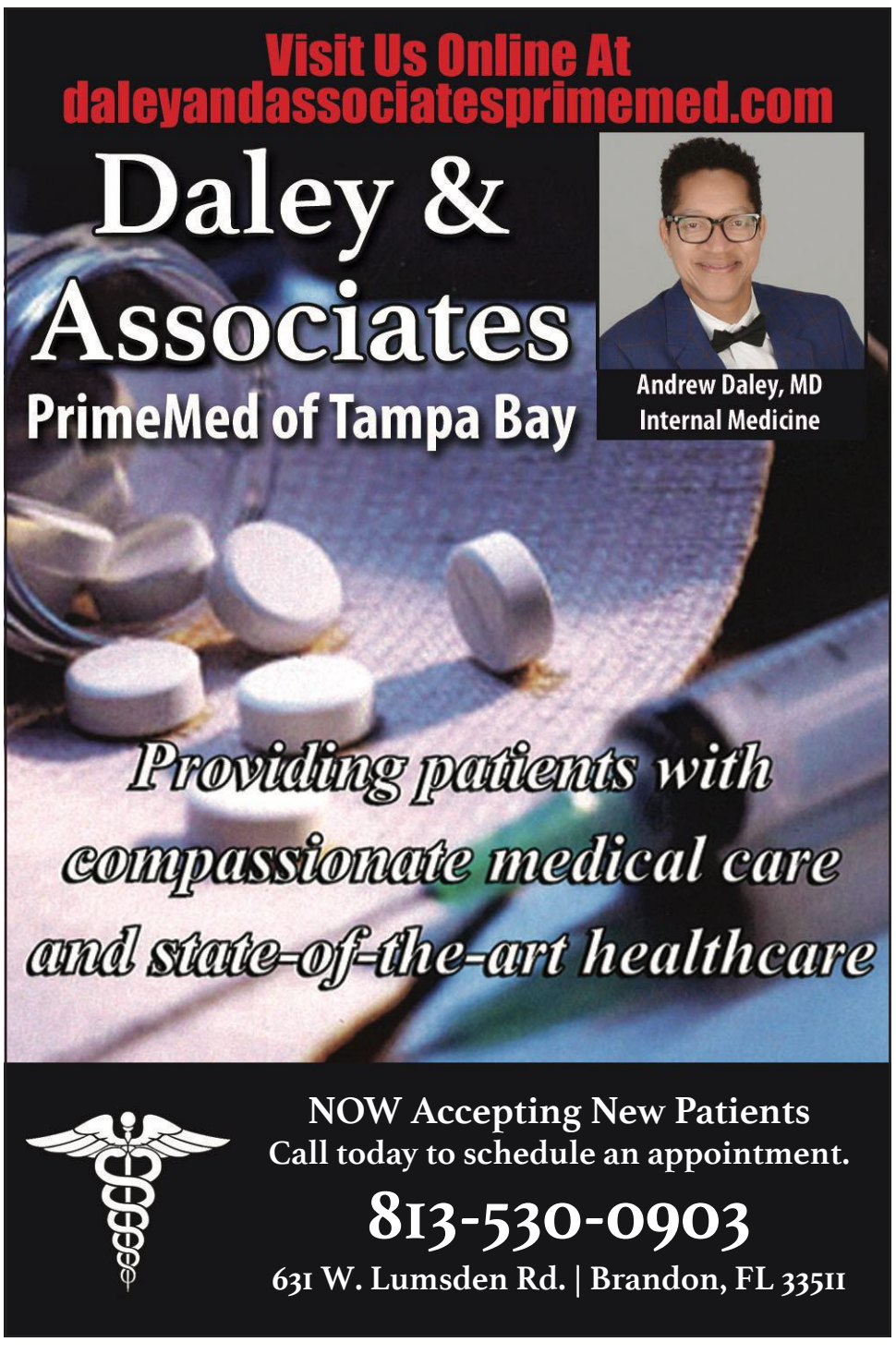
April 11 Highlights

Bloom kicks off with a full day of live entertainment and immersive floral experiences. The main stage in the market area will feature performances by The Circus Arts Place aerialists, Sweet Harmony, a harpist, a Polk State College jazz quartet and a DJ set.

April 12 Highlights

The celebration continues on Sunday with additional performances and hands-on opportunities for guests of all ages. Entertainment on the main stage includes The Circus Arts Place aerialists, the Tom Sounds jazz trio, the Shay Butter Band, live music and a DJ set.

For a full schedule and additional details, visit www.bonnetspringspark.com/.







