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FAMILY DISPLACED BY HURRICANE MILTON RECEIVES NEW STORM-RESISTANT HOME

Staff Report



"Last year, here in Tampa, we launched our new Community Disaster Resilience Initiative to help communities prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters," said Donna Epps, Verizon chief responsible business officer. "We were moved by the Range family's experience, leading us to include her family's tragic story of loss in our launch event last July. Today is truly a full-circle moment

as we welcome her family to a new home. We're proud to partner with Habitat for Humanity to support families like the Ranges with durable housing built to withstand future storms."

Through its comprehensive Community Disaster Resilience Initiative, Verizon provides preparedness resources and tools, enables access to innovative technologies and partners with like-minded organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, to keep communities safe when the next storm hits.

Like all Habitat homeowners, Michelle Range is a partner in the process, completing 'sweat equity' hours by building homes alongside volunteers and purchasing her home with an affordable mortgage that fits her family's budget.

"God is good, and together we are building my family's legacy one brick at a time," said Michelle Range. "I'm thankful to Habitat for being such a blessing to my family and so many others, and to Verizon for investing in families like mine."

Windhorst Commons is a 23-home Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough community designed to meet the growing need for affordable, disaster-resilient housing. The remaining homes are expected to be completed by early 2027.

The day began with Verizon volunteers landscaping the property, followed by a home dedication ceremony where Michelle Range received the keys to her new home, along with a quilt presentation and the family's first walkthrough of the finished home.

"This home represents stability, safety, and a fresh start for Michelle and her family after an incredibly difficult chapter," said Richard Rogers, chief development officer of Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough. "We are grateful for partners like Verizon who help us build homes, resilience and hope for families in our community."

The day began with Verizon volunteers landscaping the property, followed by a home dedication ceremony where Michelle Range received the keys to her new home, along with a quilt presentation and the family's first walkthrough of the finished home.

CHAMBER CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING OF NEW WHATABURGER LOCATION IN BRANDON

Staff Report



Representatives from the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce joined community leaders, chamber ambassadors and the Whataburger team to celebrate the grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony for Whataburger in Brandon.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly celebrated the grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony for Whataburger, welcoming the iconic restaurant to the Brandon community.

The event brought together chamber members, community leaders, and local residents for a morning of celebration, networking and support for one of the newest additions to the area's growing business community. Guests enjoyed refreshments and the opportunity to connect while officially welcoming Whataburger to Brandon.

Founded in 1950, Whataburger is widely recognized for its made-to-order burgers, signature orange-and-white branding and commitment to quality and customer service. The new Brandon location offers fan-favorite menu items, such as the honey butter chicken biscuit and spicy ketchup, continuing the brand's tradition of bold flavors and fresh ingredients that

have earned a loyal following nationwide.

"This grand opening represents more than just a new restaurant — it's a meaningful investment in our community," said Amber Aaron, chamber president. "Whataburger brings new job opportunities, supports our local economy, and provides a welcoming space for residents to gather and connect."

During the ceremony, Aaron offered remarks welcoming the business to the community and congratulating the Whataburger team on their successful opening. Following the ribbon cutting,

BRCC Ambassador Melissa Canfield read a special proclamation officially declaring the day as 'Whataburger Day,' adding to the excitement and celebration of the occasion.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is proud to support the continued growth of local businesses and looks forward to the positive impact Whataburger will bring to the community.

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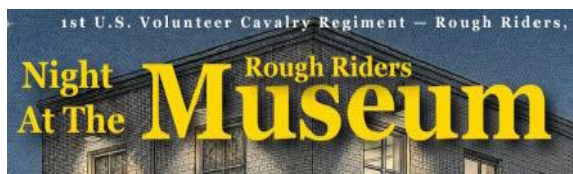
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ROUGH RIDERS BRING HISTORY TO LIFE AT THE NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM EVENT

By Kelly Wise Valdes

The Tampa Rough Riders will bring history to life on Friday, June 5, during its Night at the Museum event.



The 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment - Rough Riders Inc. was formed for the purpose of creating and perpetuating a living memorial to the unique accomplishment of President Theodore Roosevelt and the members of the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment known as 'the Rough Riders.' The Tampa Rough Riders are a Florida nonprofit corporation and a Federal 501(c)(3) charity. Since 1978 the Regiment has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars both financially and in volunteer hours. Whether providing material goods or manpower, Rough Riders live to get up close and personal with the community where they live and work.

Billy Hogan, volunteer curator for the Rough Riders Museum and lead organizer for the event, said it's an evening you won't want to miss.

"The Rough Riders' Teddy Roosevelt Museum is a series of 10 exhibits chronologically arranged in our hall," said Hogan. "We will have docents in period attire at the exhibits explaining from the Ten Years' War in Cuba (1868-78) through the end of the Spanish-American War and about our present-day organization."

