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WINTHROP SHOWCASES SEVEN RESTAURANTS DURING FIRST RESTAURANT WEEK SEPT 17-27

By Jane Owen

From upscale dining to a patio bar, Winthrop, a master-planned community located in Riverview, has over a dozen restaurants, bars, bakeries and cafes. Family-owned and operated by its founders, John and Kay Sullivan, who live in the town center, Winthrop has small-town charm and a focus on fostering community.



The owners of 7 Winthrop restaurants have teamed together to form the first restaurant week in September.

Winthrop is hosting Winthrop Restaurant Week to showcase its restaurants to the community. The restaurant week is from Thursday, September 17, through Sunday, September 27. Participating restaurants include Acropolis Greek Taverna, Cappy's Pizzeria, Cali Brandon, Donovan's Meatery, Himes Breakfast House, Tutto Tavola and Longshots Sports Bar.

Each restaurant will have a special restaurant week menu. Restaurant guests can order from a restaurant's regular menu, but they will have items to choose from that are unique for restaurant week. Some restaurants will have a prix fixe restaurant week menu, allowing guests to order an appetizer, a main entree and a dessert for a set price. Other restaurants will feature items on the menu that are only available during restaurant week.

Of the seven restaurants being showcased, the longest-opened restaurant is Acropolis, which has been in Winthrop for 17 years. The newest restaurant is Longshots Sports Bar, which just opened.

Restaurant week organizer Sarah Sullivan Xiong said it is the perfect time to try a restaurant for the first time or visit one that you know and love.

"Restaurant week is a special occasion to highlight the amazing restaurants at Winthrop. We're particularly proud that we have so many family-run and locally run businesses and restaurants," Xiong said.

John is excited about Winthrop Restaurant Week's potential for building community.

"It's been done and been very successful in larger cities, but this is definitely a first in Riverview. We're really excited to see the ground swell and see how it works out this year. It can grow. But, unless you start, you don't know. Some people say, what's the best time to plant a tree? It was 20 years ago. What's the next best time to plant a tree? Today. So, we're planting it today," Sullivan said.

The community growth from the event is already happening because of the connections being made between the restaurants.

"The restaurants are coming together in a collaborative way. It is already building a strong sense of community amongst the business owners," Xiong said.

Tutto Tavola owner Luigi Cavallaro said he is looking forward to the event. Tutto Tavola opened in Winthrop in January.

"It's a great way to showcase Winthrop restaurants. It's going to be a great event," Cavallaro said. "I love being in Winthrop because of the community. It's like a little village of its own," he added.

During Winthrop Restaurant Week, the restaurants are also giving away thousands of dollars in gift cards and other promotions. Sign up for the Winthrop newsletter at https://winthropfl.com/ and follow @WinthropFL on social media to participate in the many giveaways happening before and during Winthrop Restaurant Week. Visit WinthropFL.com/RestaurantWeek for more information.

EPIC SURF GRAND OPENING BRINGS LOCAL COUPLE'S VISION TO LIFE

By Brian Bokor



After years of planning, construction and anticipation, Epic Surf officially celebrated its grand opening at Heroes Paradise, welcoming guests to Florida's first Epic Surf deep-water standing wave. For owners Tim and Julie Pennenga, the ribbon cutting marked the realization of a vision to create more than just a surfing attraction, offering beginners and experienced surfers alike the opportunity to experience the thrill of riding a wave.

The grand opening gave guests a chance to experience that vision firsthand. Families gathered on the spacious deck overlooking the wave as music played, instructors worked with first-time surfers and applause regularly broke out when riders found their balance. Just as noticeable was the staff. From the moment guests arrived, employees were professional, respectful and welcoming, an atmosphere that continued throughout the facility.

Having followed the project since a hard-hat tour in January, when the attraction was still largely a concrete shell, I wanted to find out what many first-time visitors were probably wondering: Could someone who had never surfed really learn to do this?

Watching the instructors carve back and forth across the wave, I assumed they had years of experience. Instead, several had learned only months earlier. Julie said learning the attractions is part of the job for her team, helping employees understand what guests are experiencing rather than simply telling them what to do.

That approach became obvious once I stepped into the water.

My first two attempts ended face-first. Each time, however, an instructor explained what I had done wrong, offered another tip and encouraged me to get back on the board.

One instructor explained that beginners often hurt themselves by concentrating too hard on balancing. To get riders out of their own heads, instructors ask questions such as, "What's your favorite color?" or "What's your favorite sport?" In one case, they handed a struggling surfer toy lightsabers and had him pretend to duel while riding. Once he stopped thinking about balancing, he found it.

Julie said that learning curve is one reason Epic Surf's sessions last an hour.

"If you only give them 30 minutes, they're not going to get it. They're going to be discouraged," she said. Even experienced ocean surfers, she added, can spend much of their first session adjusting to the wave. "That last 10 or five minutes, that's when they get it."

By my fifth ride, I understood exactly what she meant. Something clicked. I found my balance, stayed on the wave and heard applause from the deck above.

My first thought was simple: "Wow ... I just did that!"

Julie sees that reaction regularly. Once riders begin figuring it out, she said, "They

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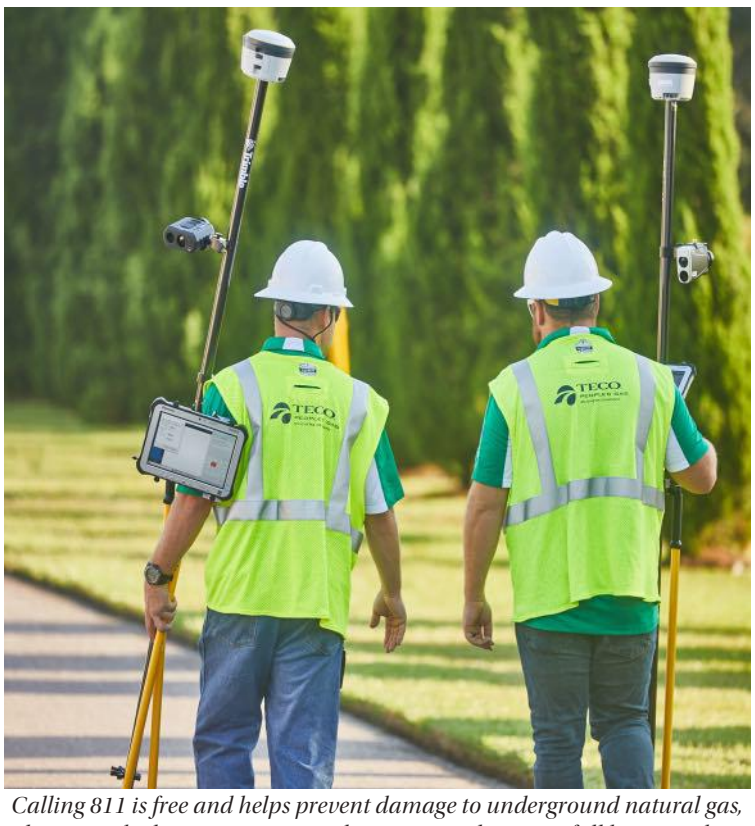
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CALL 811 BEFORE DIGGING: A SIMPLE STEP CAN PREVENT SERIOUS DAMAGE

Staff Report

Florida homeowners planning a landscaping project, installing a fence or cleaning up after a storm are being reminded to take one important step before breaking ground: Call 811.



Before you dig, make the call. Florida homeowners are reminded to contact 811 before landscaping, fence installation, tree removal or other excavation projects.

The reminder comes from Peoples Gas following National 811 Day on August 11, an annual observance designed to raise awareness about safe digging and the importance of knowing what is underground before starting an excavation project.

Florida ranks worst in the nation for damaged underground utility lines, according to Peoples Gas. Underground infrastructure can include natural gas pipelines, electric cables, telecommunications lines and other utilities. Accidentally striking a line can result in service interruptions, expensive repairs and potentially serious injuries.

Calling 811 is free, and homeowners can also submit a request through https://sunshine811.com/. The service notifies participating utility companies, which send professional locators to mark the approximate locations of underground facilities before work begins.

Peoples Gas reported that its locators responded to more than 570,000 locate requests throughout Florida last year. However, preventable damage continues to occur. Of approximately 1,700 incidents involving Peoples Gas facilities in 2025, 45 percent occurred when no call was made to 811.

The company recommends contacting 811 before any digging project, regardless of its size. Projects that require a call include planting trees or shrubs, installing landscaping or irrigation, replacing fences, building decks, removing fallen trees, grinding stumps and repairing storm-damaged property.

Homeowners should contact 811 at least two full business days before beginning excavation and provide the location and details of the project. After submitting a request, property owners should check its status and wait until all participating utilities have responded.

Once lines have been marked, excavators should respect the paint and flags identifying underground facilities. Extra care should be taken when digging within 24 inches of either side of a marked utility line, and markings should remain undisturbed until the project is finished.

Peoples Gas officials said one of the most common misconceptions is that shallow digging is safe. Even projects that appear minor can damage underground infrastructure.

For more information about safe digging, visit https://sunshine811.com/ or www.peoplesgas.com/safety.

Peoples Gas serves more than 520,000 homes and businesses throughout Florida.

BUSCH GARDENS BIER FEST RETURNS WITH NEW FLAVORS

Staff Report



Beer, barbecue and international flavors are taking over Busch Gardens Tampa Bay as Bier Fest Brews & BBQ returns for another season of Oktoberfest-inspired fun.

The annual festival runs on Saturdays and Sundays, along with Labor Day, through Monday, September 7. Bier Fest is included with regular park admission, giving visitors the opportunity to sample new foods and beverages while enjoying live entertainment, games, animal encounters and the park's rides and attractions.

This year's festival features an all-new global-inspired menu with dishes that put international twists on traditional barbecue.

At the Out of the Box Cabin, guests can try loaded brisket burnt-end stuffed potato balls, grilled sweet bourbon pineapple and pork skewers or gochujang and herb-grilled lamb chops. The Smokin' Samurai Cabin offers sticky pork pops with brown sugar sriracha barbecue sauce, brown sugar and miso pork bao buns and Thai chili peanut-butter-and-jelly-glazed pork wings.

Other options include beer-braised grilled cauliflower steak, Nashville hot street corn, stuffed jackfruit baby bell peppers and smoked duck sliders with raspberry bourbon barbecue.

More than 60 beverage choices will be available, including lagers, ales, hefeweizens, ciders, sours, moonshine and wines. New selections include Coconaut Porter from 3 Daughters Brewing, Sunshine Blonde Ale from South Beach Brewing Company, You're My Boy, Blue! from Florida Avenue Brewing and Voodoo Ranger Juicy Haze IPA from New Belgium Brewing.

For guests who want to sample multiple selections, Bier Fest Brews & BBQ Samplers start at $40 and are available with five or eight items. Pass members can get an exclusive 10-item sampler for the same price as an eight-item sampler.

In addition to food and drinks, visitors can listen to music at Helga's Bier Garten and participate in Oktoberfest-inspired games. The Wild Skies Drone Show has also been extended on select dates.

Guests can also explore the park's newest animal experience, Lion and Hyena Ridge, featuring what Busch Gardens describes as the largest coalition of lions in an Association of Zoos & Aquariums-accredited facility, along with two hyenas.

Annual passes offer another way to experience the festival, with passes starting at $13 per month. Benefits include 12 months of admission, free parking, guest tickets, special events and discounts.

Guests must be 21 or older to consume alcoholic beverages.

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CAMPBELL'S DAIRYLAND GETS NEW OWNERS, KEEPS ITS BRANDON ROOTS

By Marie Gilmore

For more than three decades, Campbell's Dairyland has been a gathering place for Brandon families looking for a good meal, a milkshake, an ice cream cone and a little taste of nostalgia.

Now, the restaurant at 200 S. Parsons Ave., has a new owner, but customers can expect much of what they love to remain exactly the same.

Dairy Joy, a family-owned Florida ice cream business with roots dating back to 1958, has acquired Campbell's Dairyland and is bringing the Brandon restaurant into its family of businesses. The new owners, Chris and Karrie Mueller, are not changing the Campbell's Dairyland name or the restaurant's identity.



The Mueller family.



Instead, the Muellers, who also own South Tampa's Xtreme Juice and Dairy Joy locations along with Rodeo Whip in Deland, plan to build on the legacy that has made Campbell's Dairyland a longtime community favorite.

"We're excited to bring Campbell's into the Dairy Joy and Rodeo Whip family," the Mueller's said. "Campbell's Dairyland is still Campbell's Dairyland — just with the Muellers helping carry its story into the future."

Campbell's Dairyland has a history nearly as rich as its menu. Founder Boyd Campbell began by selling chili dogs at local events, using a five-generation-old family chili recipe. In 1985, Boyd and his wife, Pam Campbell, purchased an ice cream business formerly known as Dairy Isle and began serving chili dogs alongside ice cream.

The business became Campbell's Dairyland in 1993. In 1998, the Campbells sold the restaurant to their daughters, Jill Paules and Leesa Lee, who continued the family business with their husbands, Jay Paules and James Lee. James passed away in 2025.

The restaurant faced one of its biggest challenges in November 2002, when a fire caused approximately $250,000 in damage. After eight months and eight days, Campbell's Dairyland reopened.

Campbell's Dairyland is known for sandwiches, burgers, hot dogs, salads, seafood, battered vegetables and more than 30 milkshake flavors, along with its extensive ice cream menu. The restaurant also features indoor and outdoor seating, a drive-thru and a small outdoor play area.

Dairy Joy has been serving generations of Florida families since 1958 and currently operates locations in South Tampa, Seminole and Jacksonville. The Muellers have three children and have made preserving the nostalgic character of Dairy Joy a priority.

For longtime customers, the message is simple: Campbell's Dairyland is still Campbell's Dairyland — just with Dairy Joy helping carry its story into the future.

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GET THE DIRT:
GRASSES AS GIFT IDEAS FOR GARDENERS

BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT



As you well know, gardeners love receiving and gifting plants. There are several grasses you may want to consider. These include cordgrass, muhly grass, lovegrass, sea oats and wiregrass.

There are five native species of cordgrass (Spartina spp.) in Florida. Sand cordgrass is typical for landscapes. This plant should be installed in a large space where it can create a screen or hedge. It can be used at the back of a landscape bed with shorter plants in front. The flowering stalks are very attractive. Cordgrass can be difficult to maintain if used in a small area. Seed heads blow in the breeze and reseed.

Muhly grasses (Muhlenbergia spp.) are mostly used to accent home and commercial landscapes in addition to roadway median strips. Hairawn muhly grass (Muhlenbergia capillaris) is adaptable to nearly any landscape, is salt tolerant and flowers more when planted in a good amount of sunshine. This should be planted at the back of the landscape bed.

Lovegrass (Eragrostis spp.) consists of 11 species and is considered native to Florida. This genus includes annuals and perennials. Both produce significant numbers of seeds from spring through fall. This plant generally exists in open sunny areas. Prune after flowering is over, and save or gift the seeds to others.