Bloomingdale/FishHawk

April 2026 Vol. 25, Iss. 4

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Edited by: Jenny Bennett

EYE ON BUSINESS

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

Bridgewater Landing 55-Plus Apartments Ribbon Cutting





The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce proudly hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 10 to celebrate the grand opening of Sunrise Homes – Bridgewater Landing Apartments, a new 55-plus active adult living community in Riverview. Leasing has officially opened for this community, which offers thoughtfully designed one and two-bedroom residences with modern finishes, in-unit laundry and private patios or balconies.

Residents also enjoy a variety of amenities, including access to the Sweet Water Club community clubhouse, walking trails, outdoor gathering spaces and convenient proximity to shopping and dining at Winthrop Town Centre.

The apartments are part of the larger Bridgewater Landing community, designed to support residents' ability to age in place. The campus includes villas and duplexes, independent living apartments and The Bridges Assisted Living Facility, creating a continuum of care and living options that allow residents to remain within the community as their needs evolve.

Visit its website at https://bridgewaterlandings.com/ for additional information and to schedule a tour.

New Retail Manager At Flooring Master

Heather Peterson is honored to serve as the new retail manager at Flooring Master Riverview.

Peterson brings over a decade of retail leadership experience and, more importantly, a genuine passion for people and community. She believes a great store starts with great relationships, and she is committed to creating a warm, welcoming experience every time you walk through its doors. Peterson is proud to call Hillsborough County home; she lives locally with her husband, their two daughters, two dogs and a cat. She is excited to serve the area and looks forward to helping you find the perfect flooring for your space.

Please stop by the Flooring Master Riverview location, at 11531 Balm Riverview Rd., and say hello. It would truly appreciate the opportunity to earn your business. Visit its website at www.flooringmaster.com.

Swim Life Celebrates Grand Re-Opening and New Pool Deck

Swim Life celebrated their grand re-opening and new pool deck with a ribbon cutting with the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce. Everyone at the event enjoyed cookies, coffee and, and swimming.

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

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

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





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

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

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

For more information about CoastalVerify and its services, email diana@coastalverify.com.

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Missing the best days

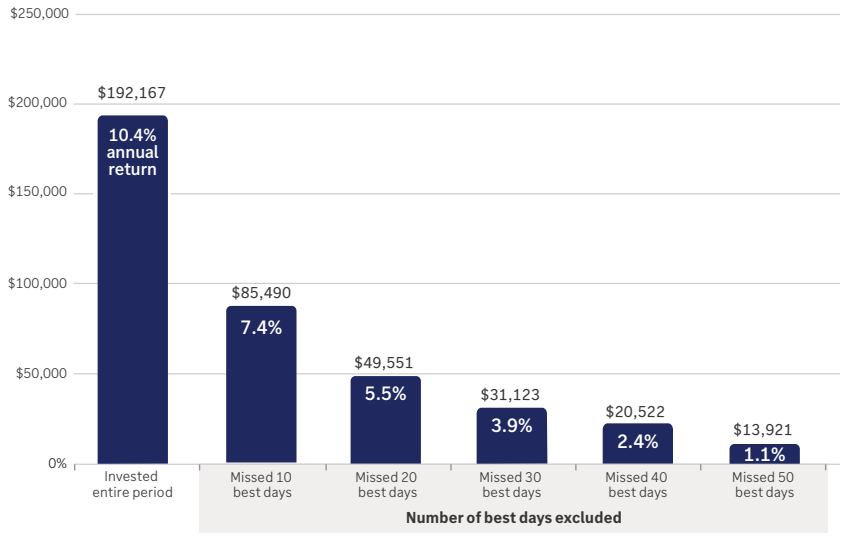
Long-term investing is relatively simple, but it isn't always easy. Volatile markets tend to make investors nervous, particularly because when the stock market drops, it receives much more attention than when it rises.

We believe the best asset allocation policy in the world won't matter much if you don't stick to your long-term investment strategy. We don't view stock market declines as a reason to sell quality investments. Rather, declines present an opportunity for investors with long-term goals to purchase additional investments at attractive prices.

You want to be invested on the "best" days. The problem is that no one knows when these days will occur. We believe buying investments when you have the money available and staying invested give you the best potential for success.

Below is an example of how returns can be impacted by missing some of the best days to be invested.