This year marks the second time the Rough Riders have hosted the event.

"We accomplished this for the first time in June 2022 in what we then called History Week, the period of time in June corresponding to when the original Rough Riders were in Tampa in 1898," Hogan said.

Doors open at 5 p.m., and visitors will be guided through the museum before entering a food and beverage area. Hogan said the evening's most distinctive feature will be historical reenactors.

"The most unique part of this event will be actors impersonating Teddy and Edith Roosevelt," said Hogan. "They will conduct their performance about 6:20 p.m., and they will be followed by book author Mark Barry. At 7 p.m., we will play the movie Night at the Museum with Ben Stiller and Robin Williams. The Roosevelt actors are making their first appearance at one of our events, and we are excited to hear their recreations of Teddy and Edith."

Organizers hope to draw at least 150 attendees. The entry fee for the event is \$5 or a new teddy bear — 12 inches or larger.

Hogan emphasized the Rough Riders' long-standing charitable mission.

"Each year the Rough Riders collect, sort and store thousands of teddy bears for our teddy bear program," he said, noting that the organization donates bears to hospitals, nursing homes, foster programs and other community partners. "We also donate about \$50,000 annually through scholarships and other donations to nonprofit causes."

The Teddy Roosevelt Museum was recently named a Blue Star Museum — one of five in Tampa — and offers free admission to active-duty military families. The 2026 program runs through Labor Day, Monday, September 7.

The Rough Riders *Night at the Museum* event runs from 5-10 p.m. at 601 N. 19th St. in Tampa. For more information and registration, visit www.tamparoughriders.org.

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

Staff Report

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

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

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

Phillip's care journey included advanced respiratory support, nutritional management and more delivered by a multidisciplinary team dedicated to the most fragile patients. As a Level III NICU, HCA Florida



Brandon Hospital is equipped to care for premature and critically ill newborns requiring complex medical attention. Now, Phillip is one of the first micro-preemies (born extremely premature) to go home without any need for additional oxygen support.

Dr. Kiran Dwarakanath, NICU medical director at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, praised both Phillip's resilience and the team's commitment.

"Phillip's journey is a powerful example of what is possible with advanced neonatal care, early intervention and an unwavering team approach. Babies born this early face significant challenges, but Phillip showed incredible strength every step of the way. We are honored to have been part of his care and to support families like Michelle's through such critical moments."

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

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



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HOW PIONEER FAMILIES GAVE LOCAL ROADS THEIR NAMES

Submitted By Preserving Brandon



Photo Courtesy Of The Falkenburg Family
Circa 1890: Falkenburg family and homestead, located near present day Falkenburg and Woodberry Rd (another early pioneer family roadway namesake). The house was torn down in the late 1960s. The county misspelled Falkenburg as well, using "Faulkenburg" for decades, until it was finally corrected.

Before Brandon became one of eastern Hillsborough County's busiest suburbs, it was a quieter place of pine flatwoods, cattle trails, citrus groves, and scattered homesteads. Yet even as the landscape changed, some of the area's most familiar road names held on, carrying forward the memory of the families who helped settle this corner of Florida.

Among the most important were John and Victoria Brandon. John arrived in the New Hope area in the 1850s, and after his death, Victoria helped guide the town's early development. When the railroad came through in 1890, the Brandon name became more than a family name; it became the identity of a growing community. Victoria Street marks the north boundary of the original Brandon townsite.

The Falkenburg family farmed land along what became Falkenburg Road, a route that once crossed open country instead of commuter traffic. Over time, the road changed with Brandon's growth, but its name still points back to the area's agricultural roots and the people who worked the land long before modern development arrived.

The Gornto name became attached to both a lake and a road, linking one family to the shape of the local map. Even now, Gornto Lake Road carries a faint echo of an earlier Brandon, when water, farmland, and family holdings helped define everyday life.

The Brandon, Falkenburg, and Gornto names were not the only ones to endure. Families such as the Parsons, Lumsdens, Pearsons, Brookers, and Kings also helped shape the area, leaving behind names that still surface in local geography and community memory.

Today, it is easy to pass those road signs without a second thought. But taken together, they still tell a quiet story about the families who cleared land, built homes, and gave the community its earliest shape.

Do you know a story about one of Brandon's roads or the families behind its name? We'd love to hear it and help keep Brandon's history alive.

Preserving Brandon - Honoring Our Past, Inspiring Our Future. Contact us preserv-ingbrandon@gmail.com



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WELLNESS WARRIORS HELP ENHANCE LIVES THROUGH HOLISTIC PRACTICES

By Libby Hopkins

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

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

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

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

Leiterman introduced Kennedy to Sulli-



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



van, who happened to be a neighbor.