Sea oats (Uniola paniculata). This is a salt-tolerant grass throughout our state. The plant stabilizes beach dunes using roots and runners and is federally protected. It cannot be disturbed or seeds collected without a permit. Sea oats can reach a height of 6 feet.

Wiregrasses (Aristida spp.) There are 18 different species of wiregrasses in Florida. Some are distinctive, but many are not. They are everywhere in Florida because it is adaptable to growing conditions and is generally available at native nurseries.

Contact labarber@ufl.edu.

AL'S TENNIS SHOP CELEBRATES 14-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

By Jane Owen

Al's Tennis Shop in Winthrop celebrated 14 years in business on August 6. The shop is locally owned by Al Macasinag and has everything a Tennis player of any level could need to play.

Macasinag is a USRSA-certified stringer and master racquet technician. His shop carries Babolat, Wilson, Head, Solinco and Yonex brands and has a demo program where customers can try racquets free of charge. Macasinag's shop also has racquetball and pickleball equipment.



Al Macasinag with his dog, Nola, in front of Al's Tennis shop in Winthrop.

As a kid, Macasinag became an avid tennis player, loving the competition of tournaments. Nowadays, he enjoys playing for exercise and time with friends. He didn't set out to open a tennis shop when he got his business degree. He spent years in the corporate world, working as a flight attendant and then in human resources. He landed in the Brandon area with a human resources job. Then, the company was sold and his position was eliminated. That's when Macasinag started thinking about opening his own company.

"I didn't want to report to anyone anymore. I was tired of working for a corporation. I knew that if I started a business, whether it fails or succeeds, it's on me," Macasinag said.

Al's Tennis Shop has grown into a business that is deeply connected in the community, supporting local nonprofits and closely supporting tennis players of all levels.

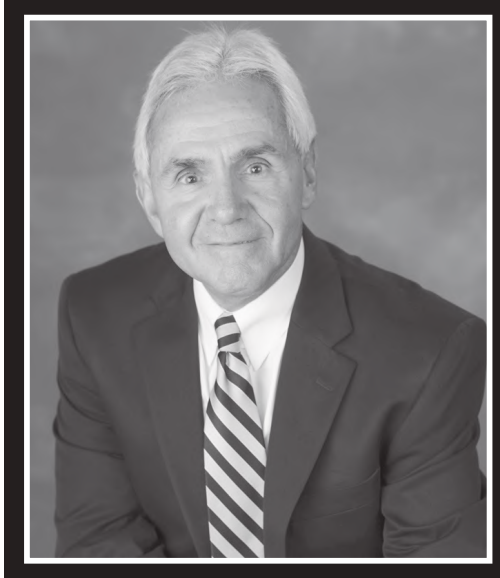
"What I love about owning the shop is being independent and the people. My customers are my friends. You know, I have really been blessed. I thank God every day for the opportunities that have been given to me," Macasinag said.

From year one, Macasinag has been involved with Tennis For Fun, a volunteer-run organization that organizes free tennis clinics for athletes with special needs. Macasinag has volunteered at the Brandon clinics and accepts donations at his shop for the organization. Macasinag also volunteers with the June Rogers Foundation (June was one of Macasinag's customers) and the Trinity Cafe of Feeding Tampa Bay.

Al's Tennis Shop is open 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m.-12 Noon on Saturdays. The shop is located at 6026 Winthrop Town Centre in Riverview. For more information, please visit https://alstennisshop.com/ or call 813-571-1010.

To know more about Tennis for Fun, visit https://alstennisshop.com/services#tennis-for-fun. Information about the June Rogers Foundation and Trinity Cafe can be found here: www.junerogersfoundation.org and https://ftb.org/groceries-meals/trinity-cafe, respectively.

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TRADING CARDS, COMICS AND COSPLAY COMING TO TAMPA EVENT

By Marie Gilmlore



Fans of trading cards, comics, anime, gaming and pop culture will have a chance to gather for a day of collectibles, cosplay and family-friendly fun when Charlie's Comic Con comes to the Egypt Shrine Center on Saturday, September 12.

Hosted by Charlie's TCG Events, the Tampa-area event will take place from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and feature more than 60 vendors offering trading cards, comics, collectibles and other pop culture merchandise.

The event is designed to bring collectors, families, artists, vendors and fans together in one location. Attendees can browse for rare and unique collectibles, meet guests, discover local artists and participate in activities centered around comics, anime, gaming and pop culture.

The event also will include giveaways, cosplay and family-friendly entertainment, with celebrity guests, exhibitors, artists and other attractions featured as part of the Charlie's Comic Con experience.

For owner Charles Nunez, the event represents more than an opportunity to bring fans together. An Iraq War veteran, Nunez built Charlie's TCG Events independently without previous convention-promoting experience.

Since launching the company, Nunez has produced 15 shows across Florida and New Jersey and has continued to grow the business through events that provide opportunities for small businesses, vendors and collectors to connect with the community.

"I started the company independently with no prior convention-promoting experience," Nunez said. "Building these community events and creating a place where collectors, families, vendors and local businesses can come together means a great deal to me."

The September 12 event is part of the company's continuing effort to create accessible pop culture events for fans of all ages. Each Charlie's Comic Con event features its own lineup of vendors, guests and activities, giving attendees an opportunity to experience something new at each show.

Whether searching for a hard-to-find trading card, shopping for collectibles, meeting fellow fans or simply enjoying a day of entertainment with family and friends, organizers said there will be something for a wide range of interests.

Admission, guest announcements, schedules and additional event information are available through https://charliescomiccon.com/.

The Egypt Shrine Center is located at 5017 E. Washington St. in Tampa. The event runs from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. For more information about vendor opportunities and upcoming events, visit the website.

A CHILDREN'S KASTLE CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF GROWING GENERATIONS

Staff Report



For four decades, A Children's Kastle Early Learning Center has been a place where local children learn, play, grow and build the foundation for their futures.

Founded in 1986 by Karen Liebler, the family-owned and operated early learning center is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. The center continues its original mission of providing children with a safe, loving and nurturing, Christ-centered environment.

Today, that family legacy continues through Jeff Liebler and Jackie Sharp, who oversee the center and remain committed to the values that have guided A Children's Kastle since its beginning.

Over the past 40 years, the center has cared for generations of children, with some former students returning years later as parents to enroll their own children.

"Celebrating 40 years is about so much more than the number of years our doors have been open," said Sharp, director of A Children's Kastle. "It represents generations of children we have had the privilege of loving, teaching and watching grow."

The center's four-decade milestone comes with several recent accomplishments. A Children's Kastle recently earned full accreditation through Green Apple Accreditation of Children's Services, meeting 100 percent of the required standards. The accreditation is valid through November 2030.

The school is also recognized as a provider in Florida's Gold Seal Quality Care Program and recently celebrated having one of the highest VPK Kindergarten Readiness results.

Giving back to the community has also remained an important part of the school's mission. Each year, A Children's Kastle hosts its Spring Fling benefiting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. This year's event raised more than $4,000, bringing the school's total contributions to St. Jude to more than $80,000 over the years.

While the accolades are meaningful, Sharp said the school's greatest accomplishment remains its relationships with families.

"For 40 years, we have been planting seeds, and it is incredibly special to see how those seeds have continued to grow," she said.

A Children's Kastle Early Learning Centers Inc. at Winthrop is located at 11297 Winthrop Main St. in Riverview. For more information, visit achildrenskastle.com or call 813-654-9400. Its 40th anniversary theme reflects Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go."

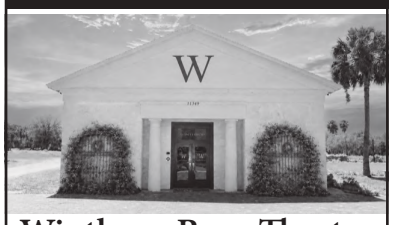

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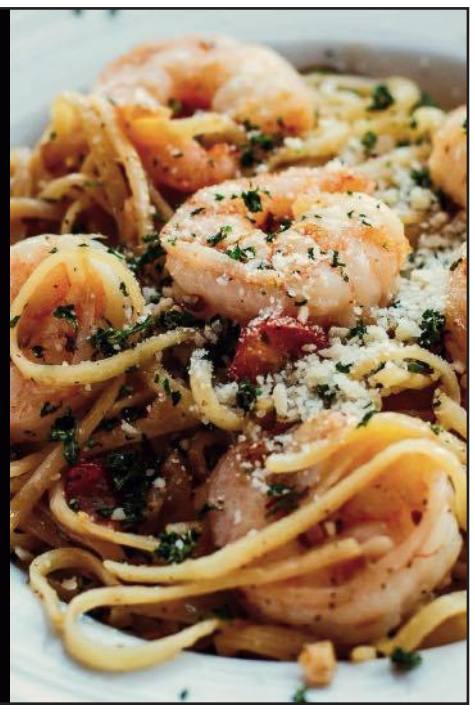
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LOCAL BUSINESSES INVITED TO JOIN HOLIDAY VENDOR FAIR

Staff Report



Local businesses have an opportunity to get their products, services and holiday offerings in front of area shoppers at the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce's annual Shop Local Holiday Vendor Fair.

The event is scheduled for Saturday, November 7, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale, located at 710 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon. The festive event will bring together local businesses, families and holiday shoppers for an afternoon of shopping, entertainment and community connection.

This year's event chair, Mike Neill, is encouraging local businesses to take advantage of the opportunity to showcase what they offer during the busy holiday shopping season.

"The holidays are one of the best times to support local businesses," Neill said. "This event gives shoppers the chance to find one-of-a-kind gifts while meeting the people behind the businesses that help make our community thrive."

Vendor booths are available for $40, with space limited and the fee nonrefundable. Businesses interested in participating are encouraged to register early through the "Events" section of the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce website at www.valricofishhawk.org.

The fair will feature a variety of vendors offering handcrafted items, holiday decor, boutique products, specialty foods, professional services and unique gift ideas. The goal is to create an interactive experience rather than simply a traditional vendor market.

Businesses, including service-based companies, are encouraged to make their booths engaging by offering games, demonstrations, crafts, contests or other activities that encourage visitors to stop and interact.

"We love seeing vendors get creative," Neill said. "Whether it's a game, a craft, a contest or another interactive idea, those experiences help create lasting memories and meaningful conversations."

The popular Flamingo Decorating Contest will also return. Each vendor receives a flamingo to decorate in a creative holiday theme, with awards presented in several categories.

For shoppers, the event will include food, music, raffles, giveaways and family-friendly activities, along with opportunities to discover local businesses and holiday gifts.

"The Shop Local Holiday Vendor Fair is all about bringing people together," Neill said. "It's an opportunity to support small businesses, strengthen community relationships and kick off the holiday season in a fun and meaningful way."

Businesses interested in becoming vendors can contact Mike Neill by email at shoplocal@valricofishhawk.org.

HCA BRANDON EXPANDS SUPPORT FOR HIGH-RISK PREGNANCIES

Staff Report



As national concerns about preterm birth and maternal health continue, HCA Florida Brandon Hospital is highlighting the comprehensive care available locally to support pregnant patients and babies. From women's care and high-risk pregnancy services to maternal-fetal medicine, specialized diabetes support and neonatal intensive care, Brandon Hospital continues to expand its maternal and newborn services to meet the needs of a growing community and provide families with access to specialized care close to home.

The 2025 March of Dimes Report Card gave the United States a D-plus grade for preterm birth for the fourth consecutive year. In 2024, preterm births affected nearly 380,000 babies in the U.S., representing one in 10 births. The report notes that certain health conditions, including diabetes and hypertension in pregnancy, can increase the likelihood of preterm birth or other poor birth outcomes. Nationally, access to early prenatal care continues to decline with nearly one in four women beginning care after the first trimester.

Brandon Hospital uses an integrated care approach that includes women's care, maternal-fetal medicine, obstetric care, diabetes support, perinatal navigation and NICU services. The hospital also convenes multidisciplinary meetings with maternal-fetal medicine physicians, obstetricians and gynecologists, neonatologists and pediatric subspecialists to help coordinate care for complex pregnancies.

A perinatal nurse navigator at Brandon Hospital helps patients understand their maternal fetal medicine care plan, coordinates appointments, supports communication with physicians and connects families with education, resources and emotional support. As patients progress to labor and postpartum and potentially having their baby cared for in the NICU, they have nurses that help guide them through their journey.

For patients managing diabetes during pregnancy, Brandon Hospital offers support from a diabetes specialist who provides education and guidance to help pregnant patients understand and manage diabetes as part of their pregnancy care.

Brandon Hospital's Level III NICU provides specialized care for babies born prematurely or with health complications. Neonatologists and maternal-fetal medicine specialists are on-site, and the NICU team works with families to support newborns who need additional care after labor and delivery.

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital is part of HCA Healthcare, a leading health care network that delivered more than 200,000 babies across its hospitals in 2024. Brandon Hospital's relationship with March of Dimes reflects a broader commitment to improving maternal health through education, research and collaboration, including work focused on postpartum education, preeclampsia awareness and efforts to support healthier outcomes for moms and babies.

In addition to providing comprehensive care for pregnant patients and babies, Brandon Hospital's Women and Infant Services team has been the number one hospital fundraising team for March of Dimes in Tampa Bay for three consecutive years. These efforts support March of Dimes' work to improve the health of all moms and babies and further underscore the Brandon Hospital nursing team's dedication to the mission of improving the health of moms and babies in the Tampa Bay community.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

(never known to fail)

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.

T.O.C.M.B.





COLLECTIVE EDIT BRINGS UPSCALE CONSIGNMENT EVENT TO WINTHROP

By Marie Gilmore



Women looking to refresh their wardrobes without paying full retail prices can shop local when The Collective Edit comes to the Winthrop Barn Theatre in Riverview from Thursday through Saturday, August 27-29.

The women's consignment shopping event brings together stylish, gently worn clothing, accessories and quality brands from women throughout the Tampa Bay area. Items are carefully curated and organized into an in-person shopping experience designed to make finding a new favorite outfit both easy and affordable.

Rather than searching through online listings, paying shipping costs or arranging meetings with individual sellers, shoppers can browse hundreds of consigned pieces in one location.

The Collective Edit is the creation of longtime friends and business partners Michelle Davis and Melanie Brockmeier-Jordy, whose relationship began more than 12 years ago. Their friendship eventually grew into a family connection when the two became sisters-in-law. Although family circumstances changed, their friendship remained strong and ultimately became the foundation for their business.

That shared history is reflected in the company's focus on supporting women, families and the local community.

For shoppers, the event offers an opportunity to find quality clothing and accessories at prices that can make updating a wardrobe more accessible. For consignors, it provides a way to turn clothing and accessories they no longer wear into extra cash without the work associated with online resale.

"We make it easy — from simple drop-off to full-service tagging and prep for high-end items," organizers said.

Brockmeier-Jordy, a Tampa Bay native, brings a strong connection to the local community and a passion for helping women feel supported and confident through the many seasons of life and motherhood.

Davis was also inspired by her sister, Christina, founder of Little Bird Lane and Wardrobe Revival, both community-focused consignment businesses serving families and women.

The Collective Edit continues that tradition with an event built around fashion, value and connection.