Market timing doesn't work
Value of a $10,000 investment in the S&P 500 beginning in 1996





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

Sources: Morningstar Direct and Edward Jones calculations. S&P 500 Total Return Index. 1/1/1996 – 12/31/2025. These calculations assume the best days, as defined as the top percentage gains for the S&P 500 for the time period designated, would not be included in the return. These calculations do not include any commissions or transaction fees that an investor may have incurred. If these fees were included, it would have a negative impact on the return. The S&P 500 is an unmanaged index and is not available for direct investment. Past performance does not guarantee future results. Dividends can be increased, decreased or eliminated at any point without notice. This is not meant to depict a real investment.

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November



Child Abuse Prevention calls to all of us for help. The Children's Board of Hillsborough County invites you to learn more at a free annual event Friday, April 3, from 9:30 to 11am at 1925 East 2nd Avenue in Tampa.

There are many ways we all might help to reduce the risks across our region, including involvement with the local Children's Board Family Resource Center. For more info, go online to childrensboard.org — & thanks!

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



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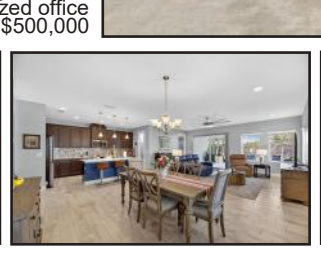
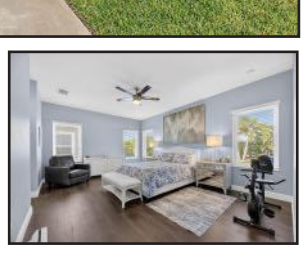


WHEN YOU KNOW, YOU KNOW! If you want & recognize quality upgrades beyond most in an upscale neighborhood, here is the home for you within wonderful Waterset! Inside & outside this Sandpiper by West Bay, you'll find improvements from a 400-SF screened lanai to $65,000 in casement hurricane-impact windows. Tile & LVP floors, decorator fans & fixtures, seamless gutters, salt-free water softener, 8-foot doors including full-glass French doors to the office & a frosted-glass entry with sidelight, security system with cameras front & back, even an electric vehicle charger in the garage await you. It's a 2,100-SF 3/2/2 with a customized office that can be a 4th bedroom. $500,000







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SUMMER CAMPS 2026

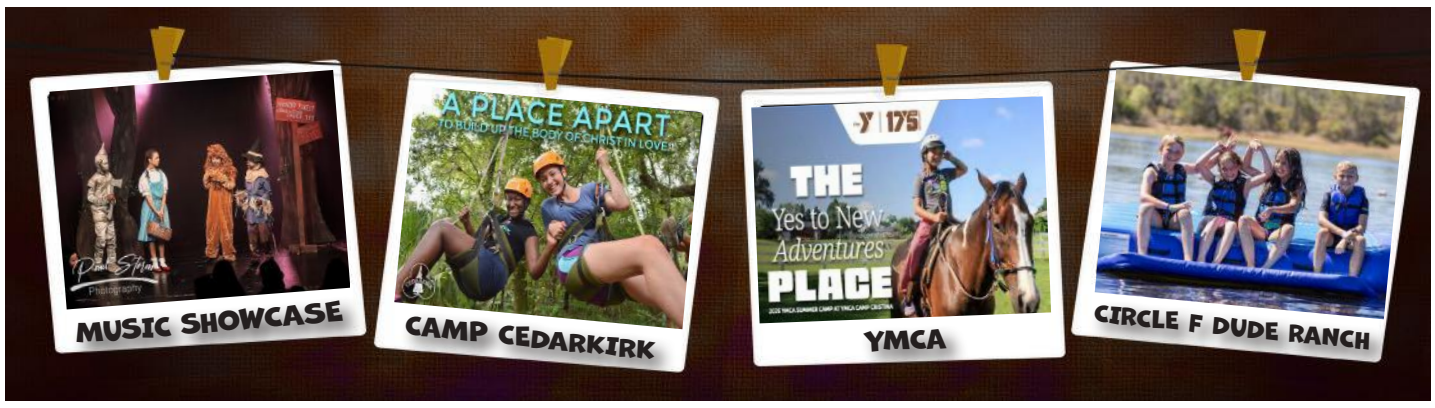


Special Section, More Inside!