The three women joined together to form the Wellness Warriors.

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

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

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

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

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

TWIN BROTHERS, STUDENT LEADER HIGHLIGHT HILLSBOROUGH COLLEGE GRADUATION CEREMONY

Staff Report

Hillsborough College celebrated the achievements of its Class of 2026 during commencement ceremonies held May 1 at the Florida State Fairgrounds Expo Hall, recognizing graduates whose stories reflected perseverance, leadership and academic excellence.

Among the standout graduates were twin brothers Nathahn and Noah Jorden of the South Shore area, who completed the Collegiate Academy program at Lennard High School with identical 7.0 GPAs. The brothers will both continue their education at University of South Florida and share the same long-term goal of becoming pediatric nurse practitioners.

College officials highlighted the Jordens as an example of dedication and determination, noting the brothers balanced rigorous dual-enrollment coursework while preparing for their future health-care careers.

Another graduate recognized during commencement was Christopher Harris, whose college journey reflected significant personal growth and resilience. Harris arrived at college uncertain about his direction, but found pur-



Twin brothers Nathahn and Noah Jorden, along with student leader Christopher Harris (below), were recognized during Hillsborough College's Class of 2026 commencement ceremony on May 1 at the Florida State Fairgrounds Expo Hall in Tampa.



pose and community through the student government association.

As he became more involved on campus, Harris developed leadership skills and confidence that eventually led him to serve as Student Government Association president at the Brandon campus. College leaders said his transformation stood as a testament to the impact of mentorship, involvement and perseverance.

"Once told he wouldn't achieve anything meaningful, Christopher is graduating as a leader and someone he is proud to have become," the college shared in highlighting his accomplishments.

The commencement ceremony celebrated hundreds of graduates entering careers, universities and service opportunities across the region and beyond.

For more information about Hillsborough College, academic programs or enrollment opportunities, call 813-555-2026 or visit the college online.

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SOUL CIRCUS COWBOYS CON'T FROM PAGE 1

By Brian Bokor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That philosophy eventually led to collaborations with additional respected music industry names, including Jim Morris of Morrisound Recording, the internationally

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PLANT CITY CHORALE PRESENTS 'AMERICA AT 250: THE ONGOING STORY'

Staff Report

The Plant City Community Chorale invites the community to a powerful and thought-provoking choral concert, 'America at 250: The Ongoing Story,' to be held on Sunday, June 7, at 5 p.m. at St. Clement Catholic Church, located at 1104 N. Alexander St. in Plant City.

This compelling program reflects on the American journey—its founding ideals, struggles for justice, and continued evolution. Audiences will hear stirring patriotic selections, such as "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and the beloved "Armed Forces Medley," alongside songs that give voice to social change and resilience including "Bread and Roses" and "The Times They Are A-Changin'."

The concert also highlights historical and folk traditions with works like "Chester" and "The Erie Canal," as well as contemporary and reflective pieces, such as "Hymn for America" and "Why Have the Fallen Gone?"

Under the direction of Coleman Flentge, the Plant City Community Chorale brings these diverse works together into a cohesive musical narrative that honors the past while looking toward the future.

Tickets are \$25 (cash, debit and credit cards accepted) and are available at

AMERICA at 250

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Members of the Plant City Community Chorale rehearse selections for 'America At 250: The Ongoing Story,' a patriotic and reflective concert exploring America's history, struggles and evolving identity through music. The performance will take place Sunday, June 7, at St. Clement Catholic Church in Plant City.

www.pccchorale.org, www.facebook.com/pcccommunitychorale, from any chorale member or by texting 727-424-9661. Tickets are \$20 when purchased from a chorale member in advance. Tickets may also be purchased at the door the night of the concert. Children 12 and younger are free.

The June 7 performance is sponsored by Grow Into You Foundation and Jonathan Pittman, financial advisor.

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



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

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

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

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

By Olivia Clark

es emphasize technique, endurance and safety in all training sessions.

The reopening comes at a time when water safety remains a critical issue for families. High 5 Inc. will host the World's Largest Swimming Lesson on Thursday, June

25, from 10 a.m.-12 Noon. The free event is open to children ages 3 and older and aims to raise awareness about drowning prevention through hands-on instruction and community engagement.

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

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

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

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

LIVINGSTONE ACADEMY TRANSFORMS EDUCATION FOR UNIQUE LEARNERS

By Libby Hopkins

In 2003, Chris and Bernadette Pello of River-view felt called to open a faith-based private school for students with learning disabilities who learned differently. As the school's founders, they left their previous jobs, took a second mortgage out on their home, stepped out in faith and opened the school with one classroom and a handful of students in a small building on Bloomingdale Avenue in Valrico.