Whether shoppers are searching for a new outfit, looking for quality accessories or simply enjoy the thrill of finding a great deal, The Collective Edit offers a chance to shop sustainably while supporting local women.

Winthrop Barn Theatre is located at 11349 Bloomingdale Ave. in Riverview. For event information, shopping details and consignment opportunities, visit https://thecollectiveeditfl.com/.



MORE THAN A SCHOOL: MCLANE'S LEGACY



When we drive past the former McLane Middle School on Knights Avenue today, it is easy to see only an aging school campus. But beneath its towering trees and within its historic grounds lies something far greater: the story of Brandon's earliest commitment to education, community and opportunity.

The history of this treasured property dates back to the late 1800s, when Brandon was still a small rural settlement. The Brandon School first appeared in Hillsborough County school records in 1894, marking the community's first formal educational presence. In 1901, local citizens established a special school tax district, and James H. Brandon donated land for a permanent school, laying the foundation for generations of learning.

By 1914, a larger school was constructed on what is now the McLane Middle School campus. Known as the 'Twin Towers,' it became Brandon's educational center, serving students from first grade through high school. A second Twin Towers building followed in 1917, reflecting the rapid growth of the community and its unwavering commitment to public education.

For decades, this campus served as the heart of Brandon. Students learned there, teachers inspired there and families built lifelong memories that connected one generation to the next. In 1972, the county built a new separate Brandon High School on Victoria Street to address rapid growth in the mclane Brandon area while the historic Knights Avenue property continued its mission by serving younger students, eventually becoming McLane Middle School.

Today, the future of this historic property is once again the subject of public discussion. Hillsborough County Public Schools has proposed redeveloping the site to provide affordable workforce housing for school district employees. While addressing housing affordability is an important and worthwhile goal, this proposal also presents our community with an opportunity to carefully consider the historical significance of one of Brandon's oldest and most meaningful public spaces.

Places like McLane are more than land and buildings — they are living reminders of the people, values and vision that shaped our community. As Brandon continues to grow, we should seek solutions that both meet today's needs and honor the places that tell our story. Preserving this landmark isn't simply about protecting the past; it's about ensuring future generations understand the foundation upon which Brandon was built.

To learn more about Brandon's history or become involved with local preservation efforts, contact Preserving Brandon at preservingbrandon@gmail.com.



WRIGHT'S GOURMET PLANS FOR EXPANDED BAKERY IN BRANDON

By Brian Bokor

A South Tampa institution known for its signature sandwiches, cakes and pumpernickel bread is coming to Brandon.

Wright's Gourmet House plans to open an approximately 15,000-square-foot location at 328 Brandon Town Center Dr., near Brandon Exchange, in summer 2027. It will take over the building recently occupied by Abby Iron Doors and previously home to Peltz Shoes.

Plans call for a large, multipurpose location combining Wright's cafe with a bakery, espresso bar, gourmet market and expanded catering operation.

The menu is expected to include the breakfast selections, deli sandwiches, salads, cakes, pastries and cookies that have made Wright's a Tampa favorite for more than six decades. The new location will also offer grab-and-go meals, take-and-bake items, event desserts and Wright's-branded products.

Wright's opened in South Tampa in 1963 and built a devoted following for its oversized sandwiches, scratch-made cakes and longtime recipes. It remained in the Wright family until Caspers Co. purchased it from Jeff Mount, grandson of founders Marjorie and Pete Wright, in 2024.

Caspers Co. is owned by siblings Blake Casper and Allison Casper Adams, whose family was once Florida's largest McDonald's franchisee before selling its restaurants to McDonald's corporate in 2022. The siblings also own Oxford Commons, the hospitality company behind Oxford Exchange and other Tampa restaurants.

Brandon was a familiar market for Caspers Co., which previously operated nine McDonald's restaurants in the area. After acquiring Wright's, the company moved carefully to ensure the restaurant's longtime recipes and quality could be maintained as it expanded.

The Brandon location is expected to employ about 100 people. As Wright's prepares to expand, Yesy Cruz, director of operations, has focused on developing its workforce, which has more than doubled since Caspers Co. acquired the restaurant.

Wright's opened its first satellite cafe at Tampa General Hospital's Davis Islands campus in February.

A second location of approximately 15,000 square feet is planned between Culver's and Cooper's Hawk along State Road 56 at Wiregrass Ranch in Wesley Chapel, with an anticipated summer 2028 opening.

Wright's original location is at 1200 S. Dale Mabry Highway in Tampa. For more information, visit www.wrightsgourmet.com or call 813-253-3838.

For Brandon-area customers, summer 2027 means a trip to South Tampa will no longer be necessary for a Wright's Beef Martini sandwich or a slice of its famous layer cake.

LOCAL MILITARY COMMUNITY HAS NEW HEALTH COVERAGE OPTION

By Brad Stager

When it's PCS time for military personnel and their families, that means a permanent change of station is at hand and attention turns to the logistics of moving and the consuming ritual of packing and junking goods to arrive at a new duty assignment in good order.



TRICARE beneficiaries in the Tampa area have access to a new healthcare initiative from the Defense Health Agency. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Michelle Lessard-Terry.)

Beyond dealing with boxes, tape and debris, there are also administrative tasks to take care of, especially relating to the government health care program known as TRICARE, which provides insurance coverage to the military community.

TRICARE moves with enrollees, but action must be taken to ensure coverage continues. According to TRICARE's website, no changes are needed until boots hit the ground at a new assignment, but once there, it is necessary to update information in the military's DEERS personnel system and establish relationships with new medical providers.

A Defense Health Agency initiative provides another option in the Tampa area to access TRICARE coverage during a qualifying life event like a move.

The TRICARE Prime Demo is a pilot program started in January that gives eligible beneficiaries a new option to receive health care.

Besides active-duty family members, retirees and their family members (not eligible for Medicare/TRICARE For Life), survivors and families of mobilized Guard/Reserve members are also eligible to participate in the program. Active-duty members of the military are not eligible to participate.

The program is run by CareSource Military & Veterans (CSMV), a managed care organization active in government-sponsored health care programs. Beneficiaries use providers in CSMV's network instead of TRICARE's standard regional contractors like Humana.

According to TRICARE's website, the TRICARE Prime Demo has the same copayments, cost-shares and other out-of-pocket costs as TRICARE Prime.

Pamela Drake represents CSMV at community events and works with beneficiaries to adjust their coverage. According to her, maintaining the right coverage during a QLE can be a challenge, but it is important to take care of it before the first symptom appears.

"The biggest mistake is waiting until someone needs a doctor to start thinking about healthcare," she wrote in an email, adding, "Eligible beneficiaries generally have 90 days from the date of that change to review their coverage and make any plan changes available to them. If no one tells you that window exists, it can be easy to miss while you're getting settled."

Visit www.caresource.com and TRICARE's website at https://tricare.mil/.

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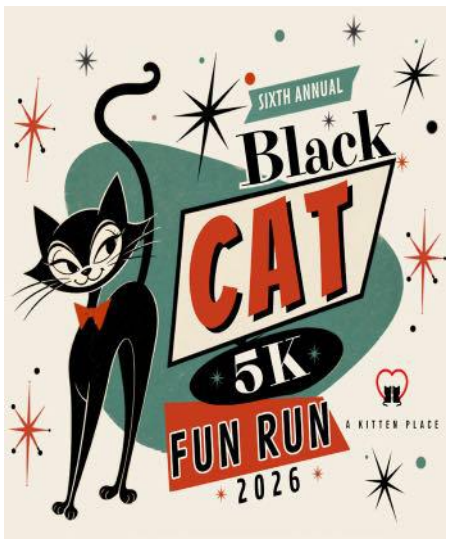
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Black Cat 5K, Gowns For Girls, Wreath Pre-Sale & More.....

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run Benefitting A Kitten Place



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

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

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

Gowns For Girls Pop-up Boutique

Gowns for Girls, a nonprofit which provides homecoming and prom dresses to high school girls for their high school dances, is hosting a homecoming pop-up boutique. The event will be held at King High School, located at 6815 N. 56th St. in Tampa, on Saturday, September 19 and 26 and Saturday, October 3 and 17, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. High school students from across Hillsborough County can shop for free with their ID to find that perfect dress. To find out more about Gowns for Girls visit its website at www.gownsforgirls.org.

Girl Scout And Seeds Of Hope Back-to-school Supplies Drive

Fossil Valley Girl Scout Troop 33521 is partnering with Seeds of Hope to help local children prepare for the upcoming school year through the organization's annual backpack drive.

Beginning this month, Girl Scouts are encouraging families, community members, local businesses and organizations to join them in collecting new, good-quality backpacks and essential school supplies for children in need. Donors can participate in several ways, including purchasing needed items through the Seeds of Hope Amazon and Walmart wish lists at www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/10LR41TQN5BI2/ref=hz_ls_biz_ex and www.walmart.com/lists/wishlist/e00b868c-cac9-4d6b-9d94-25619aa76525.

Seeds of Hope encourages donors to choose good-quality backpacks that can withstand the demands of the school year, helping ensure that children receive supplies that are both useful and durable.

Christmas Tree & Wreath Pre-Sale

Nativity Youth Ministry and Mother Seton Council 6724 of the Knights of Columbus have launched their second annual Christmas Tree & Wreath Pre-Sale Fundraiser, with proceeds benefiting local charities and youth programs.

Advance orders are now being accepted for the better-quality Fraser fir Christmas trees and 28-inch decorated wreaths that were popular last year. Pickup begins on Black Friday, November 27, at Nativity Catholic Church's Novemberfest field, located at 705 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon.

This year's supply is limited to 205 trees and 100 wreaths. Orders can be placed at www.nativitychristmasstore.com; customers who order by Monday, August 31, will save $7 on a 6 to 7-foot tree, $8 on a 7 to 8-foot tree and $10 on an 8 to 9-foot tree.

Pioneers and Cowhunters Homeschool Day

Come to the Pioneers and Cowhunters Homeschool Day on Friday, September 18, at Cracker Country, located at the Florida State Fairgrounds at 4800 U.S. 301 N. in Tampa. Discover what life would have been like for a child growing up in a Florida farming and ranching community over 100 years ago. Educators in historic dress will welcome guests to authentic structures. Students will learn cowhunter skills, like how to read cattle brands and what to pack for a cattle drive. Visit https://floridastatefairgrounds.com/event/cracker-country-homeschool-day-pioneers-cowhunters/ for more information.

Beth Israel Sisterhood Learn About Self-care Techniques and Meditation

On Tuesday, September 1, at 1 p.m., Beth Israel's Sisterhood will present a program on selfcare and meditation in its social hall, located at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center.

The presenter, Jeanne Shanin, is an expert in holistic wellness, senior health care and chair yoga, as well as meditation. Refreshments will be served.

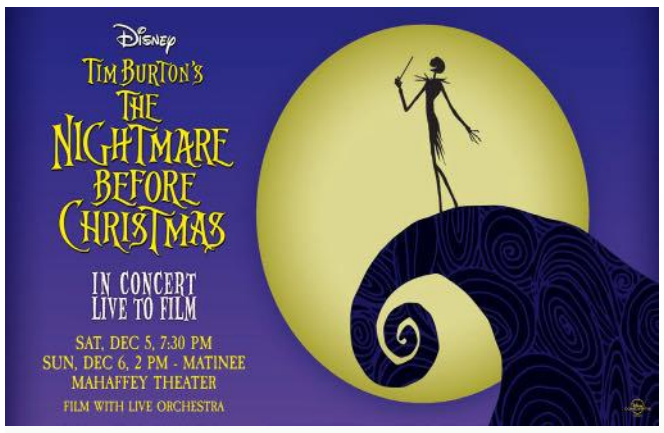
For information on this informative and beneficial event or to join Sisterhood, contact Donna at sisterhood@jcscc.org. Joining Sisterhood is a great way to meet other women and share fun times while watching, and participating in, interesting programs.





HOLIDAY FAVORITES TAKE CENTER STAGE IN ORCHESTRA'S SEASON

Staff Report



The holiday season will come to life through the sounds of The Florida Orchestra, which has announced a lineup of festive performances as part of its 2026-27 season.

Tickets for the new season went on sale August 11, including single tickets to the orchestra's holiday performances. Among the season's highlights are a live-to-film presentation of Disney's Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas and the traditional Classical Christmas concerts.

The Florida Orchestra will present The Nightmare Before Christmas in Concert Live to Film on Saturday, December 5, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, December 6, at 2 p.m. at the Mahaffey Theater, located at 400 First St. S. St. Petersburg.

The 1993 holiday favorite will be shown on the big screen while The Florida Orchestra performs Grammy-winning composer Danny Elfman's musical score live. The film follows Pumpkin King Jack Skellington as he attempts to bring Christmas cheer to his spooky world, with unexpected consequences.

For those looking for a more traditional holiday experience, Classical Christmas will feature Music Director Michael Francis conducting The Florida Orchestra on Friday, December 18, at 7:30 p.m. at the Straz Center and Saturday, December 19, at 7:30 p.m. at the Mahaffey Theater.

The program will include music from Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Oratorio, George Frideric Handel's "Hallelujah" Chorus, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker and traditional Christmas carols. The Master Chorale of Tampa Bay and Lumina Youth Choir will join the orchestra, and audiences will have opportunities to sing along.

The season also includes a family concert, A Star to Remember, on Sunday, October 25, at 2 p.m. at the Mahaffey Theater. The program follows Milo on an adventure to the mysterious Night Market and features music from E.T. and Coco, along with orchestral favorites. Families can arrive early for an Instrument Petting Zoo and other activities.

The Florida Orchestra will present nearly 100 concerts throughout Tampa Bay during the 2026-27 season, including classical, pops and family programming.

The season opens with Francis conducting Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture on Friday and Sunday, October 2 and 4, at the Mahaffey Theater. The Raymond James Pops series begins on Friday and Saturday, October 9-10, with Revolution: The Music of The Beatles.

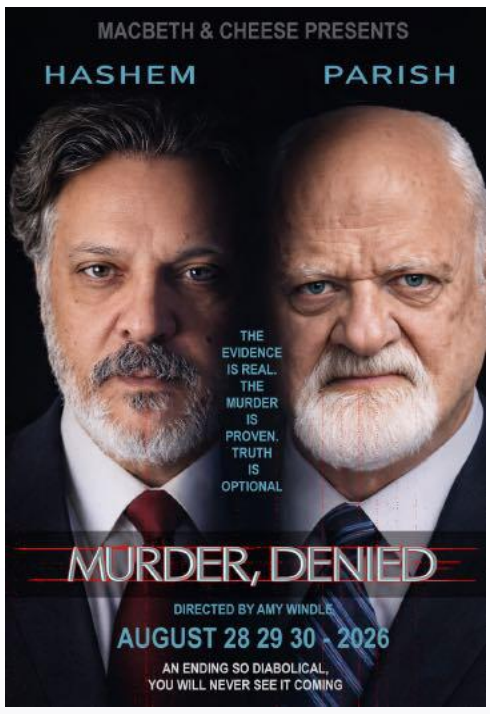
Tickets are available at https://floridaorchestra.org/, by calling 727-892-3337 or at The Florida Orchestra Ticket Center, located at 244 Second Ave. N., 1st Floor, in St. Petersburg.