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



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

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

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

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

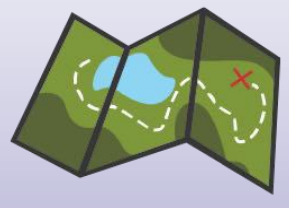
Sports and active play are front and center at Fellowship Church sports camps and High 5 Inc., where kids enjoy games, outdoor play, swimming and field trips throughout the summer. Meanwhile, YMCA Summer Camp locations across the region provide a little bit of everything — from zip-lining and gymnastics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

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

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

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







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SUMMER CAMPS 2026





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

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CEDARKIRK BLENDS FAITH, ADVENTURE AND LEADERSHIP FOR SUMMER 2026

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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MATHNASIUM
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& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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

By Emily Harper



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MATHNASIUM BRANDON CAMPS KEEP SKILLS SHARP DURING SUMMER BREAK

By Libby Hopkins



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

"Summer is one of the most powerful times for growth," said Mathnasium owner Becky McDaniels. "Without the pressure of school, kids have the space to truly understand math, and that's where Mathnasium shines. It's all about momentum and meeting students exactly where they are, strengthening skills and building confidence so they return to school prepared and proud of themselves. After 12-plus years with Mathnasium, it never gets old hearing students tell us after the first nine weeks how excited they are about their success and the confidence to raise their hand on day one."

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

Make It a Mathnasium Summer!

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

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

"We're proud to be a Step Up for Students provider, making personalized math learning accessible for more families," added McDaniels. Learn more about Summer Camps at www.mathnasium.com/math-centers/brandon or call 813-655-6284. Mathnasium is located at 1048 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico.





SUMMER CAMPS 2026



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FLORIDA ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS OFFERS FUN MUSICAL SUMMER CAMPS

By Libby Hopkins

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TEN WEEKS OF FUN AWAIT FAMILIES AT TAMPA YMCA SUMMER CAMPS

By Olivia Clark



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



At Circle F Dude Ranch Camp, we foster grit, growth, and a love for the outdoors. With the perfect blend of Western flair and classic camp fun, we give kids the kind of summer they'll never forget. Located in Lake Wales, campers 6 to 16 enjoy our overnight experiences for one, two and three-weeks sessions.

DATES & RATES

JOIN US FOR AN OPEN HOUSE

May 9th, 2026 – 10:00AM to 4:00PM

Meet our leadership team, try our activities, take a tour, and learn more about summers on the ranch.

RSVP REQUIRED

www.circlefduderanchcamp.com 863-676-4113 info@circlefduderanch.com



& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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CIRCLE F DUDE RANCH CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF ADVENTURE AND TRADITION

By Kelly Wise Valdes



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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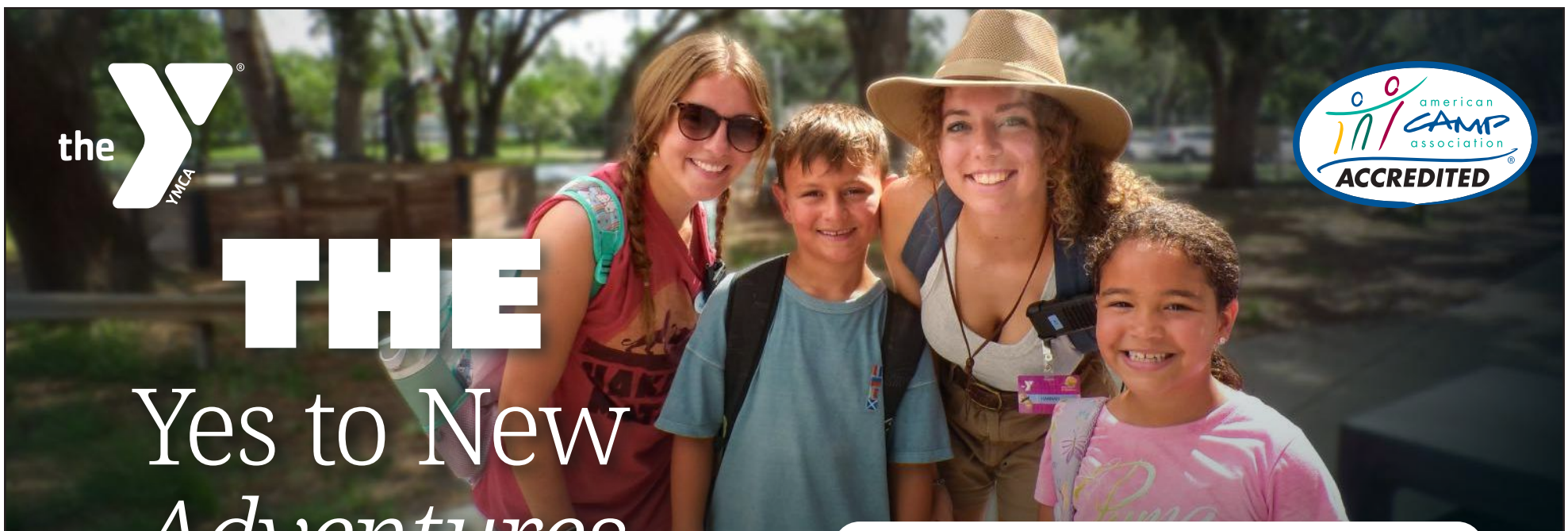
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813.677.8400