For the complete 2026-27 concert calendar and ticket information, visit https://floridaorchestra.org/.

MURDER, DENIED BRINGS PSYCHOLOGICAL SUSPENSE TO TWO LOCAL STAGES

Staff Report

Fans of suspense, psychological thrillers and unexpected twists will have two opportunities to experience Murder, Denied, an original Florida production that promises to keep audiences questioning what is real.



Presented by MacBeth & Cheese Productions, the psychological thriller will premiere at the Firehouse Cultural Center in Ruskin Aug. 28-30 before moving to Brandon Performing Arts for a limited engagement Sept. 11-13.

Directed by Amy Windle, Murder, Denied centers on Henry Whitaker, who has one night left to live and believes he has devised the perfect plan. When Michael Reyes arrives expecting a routine meeting, he instead finds a carefully prepared dinner table, precise timing and a locked room — all elements of a much darker scheme.

As the evening unfolds, long-buried secrets and past events come to light. Michael soon realizes that he was never simply invited to dinner. He was chosen.

Unlike a traditional murder mystery focused on identifying a killer, the production challenges audiences to decide what they believe. Each conversation, clue and revelation is designed to shift perceptions and encourage theatergoers to reconsider what they have just witnessed.

"The evidence is real. The murder is proven. Truth is optional," reads the production's tagline.

The intimate theater settings are expected to add to the tension, bringing audiences close to the action as the story unfolds. According to the production team, the twists continue until the final moments, with an ending intended to leave audiences debating what really happened long after the curtain falls.

The Ruskin performances are scheduled for Friday, Aug. 28, and Saturday, Aug. 29, at 7:30 p.m., with a Sunday, Aug. 30, matinee at 3 p.m. The Firehouse Cultural Center is located at 101 1st Ave. NE.

Tickets are $25 for Firehouse Cultural Center members and $30 for nonmembers. Reservations are encouraged because seating is limited. Tickets are available by calling 813-645-7651 or visiting firehouseculturalcenter.org.

The production then moves to Brandon Performing Arts for performances Sept. 11-13. Tickets for those performances are available at MacBeth & Cheese Productions. Visit https://macbethandcheese.com/

For audiences looking for an evening of mystery, revenge and psychological drama, Murder, Denied offers a story designed to keep the questions coming until — and perhaps long after — the final scene.

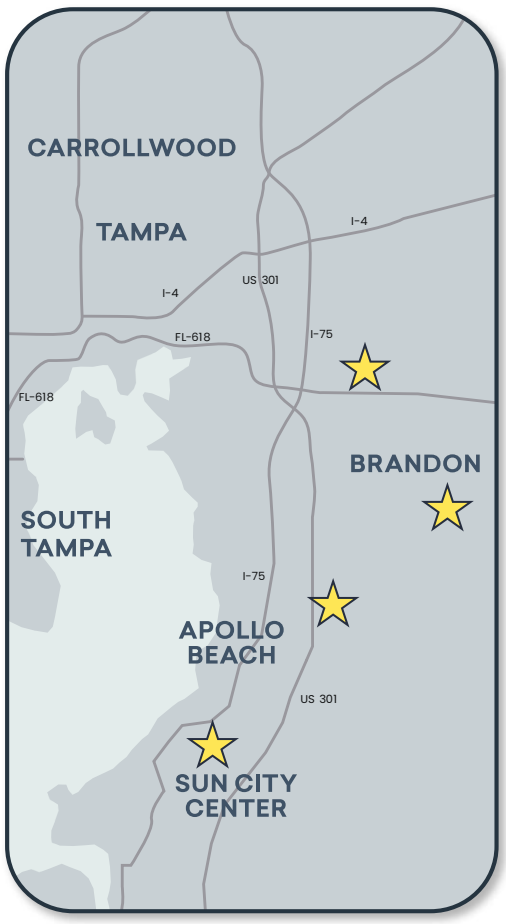
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BRANDON NATIVE HELPS NAVY'S SUBMARINE FORCE STAY READY

By Ashley Craig, Navy Office of Community Outreach



Photo by Lt. Cmdr. Michelle Tucker
Lt. Joel Walter, a native of Brandon, Florida.

Lt. Joel Walter, a native of Brandon, Florida, serves in the U.S. Navy at Strategic Weapons Facility Pacific (SWFPAC) at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor, Washington, homeport of West Coast ballistic-missile and guided-missile submarines.

Walter graduated from Brandon High School in 2004. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration in 2019 and a master's degree in management in 2021, both from American Military University.

"Growing up playing sports in my hometown taught me teamwork, dedication and discipline," Walter said. "This allows me to lead sailors in different dynamic environments."

Walter joined the Navy 17 years ago and now serves as a weapons safety officer.

"I joined the Navy because I have multiple family members who have served in the military," Walter said. "I have two grandfathers – one in the Army and one in the Merchant Marine – who served during World War II. My uncle served in the Army, and my dad served in the Air Force. I chose the Navy for the opportunities it offered, specifically with the submarine force."

SWFPAC supports the nation's strategic deterrence mission by assembling and deploying Trident II D5 missiles aboard ballistic-missile submarines while safeguarding strategic assets. The facility works with Marine Corps Security Forces Battalion Bangor to provide security.

Submarine support commands help ensure the Navy's Pacific Submarine Force remains mission-ready to deter adversaries and defend the United States.

The Navy's sub. marine force includes fast-attack, ballistic-missile and guided-missile submarines. Ballistic-missile submarines, known as "boomers," provide an undetectable platform for submarine-launched ballistic missiles and serve as a strategic deterrent.

As a member of the submarine force, Walter is part of a 126-year history of the Navy's most versatile weapons platform, capable of defending America and its allies.

"I'm most proud of being selected for the Limited Duty Officer program," Walter said. "It allowed me to serve as enlisted and then also as an officer. It wasn't even a goal of mine until I was on my second tour. I had a lot of great officers who provided me with guidance to apply for the program."

Walter also credited his family.

"I want to thank my wife, Melissa, and our children, Parker and Julianna, who have supported my Navy career," Walter said. "I also thank my in-laws, Deb and Doug Hemer, for their support."

CRISIS CENTER REACCREDITED FOR NATIONAL STANDARDS

Staff Report



The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay has once again earned national recognition for its work connecting local residents with critical community resources.

The Tampa-based nonprofit recently announced that it has been reaccredited by Inform USA, formerly known as AIRS, for another five-year period. This marks the fourth time the Crisis Center has achieved this accreditation.

The accreditation process took 12 months and included five phases designed to evaluate the organization's ability to provide accurate, reliable and effective information and referral services.

The review included a consultant's assessment of the agency's compliance with national standards, a detailed examination of its resource database, a 'secret shopper' evaluation, a survey of organizations listed in the database and a virtual site visit.

For local residents facing challenges such as food insecurity, utility assistance, mental health concerns or other crises, the Crisis Center serves as a central point of connection to available services.

Residents can access the organization's information and referral services by dialing 211.

"The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is the community's gateway to connect to resources when they are facing life's challenges," said Clara Reynolds, president and CEO of the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay. "Achieving the Inform USA accreditation confirms that we are maintaining best practices in providing information and referral services to our community."

Inform USA accredits approximately 125 agencies across the United States and Canada. Accredited organizations include 211 providers, Aging and Disability Resource Centers and other specialized information and referral agencies.

The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay's mission is to ensure that no one in the community has to face a crisis alone. In addition to its Gateway Contact Center, which provides 988 and 211 services, the organization operates several programs addressing crisis and trauma.

The Corbett Trauma Center provides trauma counseling and services for sexual assault survivors, while Success 4 Kids & Families supports families dealing with behavioral health challenges and recovery. The organization also operates TransCare, providing emergency ambulance services, behavioral health transportation, interfacility transportation and community paramedicine.

The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is located at 1 Crisis Center Plaza in Tampa and serves residents throughout the Tampa Bay area.

For more information about the Crisis Center and its services, visit www.crisis-center.com.



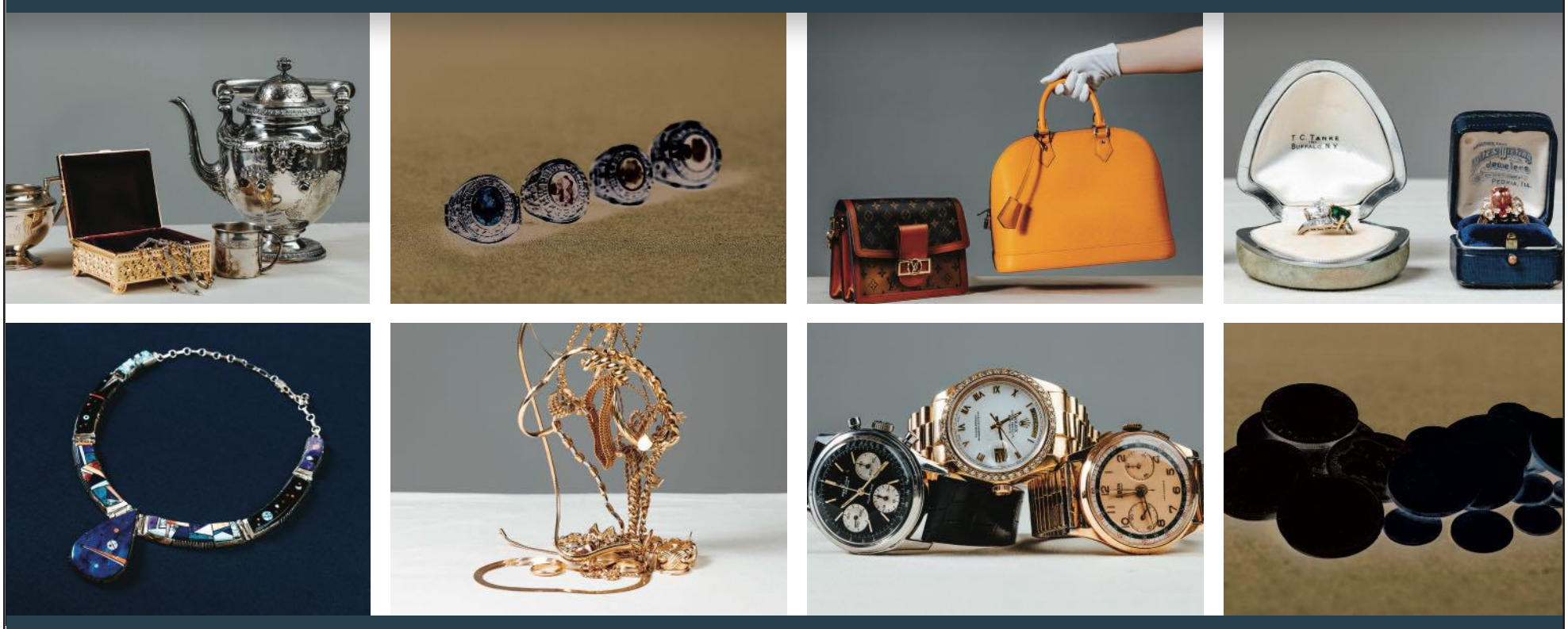
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FLORIDA VIRTUAL SCHOOL LAUNCHES NEW COURSES

Staff Report



Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is expanding its course offerings, student clubs and learning experiences for the 2026-27 school year, providing new opportunities for students enrolled full time and those taking individual courses through FLVS Flex.

Sam Verghese, the newly appointed CEO and superintendent of FLVS, will lead the organization into the new school year. He succeeds retired CEO and Superintendent Dr. Louis Algaze.

"This school year, we are excited to continue innovating while creating even more personalized opportunities for students to discover their interests, build meaningful connections and prepare for future success," Verghese said.

The new school year follows strong academic results for FLVS Full Time, which ranked among Florida's highest-performing school districts. It ranked among the state's top three districts in English Language Arts, top five in U.S. History End-of-Course Assessment and top six in Biology 1 End-of-Course Assessment.

FLVS is adding four online courses to its more than 200-course catalog. New offerings include M/J Grade 6 and Grade 7 Digital Discoveries, which introduce students to cybersecurity, computational thinking, coding, emerging technologies and digital citizenship.

At the high school level, IT Fundamentals will prepare students for the CompTIA Tech+ certification while introducing computer systems, networking, cybersecurity, coding and multimedia applications. Digital Business Foundations will focus on workplace technology, communication, productivity and digital citizenship while serving as an entry point to several career and technical education programs.

FLVS also continues to operate one of the state's largest virtual extracurricular programs, with more than 80 student clubs.

Three new clubs will debut this year: Scribble Squad, a creative writing club for kindergarten through fifth grade; Music Club for students in grades three through five; and Math and Money Lab, a financial literacy and stock market club for students in grades six through 12.

Students and families can learn more during Club Rush events. Middle and high school Club Rush will be held Sept. 10 from 4-6 p.m., while elementary Club Rush will take place Sept. 11 from 10-11 a.m.

FLVS also plans in-person learning experiences throughout the year. FLVS Flex courses are available for year-round enrollment, while FLVS Full Time applications reopen Nov. 2 for the second semester. For more information, visit www.flvs.net.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOSTS CANDIDATE CONNECTION

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed candidates, business leaders and community members to its 2026 Candidate Connection, an event designed to encourage civic engagement and give residents an opportunity to connect directly with candidates seeking public office.

Held at The Regent, the event brought together candidates from local, state and federal races. Attendees had an opportunity to meet candidates, ask questions, learn more about their platforms and become better informed ahead of the upcoming election.

The Chamber thanked Curry Law Group, the event's Presenting Sponsor, as well as Supporting Sponsors Tampa Electric Company, RSA Consulting, Raulerson Castillo & Company CPAs, Charter Spectrum and State Rep. Danny Alvarez, Florida House District 69. Contributing sponsors included Adams & Reese, State Rep. Michael Owen, District 70; Stacy Hahn for Hillsborough County Commission District 5 Countywide; and The Regent.

The event also featured support from ABC Events, which provided décor; emcee Brian Porter of Florida Foam Factory; and Alex Li of Complete Weddings + Events, who provided music and audio services.

Food and refreshments were provided by Chamber members Graze Craze Brandon, Texas Roadhouse, Dave's Hot Chicken and New York New York Pizza. Patticakes Custom Cakes provided desserts.

Among the candidates participating were Sara Peacock, Louie Aguila and Nina McGucken Alvarez, candidates for circuit judge; Daniela Simic, Sally Harris Williamson, Brittany Lyssy, Kenneth Gay and Karen Perez, candidates for Hillsborough County School Board; and Cindy Stuart, Stacy Hahn, Aileen Rodriguez, Neil Manimala, Joshua Wostal, Donna Cameron Cepeda and Gwen Myers, candidates for Hillsborough County Commission.

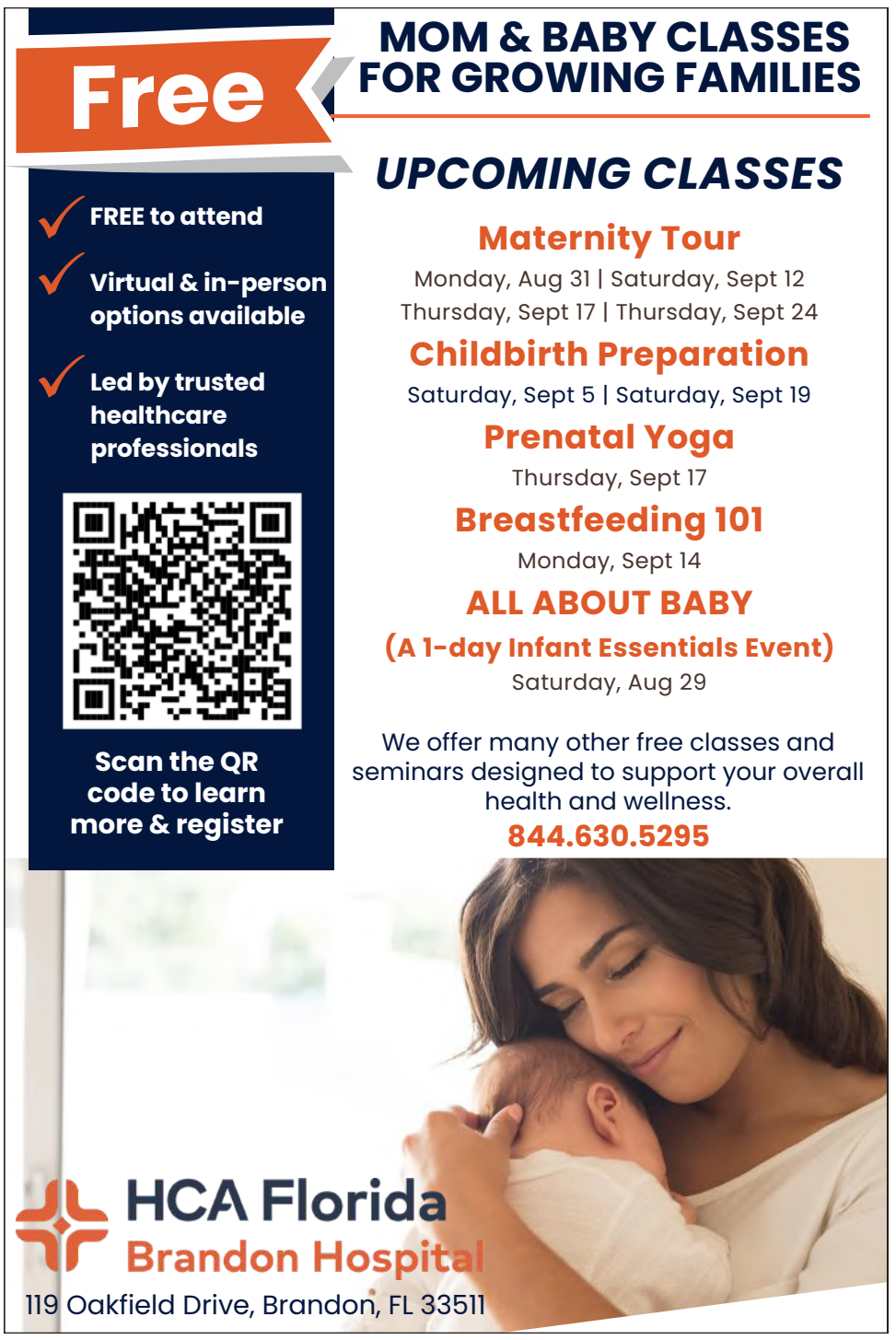
Candidates for Congress included Kimberly Overman, Brian Lambert, Kevin Steele, Bea Valenti, John Peters, Mike Beltran, Rocky Rochford and Gavriel Soriano.

The event also included State Rep. Michael Owen, District 70, and Ryan Gill, a candidate for Florida House District 68.

The Chamber expressed appreciation to all candidates who participated and engaged directly with residents by answering questions and sharing their perspectives.

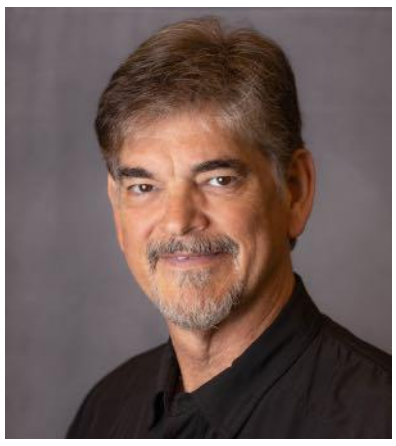
According to BRCC, Candidate Connection reflects its ongoing commitment to creating opportunities for civic engagement throughout the Brandon and Riverview communities. Bringing candidates and community members together allows residents and business leaders to learn more about those seeking public office and participate in the civic process.





RESTORATION 1 OF TAMPA BAY CELEBRATES 10 YEARS IN COMMUNITY

By Jane Owen



No one wants an emergency to happen at their home or office. However, emergencies do happen, and when they do, it is important to have an experienced and professional team to bring your life, home or business back to normal as quickly as possible.

Restoration 1 of Tampa Bay has been serving the Hillsborough County community for 10 years. Since 2016, it has provided water damage restoration, mold remediation and fire damage cleanup services. Its team brings over 50 years of combined experience to the field.

Dave Adams, owner and general manager of Restoration 1 of Tampa Bay, strongly believes that restoration services should be people-focused.

Adams moved to Valrico in 1998 with his wife, Heidi, and his son, Zack. Heidi was pregnant with their youngest son, Sam, at the time. Both boys attended the University of Florida after graduating from Bloomingdale Senior High School. Adams has worked at both large corporations and small businesses over the years. When Sam left for college, Adams fulfilled his lifelong desire to own a community-based service company.

He founded Restoration 1 of Tampa Bay in July 2016. The company specializes in the remediation and restoration of residential and commercial properties damaged by water, fire, smoke or mold. Adams' favorite part of his job is helping people who are often at a loss as to what to do.

"One of the first things people say when we arrive is, 'I don't know what to do. This has never happened before.' I love helping people, guiding them through the process of mitigation and restoration," Adams said.

Restoration 1 of Tampa Bay provides free estimates and recommends getting an assessment before contacting your insurance provider about a potential claim. It works directly with insurance companies, providing the necessary documentation and photos for the carrier to process your claim smoothly.

"When an insurance claim is filed, we provide comprehensive documentation, which includes the cause of loss, so our clients can get paid for their claims without a lot of hassle," Adams explained.

Adams' passion for serving the community has also led to the creation of two sister companies: Tam Bay Construction and Tam Bay ADA Renovations. Tam Bay Construction was born out of a desire to handle rebuilds for restoration clients. Tam Bay ADA Renovations was started after a friend needed help renovating a home following an unexpected disability.

To learn more, visit its website at https://restoration1.com/tampa-bay. For more information about Tam Bay Construction or Tam Bay ADA Renovations, visit https://tambayconstruction.com/ and https://tambayada.com/, respectively.

EPIC SURF CONTINUED....FROM PG 1

By Brian Bokor

get addicted. They want to do it. They want to do it again."



Epic Surf is located at Heroes Paradise, 733 Knowles Road in Brandon. For information or reservations, visit www.heroesparadise.com/epicsurfusa or call 1-833-543-7637.

The finished attraction also represents the end of a difficult road for the Pennengas. When asked what proved most challenging in bringing Epic Surf to Heroes Paradise, Julie's answer wasn't construction or permitting.

"Getting the business loan," she said.

With so few comparable attractions for lenders to evaluate, financing a concept this unusual required finding people willing to believe in what Tim and Julie were building.

By the time I headed toward the exit, however, what impressed me nearly as much as the wave was the culture they had created around it. The staff consistently addressed guests respectfully, offered encouragement after falls and celebrated successes. I felt welcomed when I arrived, welcomed while learning and welcomed again when I left.

Tim shook my hand and offered one final invitation: "Don't make yourself a stranger." Julie and their son, Dylan, were nearby, also thanking guests and saying goodbye.

After the experience I had at Epic Surf, I don't plan to.





HONORARY MAYOR CAMPAIGN RAISES RECORD $169,643 FOR CHARITIES

Staff Report



2026 Honorary Mayor Steve Glaros stands alongside Deputy Mayor Chris Ciulla (right) after a record-setting East Hillsborough campaign that raised $169,643.99 for local charities.

East Hillsborough's 2026 Honorary Mayor campaign raised a record-setting $169,643.99, bringing together community leaders, local businesses, volunteers and charitable organizations to support five local charities.

Steve Glaros was named the 2026 Honorary Mayor of East Hillsborough after raising $121,746.56, the highest amount ever raised by a single candidate. An attorney who has served Tampa Bay families for more than 20 years, Glaros built his campaign around advocacy, family values and strengthening organizations that support children, families and animals.

His campaign benefited High 5 Inc., which provides after-school programs, mentorship and safe opportunities for young people; the Impact Program, which equips youth through education, prevention and character development; and Raining Cats and Dogs Shelter and Sanctuary, which provides compassionate care for animals while encouraging responsibility and community involvement.

Chris Ciulla earned the newly established title of deputy mayor after raising $47,897.43. A former corporate executive and owner of VooDoo Brewing Co. in Valrico, Ciulla has become an active supporter of small businesses, nonprofit organizations and community initiatives throughout East Hillsborough.

His campaign supported Forgotten Angels and ECHO. Forgotten Angels assists young adults aging out of foster care with housing, life skills, employment preparation, education support, credit-building opportunities and guidance. ECHO, the Emergency Care Help Organization, supports families facing hardship through food, clothing, household essentials, workforce development, financial counseling and programs designed to move neighbors from crisis toward long-term stability.

The campaign also marked the conclusion of Mike Brand's term as Honorary Mayor, welcoming him into the Honorary Mayor alumni community.

The accomplishments of Glaros and Ciulla demonstrate how friendly competition can create lasting benefits for organizations serving some of the community's most vulnerable residents.

BUDDY BREW SERVES UP COFFEE IN VALRICO SPROUTS STORE

By Brian Bokor



Walk into the Buddy Brew cafe inside Sprouts Farmers Market in Valrico and you'll find specialty coffee. Spend five minutes with co-founders Dave and Susan Ward, however, and the conversation quickly moves to the people behind it.

That perspective started in their Hyde Park garage. They installed a commercial roaster there in 2007 and opened their original Kennedy Boulevard cafe three years later, naming the company after Buddy.

Susan smiled when she talked about the name. "Buddy is our dog," she said.

That first shop had no cash register. Customers dropped $2 into an old coffee can on the honor system. Trust was not something the business earned later. It was where the business began.

Today, Buddy Brew employs more than 100 team members and continues expanding across Florida. Still, the Wards remain focused on purpose. About 75-80 percent of its coffee comes through direct, long-standing relationships with global growers.

Dave has visited many of those farming communities, where coffee cherries are picked by hand on steep terrain. The experience, he said, changes how you see each cup by revealing the people and work behind it. Buddy Brew also supports Trees For Kibira's reforestation work in Burundi, East Africa, through sales of its Rainforest Roast.

That farm-level care shapes what ultimately reaches the customer. Specialty coffee is graded on a universal 100-point scale, with 100 representing the highest possible score.

"In order to be specialty, the average score is 80 points or higher, but we typically buy 85 points or higher," Dave explained. "Really, the definition of 'specialty' means coffee without defects."

"'Brew good. Do good' is all about our culture, our people, our communities and the farmers," Dave said.

That focus on values brought Buddy Brew into Sprouts Farmers Market. The partnership developed gradually as the companies got to know one another.

"As we got to know Sprouts, it really became evident how closely our brands are aligned — from their values to their mission," Dave said. "They were almost identical."

The Sprouts location brought Buddy Brew into Eastern Hillsborough County after years of requests from customers in Brandon, Valrico, Riverview and New Tampa.

"This was one of our ways of basically getting into the broader Tampa Bay area in coffee underserved areas," Dave said. "The response blows my mind, to be honest with you."

The companies have since developed a cafe prototype that can be incorporated into new Sprouts stores during construction, helping them grow together across Florida.

The Buddy Brew Coffee café at 3315 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico is open daily from 7 a.m.-5 p.m.







SCHOOL OF ROCK VALRICO SETS A NEW STAGE FOR LOCAL MUSICIANS

By Abigail Dumas



This summer, the music learning institution School of Rock opened a brand-new location in Valrico. Located at 3244 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., the grand opening took place on August 6. The event included a ribbon cutting, a tour of the school, food and drinks and live band performances by real School of Rock students.

For years, School of Rock has brought next-level music education to kids and adults around the world. With locations in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, the company has made a name for itself globally as the "most revolutionary music education school in the world."

The program focuses on creating a supportive environment that inspires creativity and learning while keeping students comfortable and engaged. Designed for all ages and skill levels, School of Rock combines one-on-one teaching with group rehearsal to build a community among its young musicians. Students from ages 5 to adult receive weekly individual lessons on either drums, bass, keyboard, guitar or vocals. This is then paired with group lessons and, eventually, live performances at real venues.

Angela Ward, co-owner of the new Valrico location, said, "Our school focuses on collaboration and collaboration. We believe the stage is the ultimate teacher and we aim to build confidence on and off the stage."

Angela, a former elementary school teacher, and her husband, Dave Ward, an experienced salesman, own the new School of Rock as a team. Their journey to opening this location started after the couple enrolled their son into a Rock 101 program at the School of Rock Germantown. The family had an amazing experience with the program, with their son growing into a confident musician right before their eyes.

"When we saw the difference School of Rock made in our son's life, we knew we wanted to bring a school like it closer to home for kids just like him," said Angela.

The couple's goal is to give families in the area the same experience with School of Rock that they had and help more musically inclined kids grow their passion.

For those interested in browsing classes or programs at the new location, check out www.schoolofrock.com.

CRAIG BECKINGER RAISES $180K TO BECOME VISIONARY OF THE YEAR

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Craig Beckinger, founder and CEO of An ABC Event Inc., has been named the 2026 Blood Cancer United All Star Visionary of the Year after leading a 10-week campaign that raised more than $180,000 for blood cancer research and patient support. For Beckinger, a blood cancer survivor, the achievement carries deep personal meaning.

"Raising more than $180,000 means far more to me than reaching a fundraising goal," he said. "As a blood cancer survivor, every dollar represents hope for someone hearing the words, 'You have cancer.'"

Beckinger dedicated the campaign to the memory of Jill Jofko, his manager during his 2023 Visionary campaign. "Because of our community's generosity, we have the opportunity to link a Blood Cancer United-funded research portfolio in her memory," he said. "Knowing her legacy will continue helping future patients is one of the greatest gifts this campaign could have given."

His path to becoming a Visionary began years earlier. Beckinger said it started at a South Tampa Chamber of Commerce luncheon where he first heard about the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's work and knew immediately that he wanted to be involved.

In 2023, with an incredible team, Beckinger raised more than $157,000. Being invited back as an All Star in 2026 gave him another opportunity to serve, and together with the community he raised more than $180,000. In total, Beckinger raised an amazing $337,000 across two campaigns.

"If there's one thing I'm most proud of, it's not the amount we raised — it's the hope we created together," said Beckinger.