REGISTER ONLINE
tampaymca.org/LETSCAMP»



SUMMER CAMPS 2026

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CAMP CRISTINA OFFERS ADVENTURE & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ALL SUMMER

By Olivia Clark





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ULTIMATE SUMMER WITH BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY CAMPS

Staff Report

Busch Gardens camp
YOUR SEARCH FOR SUMMER PLANS IS OVER
REGISTER NOW!
BuschGardens.com/camps • (813)884-4FUN (4386)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Weekly Themed Horse Back Riding Camps
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DISCOVER CREATIVITY AT OVERFLOW FINE ARTS CAMPS

Staff Report

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

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

A Fun, Faith-Filled Approach to the Arts

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

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

Building Confidence, Community, and Talent

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

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

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

ESPN2 TO AIR BIG BOY SOAP HOCKEY'S RIVERVIEW TOURNAMENT

By Nick Nahas



The Big Boy Soap Hockey League returns for its second tournament in two years in the Tampa area. The tournament takes place at the Showmen's Club, located at 6915 Riverview Dr. in Riverview, on Saturday, May 16, from 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. and will air on ESPN2 in August.

The first tournament was held in Brandon last year at the J.C. Handly Sports Complex and made its TV debut on ESPN2 in August 2025. Reruns on ESPNews are shown frequently throughout the year.

Bloomingdale High School graduate Nick Pletcher, who runs production company Glass Eye Creative out of Atlanta, Georgia, wanted to bring soap hockey to his hometown because of the potential interest he thought the game would garner. Over 100 people attended the filming of the event last year. The popularity of the contest made ESPN want to air another tournament this summer. Spectators are encouraged to attend the free event, which will have food trucks, a drum line and a live DJ to accompany the festivities. A new mascot called Duck Duck Dude will attend. The giant rubber duck with a water gun will harass the players throughout the afternoon.

The Big Boy Soap Hockey League, which was created by Pletcher and his friends, is back with new players, new uniforms and brand-new logos, along with some new concepts. Soap hockey is played on a giant 30-foot-by-40-foot, soap-drenched tarp and is usually three versus three.

Unlike regular hockey, soap hockey doesn't have very many rules but is also very rough and tumble. Players are allowed to grab other players sticks.

The event will consist of eight teams in a single-elimination format with 10-minute games and live commentators.

Popular Instagram hockey influencers from *On The Bench* will be the two power players that are allowed to sub in once a game for two minutes to help out a team.

"If anybody is reading this and wants to be on TV and watch a really fun sport, they should come out and support," said Pletcher. "We'll have food, we'll have drinks and all kinds of fun stuff, so they should come out."

Visit www.bigboysoaphockey.com or follow on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube @BigBoySoapHockey.

Music & Theater Summer Camps

The Florida Academy of Performing Arts



Musical Arts For All Ages

faopa.org
the florida academy of performing arts

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Full and half-day week-long camps, plus daily drop-ins

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- Activities to explore instruments, acting, singing, and art
- Themed weeks like: Wicked, Harry Potter, Superheroes, and more!
- Scholarships and sibling discounts

Musical Theatre Camp

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

Past Summer Shows



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



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

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center

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

Circle F Dude Ranch

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

Mathnasium

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

The Patel Conservatory

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

Busch Gardens

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

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

Jam Room Music

Jam Room Music is a new concept in music stores, combining retail and lounge areas with space to jam. It knows the unique joy that occurs when musicians create music together and believes everyone should have that experience. Its goal is to build up the local music community by providing everything musicians of all skill levels need and creating a welcoming environment to spend time around music. Jam Room Music is offering half-day summer camps from Monday, June 8, through Friday, July 10, at its Valrico location at 1040 Bloomingdale Ave. Visit www.jamroommusic.com or call 813-709-7822 for information.

CAMP WEEKS:

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

Overflow's

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LOCATION: 4929 BELL SHOALS RD, VALRICO FL

LEARN MORE: overflowfinearts.com



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

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Camp Mirage

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

Fellowship Church

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

Music Showcase And The Florida Academy Of Performing Arts

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

Skill Samurai

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

TLC's Gypsy Haven Riding Camps

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

School of Rock Valrico

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

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

FELLOWSHIP SPORTS SUMMER CAMPS

CAMPS AND PRICING:
- Soccer Camp – $150
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DAILY SCHEDULE:
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Afternoon sessions (JUN): 1:30p–4:00p
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YMCA, CODE WIZ, AR WORKSHOP, VIBE CAMP, HIGH 5 INC. & MORE

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

High 5 Inc.