Beckinger's 2026 campaign featured a series of community events, from fashion shows and bingo fundraisers to raffles and popups. "Every event reached a different audience and brought new people into the mission," he said. The Grand Finale drew more than 300 attendees. "Looking around the room, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Together, we didn't just raise money — we raised hope."

The campaign's intensity was one of its biggest challenges. "There simply weren't enough hours in the day," he said. Still, he learned that "people genuinely want to help when they're given the opportunity."

Beckinger credits innovation and partnerships for the campaign's success. "We focused on creating experiences that inspired participation," he said. "Innovation isn't just about finding new ways to raise money — it's about finding new ways to inspire people to care."

He said he measures success by impact, not titles. "You don't have to change the whole world — you just have to change someone's world," said Beckinger. "That's how I want to live my life — making a difference, one person at a time."

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COMMUNITY INVITED TO HEIFER LIVING GIFT MARKET

Staff Report



Families looking for a meaningful way to make a difference are invited to attend the Heifer Living Gift Market at the First Presbyterian Church of Brandon, where every donation helps provide struggling families around the world with the tools they need to build a better future.

The free community event will take place on Sunday, September 20, immediately following the church's worship service in Mauldin Hall at First Presbyterian Church of Brandon, located at 121 Carver Ave. in Brandon. The public is invited to enjoy brunch, browse interactive exhibits, participate in live and silent auctions and discover how a simple gift can create lasting change.

Unlike traditional charitable giving, the Heifer Living Gift Market allows visitors to 'purchase' animals or shares of animals — including goats, chickens, cows, pigs, bees and even water buffalo — that are provided to families in need through Heifer International. Donations also support educational opportunities, such as the 'Send a Girl to School' program. Each gift includes education and training, empowering recipients to become self-reliant rather than dependent on aid.

Heifer International's unique "pass on the gift" model encourages each recipient to share the first offspring of their animal, along with the knowledge of how to care for it, with another family in need. This creates a ripple effect that helps entire communities improve their quality of life while expanding hope from one family to the next.

Visitors will find booths highlighting each giving opportunity, handmade items created by the church's crafters available for purchase and opportunities to bid on gift baskets and other auction items. Every dollar raised benefits Heifer International's programs worldwide.

For those searching for an alternative Christmas or other holiday gift, donors receive a special honor card that can be presented to a loved one, letting them know a life-changing gift was made in their name.

Whether attending for the food, the fellowship, the auctions or the opportunity to help others, the organizers hope the community will come together to support families striving for a brighter future.

For more information, contact First Presbyterian Church of Brandon at 813-689-4597 or visit https://fpcbrandon.org/. Additional information about Heifer International is available at www.heifer.org.

TAMPA BAY RODEO & FAMILY FESTIVAL MAKES FIRST-EVER LABOR DAY APPEARANCE

Staff Report



The yearlong celebration of America's 250th anniversary continues Labor Day Weekend as the Tampa Bay Rodeo & Family Festival makes its first-ever Labor Day Weekend appearance on Friday and Saturday, September 4 and 5, at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds, located at 215 Sydney Washer Rd. in Dover. After July's sold-out Tampa Bay Rodeo, fans asked for another opportunity to experience Florida's Hottest Show on Dirt — and organizers listened.

The Labor Day weekend event features two action-packed nights of full rodeo competition where the region's top cowboys and cowgirls will battle it out in bull riding, bronco busting, barrel racing, calf roping and more.

Continuing its yearlong celebration of America's 250th, the Tampa Bay Rodeo is proud to work with Wounded Warrior Project to create a memorable Labor Day weekend for wounded veterans and their families. The rodeo's stirring opening ceremony will pay tribute to the brave men and women of the U.S. military with mounted cowgirls carrying American flags, a moving musical salute and special recognition of veterans in attendance.

As part of its military appreciation initiative, the Tampa Bay Rodeo is providing complimentary tickets to personnel from MacDill Air Force Base, the Florida National Guard, the United States Air Force Recruiting Center and the Veterans Art Center Tampa Bay. Representatives from the Florida National Guard and the United States Air Force Recruiting Center will also be on-site throughout the weekend to connect with guests and share information about their organizations.

"We are always looking for ways to bring our veterans together in the community. This opportunity gives families a chance to enjoy the camaraderie of being out with fellow veterans and service members," said Kevin Sosa, Wounded Warrior Project Alumni Manager.

Guests can arrive early to enjoy the Family Festival featuring live music by Noah Hunton in the Busch Light Beer Barn, delicious food, mechanical bull rides, ax throwing, giant inflatable slides, military vehicle displays and a spectacular 110-foot patriotic American flag slide.

Fans looking for the best view can upgrade to the reserved seating area, featuring premium seating closest to the bucking chutes, access to a private bar, private restrooms, complimentary snacks, added security and a designated nonsmoking area.

Gates open at 4:30 p.m., live music begins at 5:45 p.m. and the rodeo starts at 7:30 p.m. The event will take place rain or shine. For more information and tickets, visit https://tamparodeo.com/.

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BIKES FOR CHRIST AWARDED $10,000 GRANT FROM THE MABEL & ELLSWORTH SIMMONS FOUNDATION

Staff Report



Bikes For Christ is proud to announce it has been awarded a $10,000 grant from The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation Inc. The funding will help support the organization's ongoing program operations, allowing the nonprofit ministry to continue providing reliable transportation to individuals and families in need throughout the Tampa Bay region.

Founded in 2016, Bikes For Christ has become the premier provider of bicycle transportation to organizations serving those in need in parts of five counties. Working through a network of more than 200 partner organizations, schools, employers, social workers and community agencies, Bikes For Christ provides bicycles that help recipients travel to work, school, medical appointments and other essential destinations while sharing the love of Christ with every bicycle distributed.

The $10,000 grant will directly support the organization's transportation ministry by helping fund bicycle repairs and refurbishments, replacement parts, safety equipment, distribution costs, community outreach and other essential program expenses. These resources ensure that donated bicycles are safe, dependable and ready to make an immediate difference in someone's life.

"We are incredibly grateful to The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation for believing in our mission," said Pat Simmons, founder and president of Bikes For Christ. "Reliable transportation is one of the greatest barriers many people face when trying to improve their lives. This generous investment allows us to continue removing that barrier while sharing hope, encouragement and the love of Christ throughout our community."

Since its founding, Bikes For Christ has distributed more than 3,000 bicycles to individuals in need and has partnered with over 200 organizations throughout the Tampa Bay area. The organization has earned recognition as Nonprofit of the Year from both the Plant City and Valrico FishHawk chambers of commerce, along with numerous community service awards recognizing its innovative approach to addressing transportation needs.

Every bicycle distributed represents more than transportation; it represents opportunity. Whether helping someone get to work, attend school, access health care or regain independence, each bicycle creates a pathway toward greater stability and self-sufficiency while opening the door to share the gospel message.

Bikes For Christ extends its sincere appreciation to The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation for its generosity and commitment to strengthening communities through meaningful charitable investments. For more, visit www.bikes4christ.com.

TAMPA BAY SUN FC ANNOUNCES EXCITING 2026 FALL SCHEDULE

Staff Report

The defending champions are ready to return to the pitch as Tampa Bay Sun FC has announced its 2026 fall season schedule, giving local soccer fans seven opportunities to cheer on Tampa Bay's first professional women's sports team at Suncoast Credit Union Field.

The 2026 Fall Season marks a unique chapter for the Gainbridge Super League as the league transitions to a spring-to-fall calendar beginning in 2027. The condensed 'sprint' season will feature just 14 regular-season matches, making every game critical in the race for the Players' Shield. The top four teams in the standings will qualify for the playoffs, with semifinal matches scheduled for Saturday, December 5, and the league championship on Saturday, December 12.

The Sun will begin the season with three consecutive road matches, opening against Dallas Trinity FC on Saturday, August 15, before traveling to face Sporting JAX on Saturday, August 22, and Carolina Ascent FC on Saturday, August 29.

Tampa Bay returns home on Saturday, September 12, for its highly anticipated home opener against Fort Lauderdale FC. The match also marks the first Florida Derby of the season, renewing an in-state rivalry that is expected to draw plenty of excitement from fans.

October brings another challenging stretch for the Sun. The team welcomes reigning Gainbridge Super League champion Lexington SC to Tampa on Sunday, October 4, before hosting Carolina Ascent FC on Saturday, October 10. Tampa Bay then heads back on the road for matches against Lexington SC on Saturday, October 17, and Brooklyn FC on Saturday, October 24.

The final month of the regular season could determine playoff positioning. The Sun will host DC Power FC on Sunday, November 1, before welcoming Dallas Trinity FC on Saturday, November 14, and Brooklyn FC on Saturday, November 21. Tampa Bay closes out the regular season at home on Saturday, November 28, against Sporting Club Jacksonville in what could be a pivotal match with postseason implications.

Founded as one of the league's original eight clubs, Tampa Bay Sun FC made history as Tampa Bay's first professional women's sports franchise and captured the inaugural USL Super League championship in 2025. The league is now known as the Gainbridge Super League, with the Sun continuing to compete at the highest level of women's professional soccer in the United States.

Beyond winning championships, the club's mission is to build a locally rooted, nationally influential organization that empowers girls, elevates women and energizes the Tampa Bay community through the game of soccer.

Single-game tickets for the 2026 fall season, including the September 12 home opener, are now on sale.

For more, visit www.tampabaysunfc.com.





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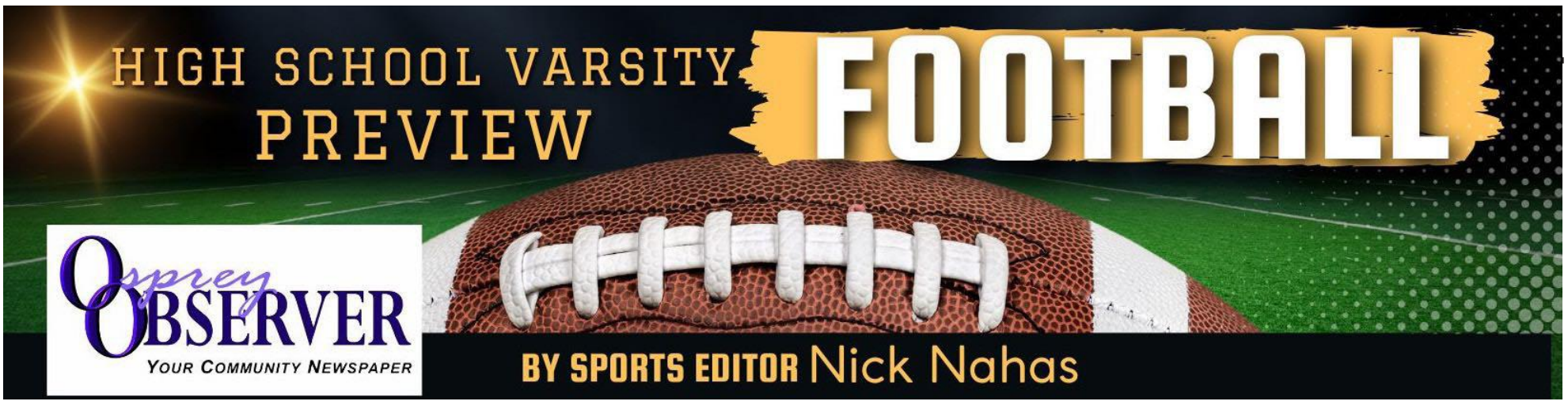
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CRUSADERS LOOK TO BUILD OFF SUCCESSFUL SEASON WITH A YOUNG ROSTER



Seffner Christian Academy (SCA) Head Coach Travis Puelo has built a highly successful football program over his last 14 seasons at the helm. He, along with his coaching staff, have cultivated a family atmosphere built on team chemistry and leadership.

Puelo took 19 players and coaches on their yearly mission trip to Tennessee to help build team chemistry. A week later, they took the whole team to a three-day, two-night camp where they continued to practice and bond.

The Crusaders had another winning season in 2025, going 7-4 and making the playoffs for a second straight season. The team lost 15 seniors from last year and is going from a 53-man roster to around 30. Puelo has another young roster with talent, poised to make another playoff run. They will have to gain experience throughout the season with only seven seniors on the depth chart. Puelo also has a new defensive coordinator for the first time in 11 years. Stewart Weiss will take over those duties after joining the staff last year.

The head coach wants his team to play with relentless effort this year. The team slogan for 2026 is "relentless effort." The Crusader players and coaches don't want to leave anything on the table and want to give it their all on and off the field.

SCA returns five starters on offense and five on defense. They will have to replace two-year starting quarterback Gabe Hagan, who did a tremendous job leading the team. Senior transfer Marino Cozzens will take the reins at QB-1. Puelo said that he already commands leadership of the team and has the strongest arm of any quarterback he's worked with. Puelo said that Cozzens' dual-threat skill set will allow them to open up their spread offense and run it the way they envisioned.

Seffner Christian will rely on their skill position players to help out Cozzens. Senior wide receiver/cornerback Luke McLaughlin has sure hands and has played on the team for four seasons. Senior Plant High School transfer receiver Jasiah Bennett will pair nicely with McLaughlin and start at the other cornerback position. Sophomore running back Isaiah Balthazar could potentially rush for 1,000 yards. The Crusaders will run behind captain left tackle Dylan Edwards and left guard Ryan Rogers, who will both anchor the offensive line.

Puelo wants his team to cut down on penalties and take care of the ball better than they did the last two years. He wants his defense to tackle better and not give up as many big plays. Special teams will play a big role in the team's success. Junior kicker/punter Zack McKeehan has a big leg and will handle all kicking duties. He can hit field goals from 50 yards and beyond.

"I'm looking forward to seeing these guys grow together, being such a young and new team, watching these guys gel together excites me," said Puelo. "It's really a new team with the roster turnover. For me, in my 14 seasons at SCA, I haven't had this experience, and it's kind of reinvigorated me just watching it play out in front of my eyes. If this team can stay healthy and gel together quickly like I believe they can, like they're starting to do already, there's going to be some exciting days for this team for sure."

The expectations haven't changed at SCA. Puelo wants his team to play with relentless effort and discipline, taking it one game at a time. He said that his players are extremely coachable and soak up everything they learn like a sponge. The schedule is really tough, especially the last six games. Expect the Crusaders to go to the playoffs for a third straight season.