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

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



YMCA Summer Camp

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

Code Wiz

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

Kids 'R' Kids

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

AR Workshop

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

Center For Dance Arts

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

Overflow Fine Arts Camp

Overflow Fine Arts Camp is located at 4929 Bell Shoals Rd., in Valrico and will provide a wide variety of camps over the summer including a dance camp, kids musical theatre camp, art camp and lego camp. The emphasis at these camps will be on feeling safe and belonging, with a low ratio of teachers to campers. Camps will run from June 1 through July 17. Most camps will start at 9a.m. and will run through 3p.m. Visit its website at www.overflow-finearts.com or call 813 777 3808 for additional information.







& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Christian Voice



Grace Notes

Easter Blessings
By Debora Coty

My favorite Easter decoration is a wooden, one-eared bunny posted on my flowerbed. It's not new. It's not fancy. It's not terribly attractive.

But it's honest and blatant about the message it brings: You may be missing a vital part of yourself this year (notice the bunny's missing ear), but nevertheless you're blessed.

I suspect you feel diminished in your worth. You may know what caused it — perhaps the death of a loved one you've celebrated Easter with throughout most of your life. Maybe it's the absence of someone who brought you much joy and happiness at a different season of life. Could be the dissolving of a longtime dream. Or an unexpected change in your finances, job, health, church or circle of friends.

Something that has caused disillusionment with life as you thought you knew it.

Or maybe you don't know what has created this deep sense of loss within you. You find that you lean toward the melancholy rather than the joyous this Easter. Your spirit is dragging. You want to celebrate the miracle of Christ's death and resurrection, but there's some pervasive sorrow in your soul that defies identification.

You may not have a clue about why, where, when or how to process your unease (hence the bunny's baffled expression). You may only perceive that something vital is absent this year. Something is different. Something is off.

The message of this little broken Easter sign is that you're blessed. Regardless. It's okay to be broken. Unwhole. Disconnected. Bewildered over it all.

You're still blessed. Whether you feel it or not. Whether you think you deserve it or not. Two thousand years ago, Jesus willingly gave his life so that you could be blessed today. Eternal life is yours if you only choose to believe it. Papa God is pouring out His blessings on you like a gushing waterfall. You just have to recognize that you're all wet.

I pray that you'll acknowledge and embrace your Easter blessings — regardless of your circumstances — during this time of remembrance of the crucifixion and resurrection of your Savior.

Wow. What a blessing, my friend! Don't miss it.

Debora M. Coty is an inspirational speaker and award-winning author of over 40 books, including the bestselling Too Blessed to be Stressed series. Visit with Debora anytime at www.DeboraCoty.com.

A DEEPER LIFE OF FAITH IS OUR CIVIC DUTY



"But when the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth [full and complete truth]." — Jesus, John 16:13.

Quite often, preparing for Easter, I find myself turning to John's account of the Last Supper. The words seem to carry additional gravitas at this last meal together, as Jesus carefully goes over the highlights one more time.

His words resonate in the 21st century, where we take such sweeping liberties with truth. It makes good sense, then, to check in with the one who is truth personified. We dare not separate our pursuit of, our quest for and our understanding of truth from our pursuit of, our quest for and our understanding of God.

So, if we pray when we read the scriptures, why not pray before — and also as — we read the news, or research, or fact-check, or enter into conversation or debate? Is our relationship with God an integral part of our thinking, our emotions, our intellectual curiosity?

When I hear commentators referencing this time in history as 'the post-truth era,' I believe this means we live in a 'post-Jesus era' too. So, what exactly do we need if we say that "full and complete truth" is important? Well, we need Jesus. And we need to be, as Jesus puts it, "Guided by the Spirit of Truth."

We live in a time when the suppression of truth, the manipulation of truth and a wholesale disregard for truth are eating away at our freedom at an alarming rate. But thankfully, as Jesus pointed out, "The truth will set us free."

We cannot leave an active, purposeful relationship with God out of the equation. It is critically important that we love God, follow Jesus and are guided by the Spirit. Then, "when the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide us into all truth [full and complete truth]."

I guess, then, it would be fair to say that it is our civic duty to draw closer, and become more accountable, to God.

— DEREK



Derek Maul has written for many news outlets, including the Tampa Tribune, The United Methodist News Service, All Pro Dad, FOCUS Magazine, Newsweek, USA Today, The Christian Science Monitor, Presbyterians Today, Guideposts, Chicken Soup for the Soul and many other publications. Read Derek Maul's daily blog posts at www.derekmaul.wordpress.com.









TAMPA BAY RODEO & FAMILY FESTIVAL GALLOPS INTO HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS APRIL 10 & 11

Staff Report

Celebrate America's 250th birthday at the Tampa Bay Rodeo & Family Festival, presented by Bartow Ford, on Friday and Saturday, April 10-11, at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds. Tampa's thrill-packed spring tradition delivers two action-packed nights of full rodeo competition, featuring bull riding, bronco busting, barrel racing, calf roping and more. The event also honors the brave men and women in law enforcement, fire and rescue who serve and safeguard our communities.

In honor of local police officers, firefighters and rescue personnel, a charitable donation will be made to Off-Road United, a nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting the well-being of first responders in the Tampa Bay area. Complimentary tickets have also been distributed through local first responder organizations, which will also participate on-site with vendor booths. Blue-line and red-line flags will fly high above the entrance in tribute to those who serve this community.

This year's Family Festival expands its animal experience with more than 100 animals and an exciting new attraction. Camels, goats — including more than 20 babies — pigs, a monkey and an elephant join lions and tigers as part of the festival's growing animal lineup. New this year, the Tiger Encounter offers a live viewing and feeding experience where guests can learn about tiger behavior and conservation from trained handlers. Together, the animals create a lively attraction that gives families a chance to get up close to majestic creatures from around the world.

Guests can arrive early for the Family Festival to enjoy delicious food and interactive fun. Festival favorites include corn dogs, barbecue, tacos, funnel cake and hot-pressed Cuban sandwiches paired with refreshing beverages or ice-cold beer. Visitors can test their skills on the mechanical bull, try ax throwing, soar on the bungee trampoline, race down the giant slide and challenge friends to cornhole and giant Jenga. Guests can also climb aboard a monster truck or even take a ride on a camel.

When the sun goes down, the spotlight shifts to the rodeo arena, where superfans can upgrade their tickets to the new VIP Rodeo Section. VIP tickets include admission and premium reserved bleacher seating near the bucking chutes, along with exclusive access to a private bar, a Luxe restroom trailer, complimentary snacks and sponsor giveaways (while supplies last), additional security and a designated nonsmoking area. Gates open at 4:30 p.m., and the rodeo competition begins at 7 p.m.

The Tampa Bay Rodeo & Family Festival, presented by Bartow Ford, is a community event featuring local vendors and area sponsors.

For more information and tickets, please visit www.tamparodeo.com/.

FROM HOME SALES TO SCAVENGER HUNTS, CLARKIN CREATES FUN

By Makenzie Atkins Noel





In a community that continues to grow and evolve, Kerin Clarkin has made it his mission to ensure Riverview grows with heart, connection and a whole lot of fun.

Clarkin is a local realtor serving Riverview and surrounding areas including Tampa, Seminole Heights and St. Petersburg. Since entering the Tampa Bay real estate market in 2015, he has built his business on a simple philosophy: Put clients first and focus on relationships. His team does not charge cancellation fees or other hidden fees, keeping the process transparent for clients. This approach reflects his commitment to transparency and long-term trust.

Originally from Long Island, New York, Clarkin moved to the Tampa area in 2009 to work in apparel design and marketing. What began as a short-term move quickly turned into something permanent as he became immersed in the community and saw the area's growth and potential. When he stepped back into real estate, he did so with a desire to serve the place he now calls home.

Clarkin describes his style as hands-on and highly personal. He prides himself on being known for trust, respect, honesty and strong customer service.

"Our clients come first, always," Clarkin said. "By the end of the process, they're not just clients anymore. They're friends."

His involvement in the community naturally expanded beyond real estate. Through his Riverview Fun and Events Facebook group, Clarkin began organizing giveaways, scavenger hunts and free events designed to support local businesses and bring neighbors together. His Riverview-only scavenger hunts have become especially popular. In an effort to support small businesses in the community, he purchases gift cards from local businesses and hides them throughout Riverview, posting clues for residents to follow.

Over the years, he has given away more than $3,000 in gift cards and cash, hosted a 350-person bingo event with $1,000 in winnings and even gave away a car during a sports watch party. He regularly supports local schools and celebrations, helping make events more memorable and giving back to the students and families who call Riverview home.