SCHEDULE

8/14 vs Avon Park
8/21 @ Legacy Charter
8/28 vs Indian Rocks Christian
9/4 @ CFCA
9/18 vs Northside Christian
9/25 vs Providence School
10/2 @ Cambridge Christian
10/8 vs Out-of-Door Academy
10/16 @ The Master's Academy
10/23 vs MDCA

ROSTER

#	NAME	POS	GR	#	NAME	POS	GR
2	Luke Mclaughlin	WR, CB	Sr.	23	Antonio Ercolano	RB, LB	Jr.
4	Marino Cozzens	QB	Sr.	40	Eli Hargus	LB, DE	So.
5	Jonathan Adams	RB, LB	Jr.	45	Dominic Clovis	RB, LB	Fr.
6	Jasiah Bennett	WR, CB	Sr.	50	Drew Frazier	G, DT	So.
7	Isaiah Balthazar	RB, S	So.	51	Luke Frazier	G, LB	So.
8	JC Weiss	DE	Sr.	52	Ryan Rogers	G, LB	Sr.
9	Graham Stewart	WR, FS	Sr.	54	Tyson Edwards	T, DT	8th
10	Judah Schmidt	TE, DT	So.	55	Dylan Edwards	T, DT	Sr.
11	Jose Alvarado	WR, CB	So.	56	Chase Miller	G, DT	Jr.
12	Mason Bowden	WR, CB	Fr.	57	Blake Herndon	C, DT	So.
14	Judah Triplett	WB, DE	Jr.	60	Elias Montes	G, DT	Fr.
15	Jamier Etheridge	WR, CB	8th	65	Lincoln Stewart	G, DT	Jr.
18	Jonathan Moss	WR, CB	So.	72	Nathan Hawsey	T, DE	Jr.
20	Drew Warrington	WR, S	Jr.	74	David Jupp	T, DT	Sr.
22	Gavin E Vital-Herne	WR, DE	Jr.	81	Zack McKeehan	K, P	Jr.

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PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

(never known to fail)

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.

T.O.C.M.B.

HISTORY AND SERVICE HONORED AT VIETNAM VETERANS ORGANIZATION

By Brad Stager

The call to service they once heard in the hot, muggy landscape of Southeast Asia now echoes through Hillsborough County's densely humid air and has been answered by members of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 787 at its Veterans Memorial Park command and control center.



A Bell AH-1F Cobra helicopter on static display serves as gate guardian at the Veterans Memorial Park and Museum in Tampa, Florida.

In the more than half-century since the official end of the Vietnam War in 1975, many who served in that conflict have organized into a national organization that advocates for all of those who defend the nation and to serve the communities in which they live.

VVA Chapter 787 is one of 29 chapters in Florida and has been active in local community engagement since its founding in 1988. While 'Vietnam' in the group's name indicates an era of military service to distinguish it from other veteran organizations, VVA members actively support the general veteran community in Hillsborough County as well as aspiring warriors in local high schools by mentoring local JROTC cadets and relating firsthand their historical experiences to students.

Tom Leavitt, the chapter's president, wrote in an email, "Participation in the JROTC award programs in all 29 schools within the county is a special time each year of supporting our wonderful cadets."

Leavitt, who was an Army medic in Vietnam, expressed respect for the young people he and his comrades have encountered in their outreach efforts.

"We have found them to be what our young people are really all about and we see their leadership skills as our future," he said.

Business meetings are held every fourth Thursday of each month at Veterans Memorial Park and the organization's calendar is full of activities that support the local veteran community. Chapter 787 is a presence at many local patriotic events, such as Patriot's Day observances and Veterans Day parades at James A. Haley VA Hospital, where it also hosts a pizza dinner every other month for families staying at the adjacent Fisher House. Conducting an annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans event is a significant occasion for the chapter that corrects the abandonment Vietnam veterans once endured when they came home from the war decades ago. It is held on or around National Vietnam War Veterans Day which is observed each March 29.

One invaluable resource for veterans and their families is Chapter 787's website at https://vva787.org/, where extensive information about programs and services can be found as well as details about the VVA.

PARADE OF LIGHTS PARTICIPANTS WILL BENEFIT TWO LOCAL NONPROFITS

Staff Report

The Brandon Parade of Lights is set to return on Saturday, December 12, inviting families, businesses, schools, nonprofits, churches and community organizations to come together for an evening of holiday tradition with a purpose. Stepping off at 5:30 p.m., the illuminated parade will travel approximately 1.3 miles, beginning at Lakewood Drive and Oakfield Drive and continuing along Oakfield Drive before concluding at Vonderburg Drive. The parade typically lasts about two hours and attracts thousands of spectators from all over the Tampa Bay area.

This year also marks a special milestone as Reed & Reed, a Brandon-based law firm, returns as the title sponsor for the third consecutive year, continuing its commitment to helping make the Brandon Parade of Lights one of the area's premier holiday events.

While the parade is known for its festive floats, marching bands, performers and holiday spirit, it is also recognized for something that sets it apart from many other holiday parades throughout the year, its commitment to giving back. Each year, the Brandon Parade of Lights asks its local chambers, the Brandon Riverview and Valrico FishHawk chambers of commerce, to each select one nonprofit who will then benefit from parade proceeds. The 2026 Community Impact Partners are MacDonald Training Center (https://macdonaldcenter.org/) and Easterseals Florida (https://florida.easterseals.com/), two organizations dedicated to improving lives through education, employment, independence and supportive services.

"From the very beginning, our vision has been to create more than a holiday parade," said the Brandon Parade of Lights Committee. "We wanted to build a community tradition that celebrates the season while also shining a light on organizations making a meaningful difference in people's lives. Every sponsor, participant, volunteer and spectator becomes part of that mission. We are excited to be able to support our local nonprofits as much as possible."

The committee is currently seeking additional parade participants to help make this year's event the biggest yet. Businesses, schools, civic organizations, nonprofits, churches, youth groups, clubs, performance teams and marching bands are encouraged to participate in this year's parade.

Sponsorship opportunities are also available for businesses looking to increase their community visibility while supporting an event that benefits local nonprofits. The deadline for both parade registrations and sponsorships is Saturday, October 31. With a limited number of parade entries available, early registration is encouraged.

For parade registration, sponsorship opportunities, merchandise, and event information, visit https://brandonparadeoflights.com/ and be sure to follow the Brandon Parade of Lights on Facebook and Instagram.



ROTARY CLUB OF BRANDON WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT RYAN REED

By Libby Hopkins

This past June, the 2025-26 president of the Rotary Club of Brandon, Liz Brewer, installed the club's new incoming 2026-27 president, Ryan Reed, during a special gathering surrounded by the dedicated members who make up the heart of the Rotary Club of Brandon. The installation marked an important moment of transition for the club, honoring Brewer's year of service while welcoming Reed into a leadership role that will help guide the organization's continued commitment to service, fellowship and community impact.



Newly installed Rotary Club of Brandon president Ryan Reed stands with Hillsborough County Tax Collector Nancy Millan.

"My year as president, the second woman in the 64-year history of the club, I might add, was amazing," Liz Brewer said. "I was so proud of how our members came together as a solid team and created fun opportunities for our members to fellowship, volunteered time and talents to raise over $160,000; and also, I worked closely with our treasurer and secretary to create systems to streamline the work of those we are leading as we are all 100 percent volunteers."

When looking for someone to lead the club in the future, the club begins its search for its next president two years out.

"Ryan became our incoming president to learn under the current president, as well as attended necessary trainings to prepare for this incredible responsibility and step into their role more knowledgeable about Rotary systems and processes, so everything is consistent from one club to another," Brewer said. "Ryan was a great choice, as he jumped in from the day he joined our club back in May of 2023 and became engaged in the work of the organization."

Reed is a community leader and philanthropist in his own right, and the club knew that he would be a great leader for them because he understands the needs of the community.

"My hope for this year ahead is simple," Reed said. "I want to keep doing the work that matters, to welcome new faces who'll carry this club forward long after I'm done, and to enjoy each other's company while we're at it. The friendships in the club are the quiet engine behind everything we accomplish. I am honored, excited and ready to get to work alongside our club members."

"Ryan will commit the time needed to be successful in this area, and, as immediate past president, it is my responsibility to assist Ryan in the year ahead," Brewer said.

To learn more about the Rotary Club of Brandon, visit its website online at www.brandonrotary.org/index.php.

FAMILY FUN, BBQ AND HISTORY BENEFIT FOR BRANDON LANDMARK

Staff Report



The community is invited to celebrate Brandon's rich history while helping preserve one of its most treasured landmarks during the 2nd Annual Brandon's Legacy Labor Day Family Picnic, taking place on Monday, September 7, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Winthrop Barn Theatre.

Hosted by the Timberly Trust, the fundraiser supports the ongoing preservation of the historic Moseley Homestead, a 14-acre property located along State Road 60 in Brandon. Built in 1886 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the homestead is one of the area's oldest surviving historic sites and offers a glimpse into Brandon's early history.

The preservation effort honors the vision of longtime steward Julia Winifred Moseley, who passed away in 2020 at the age of 101. Following her wishes, the Timberly Trust and its volunteer trustees continue working to protect, manage and preserve the property for future generations.

The Labor Day celebration will feature something for the entire family, including a BubbaQue's barbecue lunch, strawberry shortcakes provided by the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, live music, children's crafts and games, raffles, a silent auction and a special presentation about the history and significance of the Moseley Homestead.

Admission is $20 in advance ($25 at the door) for adults, $10 for youth ages 6-16 and free for children age 5 and younger.

The event's presenting sponsors are Odiorne Insurance Agency and Auto-Owners Insurance.

In addition to welcoming attendees, the Timberly Trust is seeking event sponsors and donations for its silent auction and raffle. Sponsorship opportunities offer businesses community recognition, brand visibility and an opportunity to support the preservation of one of Brandon's most significant historic landmarks. All donations are tax-deductible and directly benefit the continued restoration and maintenance of the Moseley Homestead.

"The Labor Day picnic is a wonderful opportunity for families to enjoy great food, entertainment and community fellowship while helping preserve an irreplaceable piece of Brandon's history," organizers said. "Every ticket purchased, sponsorship secured and auction donation helps ensure the Moseley Homestead will continue to educate and inspire future generations."

For those looking for a meaningful way to celebrate Labor Day, the Brandon's Legacy Labor Day Family Picnic offers an opportunity to enjoy a day of family fun while supporting the preservation of a local treasure that has stood for nearly 140 years. For tickets, email timberlytrust@gmail.com or call 813-230-4680.





MEET THE 2026 TEAM OF *OSPREY OBSERVER* INTERNS

By Jamie Lu

Each summer, the Osprey Observer hosts an internship program for high school and college students interested in supporting the local community through journalism. Read on to learn more about this year's interns.















Ella Baroni

Ella Baroni is a high school senior planning to study communications and public relations. She applied to better understand reporting, journalism and what her future career may look like. Her goal was to write stories about people who do good and may go unnoticed.

"My favorite part has been learning about all these organizations through my assignments, taking initiative to better the community," Baroni said. "It's very empowering."

Baroni has played soccer her entire life and has traveled across the U.S. and to Barcelona, Spain, to compete.

Chloe Wagner

Chloe Wagner is a recent University of Central Florida graduate who majored in print and digital journalism with a minor in political science.

Wagner applied because she wanted to start her career with an outlet close to home. She grew up reading the Observer and was eager to join the team, build her portfolio and pursue jobs in the area.

"I've loved covering a variety of stories throughout the community," Wagner said. "I've always admired and championed the importance of community news. I think it's vital that community outlets such as the Observer exist because people often trust them more than larger, more commercialized outlets. It's always so heartwarming to see communities hold events and celebrate each other's successes!"

Wagner is a fourth-generation Tampeño and a huge fan of Tampa Bay sports, especially the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Abigail Dumas

Abigail Dumas is a junior at Newsome High School. She applied because she wants to pursue journalism and gain experience in the field. Her goal was to learn more about journalistic writing and the profession.

"My favorite part of the internship has been receiving the Osprey Observer newspapers and seeing my own articles in them," Dumas said.

She writes for both Newsome's yearbook and school paper.

Jamie Lu

Jamie Lu is a sophomore at the University of Missouri, double-majoring in journalism and constitutional democracy, with minors in creative writing, linguistics, history and political science.

Lu applied to support her hometown through reporting while studying abroad in the Philippines this summer. She is a proponent of local journalism and hopes to practice investigative journalism in the future.

Lu is also a competitive fencer for the University of Missouri.

Srishti Tripathi

Srishti Tripathi is a senior at Newsome High School who plans to major in business or finance on a prelaw track.

Her goals were to hone her feature writing and interviewing skills, learn how to capture local perspectives and gain a stronger understanding of community-driven publishing.

"My favorite part has been having the creative freedom to research and write local feature stories that highlight the people and events making a difference in our area. It's been incredible to take a story from an initial idea, interview community members and see the final piece come to life for readers," Tripathi said.

Tripathi performs color guard, manages social media for her school band and does sports and portrait photography.

Zofia Osterman

Zofia Osterman is a Newsome High School graduate and current sophomore at the University of Central Florida studying communications. She applied to experience working at a newspaper as a journalist.

"My favorite part of this internship has been meeting people from my community, interviewing them, and sharing their stories through my writing," Osterman said. "I have also enjoyed connecting with people from all different walks of life and learning about their unique experiences."

Osterman is a military child who has moved six times. She has also attended three elementary schools and two middle schools.

Brooke Wilson

A 2024 graduate of Durant High School, Brooke Wilson is spending the summer as an intern with Osprey Observer Communications. She is now a student in the Honors College at Florida Gulf Coast University, with an expected graduation date of May 2028.

Wilson is gaining hands-on experience in community journalism, marketing and communications while contributing to the newspaper's mission of highlighting positive local stories. At Durant, she was a member of the National Honor Society and earned several honors on the lacrosse field, including the Lacrosse Scholar-Athlete Award, Most Valuable Player Award and Cougar Award for Outstanding Spirit.

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CAMPAIGN TAKES SHAPE FOR COUNTY WOMEN VETERANS MONUMENT

By Brad Stager



A new Women Veterans Monument is slated to be included in the planned renovations of Hillsborough County's Veterans Memorial Park.

The goal of recognizing the contributions of women veterans at Hillsborough County's Veterans Memorial Park and Museum with a monument is within sight as a design has been selected and fundraising efforts continue.

In what has been a grassroots campaign of more than five years, the monument has gone from an idea to set the record straight about an aspect of America's military history that has often been ignored or diminished to an allotted space in the park and an approved design to create from. It is slated to be included in the park's planned renovations.

The selected design depicts a woman in a generic military uniform standing upon a black granite tri-base, flanked by a woman pilot and infantry soldier, with a figure of a young girl in the foreground.

For the organizers and the veterans they represent, it is more than a statue as it provides recognition for the women who served their country. They are joined in their effort by AMVETS Post 44 in Plant City, a kindred band of veterans who understand the cost of service. Post 44 hosts special fundraising events on behalf of the monument, such as a community yard sale on Saturday, August 8, from 8 a.m.-2 p.m.

Irene Rapoza, who is chair of the monument initiative said there has been a lot of progress with deciding on a design and procuring a place in the park, but there is still plenty of work to do and, with a projected cost of $100,000, funds to raise.

"We've come a long way from our original design of our monument," she wrote in an email. "We are still in our fundraising mode, but with AMVETS Post 44 partnership, we are about one-third of the way to our goal with many fundraisers on the horizon."

Rapoza also credited other local veterans groups and businesses for their assistance as well as County Commissioner Donna Cameron Cepeda, an Army veteran, for her political support. She encourages others to join their ranks as donors or community supporters as the project makes its way through bureaucratic and construction developments.

You can keep up with the group's fundraising and networking efforts via its Facebook page, Women Veterans Monument - Hillsborough County.