Most recently, Clarkin expanded into the entertainment space with Cory Casino, a party casino business featuring professional dealers and travel-ready casino games. His goal is twofold. He wants to host free community events that bring people together in a new way, and he also offers the casino experience for businesses and organizations looking to elevate their own events.

Visit www.thekerin.com/ or find Clarkin on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/riverviewevents/.

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ORCHESTRA ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT OF CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER SUSANA WEYMOUTH

Staff Report



The Florida Orchestra today announced that Chief Development Officer Susana Weymouth will retire this season, leaving a lasting legacy as a champion of the arts who has significantly impacted the organization and the Tampa Bay cultural landscape.

Since joining in December 2020, Weymouth helped drive major fundraising growth for the state's largest professional orchestra. Contributed revenue more than doubled during her tenure, bolstered by major gifts that strengthened the orchestra's endowment. Most notably, those efforts culminated in a historic $10 million donation—the largest single gift in the orchestra's 58-year history.

Weymouth also expanded partnerships with corporations and foundations, particularly through concert series sponsorships. She deepened engagement with donors through musician and concert sponsorships while broadening support for education and community programs that serve tens of thousands across Tampa Bay.

"Susana has been an incredibly dedicated colleague and partner," said President & CEO Ignacio Barrón Viela. "Her passion, care for our donors and belief in music have built momentum that will endure well into the future."

Music Director Michael Francis praised Weymouth's leadership, noting her ability to inspire "joyful giving" and strengthen connections between patrons and the orchestra's mission.

Weymouth will relocate to be closer to family in Savannah, Georgia, but will remain in an advisory role. The orchestra has engaged Aspen Leadership Group to conduct a national search for a Vice President of Development.

"For me, supporting the arts has always been a passion," Weymouth said, recalling a childhood in Washington, D.C., where early exposure to museums and symphonies shaped her lifelong commitment.

Over a career spanning more than four decades, Weymouth worked in major cultural centers including New York, Beijing, Paris, London and Miami. She moved to the Tampa Bay area in 2001 with her husband, Yann Weymouth, a renowned architect whose work includes projects at the National Gallery of Art and the Louvre.

Before joining the orchestra, Weymouth served as executive director of Tampa Bay Businesses for Culture and the Arts, where she helped strengthen connections between the arts and business communities.

Reflecting on her time with The Florida Orchestra, Weymouth expressed gratitude for colleagues, patrons and donors.

"Because of them, this orchestra continues to thrive," she said. "I'm confident the momentum we've built will inspire our community for generations to come."

16TH ANNUAL CRAWFISH FESTIVAL PROMISES FLAVORFUL FUN FOR A CAUSE

By Marie Gilmore



The 16th annual Crawfish Festival is set to bring a taste of Louisiana to Riverview in April, inviting the community to enjoy a lively day of food, music and family-friendly fun — all for a good cause.

Hosted by the FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club, the popular event will take place on Saturday, April 25, from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. at Winthrop Town Centre in the Winthrop Commons field behind Donovan's. Admission and parking are free, making it an accessible outing for families, friends and even four-legged companions, as the festival is dog-friendly.

Festivalgoers can look forward to fresh crawfish delivered straight from Louisiana on the morning of the event, served Cajun-style with corn and potatoes. In addition to the signature dish, attendees will find a variety of Louisiana favorites, including gumbo, crawfish étouffée, red beans, rice and dirty rice. Other menu options, such as pulled pork sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs and smoked fish dip, ensure there is something for every palate, along with sweet treats offered by local vendors.

Live entertainment will be provided by Mike Imbasciani & His BluezRockerz, setting the tone for a festive atmosphere, while more than 30 vendors will offer local goods, crafts and festival merchandise. A dedicated children's area will provide activities for younger attendees, making the event a well-rounded experience for all ages.

Food and beverages at the festival are purchased using 'Crawfish Cash' or prepurchased meal tickets, available online and at the event. A standard crawfish dinner, featuring approximately 2 pounds of crawfish, is priced at $25, with additional food items ranging from $2-$8.

Beyond the food and entertainment, the Crawfish Festival serves a meaningful purpose. Proceeds benefit the FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club Foundation, which supports initiatives aimed at alleviating hunger, poverty, illiteracy and disease both locally and internationally. Notably, 90 percent of proceeds remain in the local community, funding charitable organizations, youth scholarships and leadership development programs. With the support of attendees and volunteers, the foundation contributed $40,000 to community organizations in the past year alone.

To purchase tickets in advance, visit www.luvcrawfish.com.

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