ANGEL FOUNDATION CELEBRATES 20TH EVENING OF HOPE GALA

Staff Report



Angel Foundation FL is proud to announce its 20th annual Evening of Hope Gala, taking place on Friday, October 9, at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview. This milestone event celebrates two decades of compassion, hope and community support while raising critical funds to assist local families facing life-threatening illnesses such as cancer and other catastrophic events that create unexpected financial hardship.

For the past 20 years, Angel Foundation FL has been a beacon of hope for families throughout Eastern Hillsborough County and the Greater Tampa Bay area. Through the generosity of donors, sponsors, volunteers and community partners, the foundation has provided financial assistance and compassionate support to families during some of life's most difficult moments, ensuring they can focus on healing instead of financial stress.

Guests will enjoy an elegant evening featuring a gourmet dinner, live entertainment, inspiring stories of hope, exciting live and silent auctions and special recognition of the individuals, businesses and community partners whose generosity has helped the foundation impact countless lives over the past two decades.

"This 20th anniversary is more than a celebration of our history — it's a celebration of every family we've had the privilege to serve and every supporter who has made our mission possible," said Liz Brewer, CEO of Angel Foundation FL and founder of the Foundation Angel Program. "Together, we continue to bring hope, healing and financial relief to families when they need it most. Every ticket purchased, every sponsorship secured and every donation made helps us continue lifting up families in crisis throughout our community."

Angel Foundation FL extends its sincere gratitude to its presenting sponsor, HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, for its continued support of the 20th annual Evening of Hope Gala.

Proceeds from the Evening of Hope Gala directly benefit Angel Foundation FL's programs, allowing the organization to continue providing emergency financial assistance and compassionate support to families facing life-threatening illnesses such as cancer and other catastrophic events that place an overwhelming financial burden on their households.

Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are now available. Community members, businesses, and organizations are invited to join this unforgettable evening of inspiration, celebration and generosity while helping ensure Angel Foundation FL can continue serving local families for generations to come.

For more information about Angel Foundation FL, visit https://angelfoundationfl.com/.

Edward Jones > edwardjones.com | Member SIPC

Job change?

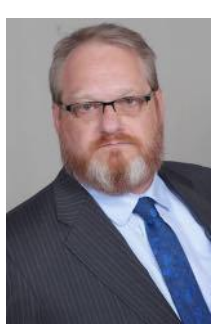
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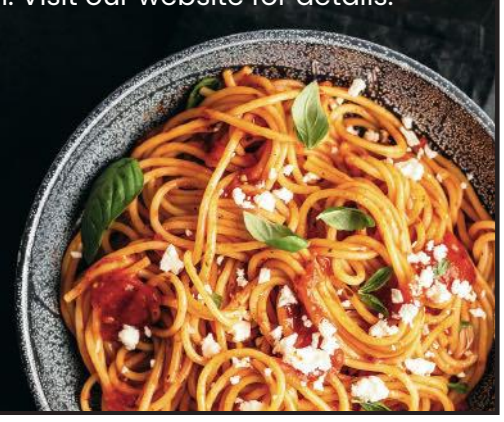
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ROTARY CLUB OF BRANDON GIVES $25,000 IN SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

By Libby Hopkins



Established in 1961, the Rotary Club of Brandon is part of a worldwide organization of business and community leaders who are dedicated to service, fellowship and making a positive difference close to home. For more than six decades, the club has brought together local professionals with a shared commitment to supporting Brandon and the surrounding area through charitable projects, community partnerships and programs that invest in the next generation.

The Rotary Club of Brandon was proud to award $25,000 in scholarships to 11 high school students from the Brandon community on June 2, including recipients of the Jacob E. Campoamor Memorial Scholarship and Sharon Sellers Memorial Scholarship.

"The Rotary Club of Brandon has presented scholarships to deserving high school seniors for as long as I can remember through the funds our club raises each year during our annual golf tournament and Wild Game Dinner," said Liz Brewer, club member and recent club president. "The students who were awarded the scholarships were from Bloomingdale, Durant, Armwood, Newsome, Strawberry Crest, Riverview and Christo Rey Tampa high schools."

The Brandon Rotary Charity Club Fund Board is made up of active Rotarians and the club's president-elect. Each year, the board carefully reviews the scholarship applications submitted by local students and determines award amounts, which can range from $1,000-$2,500 for individual recipients. The decisions are based on merit and take into consideration each student's grade-point average, involvement in community service, leadership, school activities and overall commitment to excellence in their studies. Through this process, the club looks beyond academics alone and recognizes students who have demonstrated character, perseverance and a desire to make a positive impact in their schools and communities.

The universities that the scholarship recipients will be attending in the fall include the University of South Florida, the University of Florida, Princeton University, Auburn University, Alabama State University and Florida State University. These schools represent a wide range of academic opportunities, from major public universities in Florida to respected institutions outside the state, giving the students the chance to pursue their chosen fields of study while continuing to grow as leaders.

For the Rotary Club of Brandon, helping students take this next step is an investment not only in their education but also in the future of the community they represent.

"Our hope for these students is that these scholarships will help them as they begin their college journey to offset initial expenses they will incur and start them off on the right foot," Brewer said.

To learn more about the Rotary Club of Brandon, you can visit its website at https://brandonrotary.org/index.php.



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Evening of Hope

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October 9, 2026 The Regent

AngelFoundationFL.com

Brandon/Winthrop Edition

August 2026, Vol. 21, Iss. 8

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Edited by: Jenny Bennett

EYE ON BUSINESS

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

Align Right Realty Rebrands To Elevated Realty – Raising The Standard

Effective immediately, Align Right Realty brokerage proudly announces its rebrand to Elevated Realty – Raising the Standard. While its name is changing, the foundation of the company remains the same. Elevated Realty continues under the ownership and leadership of broker/owner Lisa Tackus, with the same trusted leadership and committed agents, unwavering commitment to excellence and dedication to serving customers and the Tampa Bay community. The rebrand reflects the company's continued growth and long-term vision while honoring the relationships built over the past seven years as a brokerage and more than 21 years of real estate experience. For more information, visit www.elevatedrealtyfl.com or contact Elevated Realty at 813-563-5995.



JF Kicks Hosts Chamber Of Commerce Networking Group

Every Friday at noon, JF Kicks brings Brandon and Riverview Chamber of commerce members together for meaningful networking, lead-generating activities, engaging conversations, and plenty of opportunities to grow your business in a fun, supportive environment. Whether you're a brand-new member or you've been with the Chamber for years, there's always room for another connection—and that connection could be the one that opens your next door.

Bring your business cards, your smile, and a willingness to connect. We can't wait to meet you, learn about your business, and help you make valuable Chamber connections.

JF Kicks is located at 3345 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. Visit its website at https://jfkicksrestaurant.com/ for more information.

Meetup Group Cruise

Whether you're single, traveling solo, a couple, or coming with friends, this is a fantastic opportunity to enjoy an incredible Caribbean vacation while meeting great people along the way. Travel advisor Matthew Gordon of Cruise Planners - Venture Out Vacation has secured special group pricing and blocked staterooms just for Meetup members. This is a seven-night roundtrip Western Caribbean cruise from Saturday, October 17, through Saturday, October 24, starting from Tampa. Ports of call include Key West; Roatán, Honduras; Belize City, Belize; and Cozumel, Mexico. Plus, there are two relaxing days at sea to enjoy everything the spectacular Margaritaville at Sea Islander has to offer.

For more information or to book this cruise, please visit www.ventureoutvacation.com or call 717-856-2646.

Oh So Rustic Fall Kick-Off Event Brandon Sunday Market

The Brandon Sunday Market continues to bring together local artisans, small businesses and families through an outdoor market that highlights handmade goods and community connection.

Now organized by Oh So Rustic Home Goods Store owners Robert and Debra Ries, the market has become a gathering place where residents can shop local, discover unique products and support small businesses throughout the Brandon area.



The upcoming Fall Kick-Off Market will be Saturday, September 13, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. with local vendors, food trucks and music.

The Brandon Sunday Market is held at 788 W. Lumsden Rd. in Brandon. For more information about upcoming markets, visit www.brandonsundaymarket.com.

Chamber of Commerce Celebrates Flutterby Media's 10+ Years in Business and First Anniversary as a Chamber Member

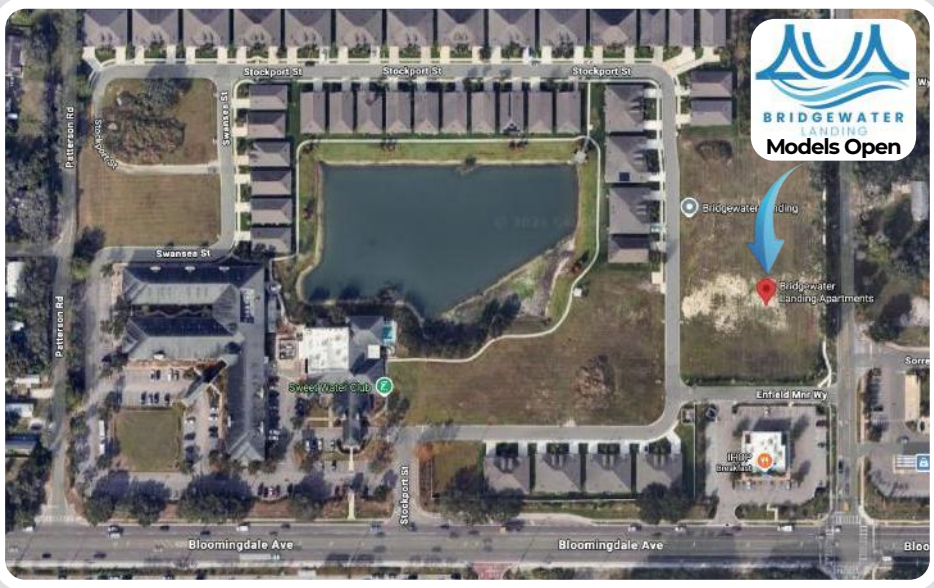
The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) recently celebrated Flutterby Media with a special Ribbon Cutting Ceremony recognizing the company's one-year anniversary as a BRCC member and more than 10 years in business.

BRCC President Amber Aaron welcomed attendees and introduced Barb Smith Gray, founder of Flutterby Media, who shared more about her company, its mission and the importance of building meaningful professional relationships both in person and online.

Flutterby Media provides LinkedIn training and consulting for professionals and businesses looking to increase their visibility, credibility and connections online. Through a relationship-driven approach, Smith Gray helps clients bring the trust and reputation they have built offline onto LinkedIn, making it easier for others to find them, understand what they do and connect with confidence.







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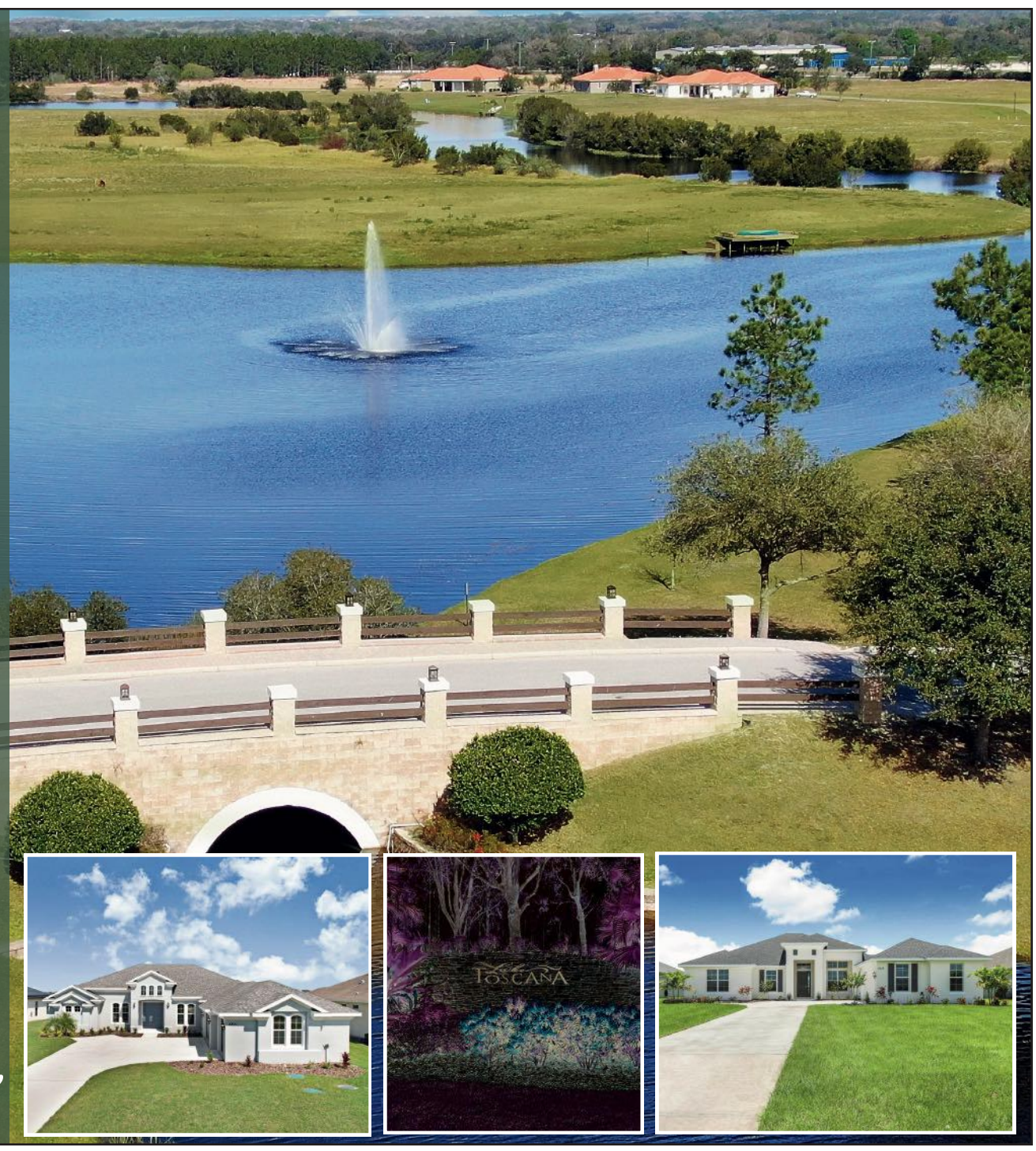
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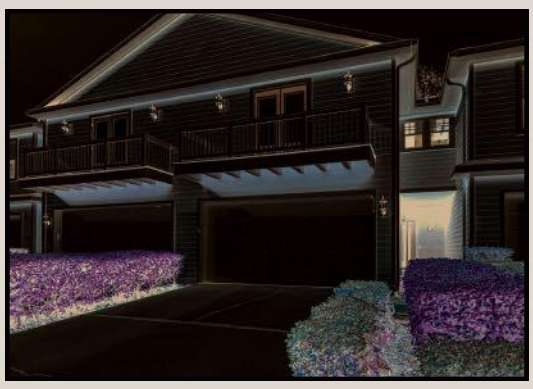
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