Livingstone Academy Seffner, Livingstone Academy Autism Center and Livingstone Academy Exceptional Center, are Hillsborough County's premier private schools for students with unique abilities.

They quickly realized they were going to need more space



LIVINGSTONE ACADEMIES

schools for students with unique abilities. Livingstone

to serve more students; so, in 2004, they moved to the campus of Bay Life Church in Brandon and changed the name to Bay Life Academy. In the first year as Bay Life Academy in 2004, the school had two classrooms with 36 students enrolled.

In 2007, the small school moved from the Bay Life Church campus to the property on Lenna Avenue in Seffner.

"It was then that we changed the name to Livingstone Academy," said Livingstone Academy's CEO, Kristin Lisi. "The need in the community was so great, and the word about our very special school that was founded on love, acceptance and accountability began to spread far and wide. At that time, we served students from kindergarten through eighth grade."

Livingstone Academy Seffner, Livingstone Academy Autism Center and Livingstone Academy Exceptional Center are Hillsborough County's premier private

Academy is the county's largest private school program for students with the FES-UA, FES-EO and FTC scholarships. Its strategy of a "small group learning model" ensures each student receives the individualized attention necessary to reach their greatest potential.

Enrollment for the 2026-27 school semester is currently open at Livingstone Academy.

"New students can expect a safe learning environment, where they will feel safe to ask questions and inspired to learn," Lisi said. "Many new students will find a true sense of acceptance and belonging, maybe for the first time ever in their school career."

Livingstone Academy accepts students with learning disabilities who are struggling academically, as well as students without learning disabilities.

To register, visit Livingstone Academy's website at www.livingstoneschools.org.

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MINTZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT SHOWS BRAVERY BY SAVING THE LIFE A FELLOW CLASSMATE

Donovan Enu is a bright and joyful fourth grader at Mintz Elementary School in Brandon, who truly lights up a room. He has a deep love for art, anime and video games, and his creativity shines through everything he does.

"Donovan is incredibly kind, generous, and thoughtful," said his mother and teacher at Mintz Elementary, Jennifer Kramer. "He values his friendships and always tries to make others feel included. He also has a great sense of humor and loves telling jokes to make people laugh. I am a fourth grade math and science teacher at the same school they attend, and I'm so proud to see those same qualities of curiosity and kindness growing in him."

Rowan Scalera is an amazing young boy with a big personality and an even bigger heart.

"He loves virtual reality and, like Donovan, enjoys making people laugh with his jokes," Kramer said. "Rowan is known among his peers as a loyal and dependable friend. What really stands out about him is his courage, his respect for others and he carries himself with maturity beyond his years. He's the kind of kid who naturally lifts others up and brings joy to those around him."

During lunch this past April, Donovan was sitting with his friends, eating and chatting just like any normal day. Suddenly, he felt a piece of food get stuck in his throat. At first, he tried to swallow it down and asked a friend for a drink, hoping it would help, but instead it made things worse. The food



Donovan Enu (right) and Rowan Scalera (left) are friends and students at Mintz Elementary in Brandon.

immediately recognized what was happening. While others froze in confusion and fear, Rowan stayed calm and sprang into action. He rushed around the table, positioned himself and performed the Heimlich maneuver on Donovan.

Fortunately, the food was dislodged, and Donovan was finally able to cough it up and breathe.

"Shortly after, Principal Kevin Martin ran over and helped comfort Donovan as the situation settled," Kramer said. "It was a terrifying moment that could have ended very differently, but thanks to Rowan's courage and quick thinking, it became a story of heroism."

"She (the school nurse) assured me that Donovan was OK and was in her office with her," Kramer said. "From the tone in her voice, it was clear that this was no ordinary nurse visit, and my heart dropped."

Kramer and her family feel incredibly thankful, grateful and honored that Donovan has a friend like Rowan.

"In such a chaotic and frightening moment, Rowan was the only one who remained calm and in control," Kramer said. "His bravery didn't just save Donovan; it showed true character and leadership."

By Olivia Clark

became lodged, and Donovan realized he couldn't breathe.

Panic set in. He stood up, clutching his throat, tears streaming down his face. In that frightening moment, Rowan

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

Staff Report



Nonprofit Award: A Kid's Place.



Medium Business Award: The GOAT Plumbing Company.



Large Business Award: Grease Monkey.

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

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

"This event is about our members — the small businesses, nonprofits, and service organizations that make up the foundation of our community," said Amber Aaron, chamber president. "The

chamber exists because of them, and we are proud to celebrate their achievements and contributions."

Bosley was recognized for her outstanding leadership, extensive service in law enforcement and



Citizen of the Year: Melissa Canfield.



Community Leadership Award: Col. Nikki Bosley, HCSO



Volunteer of the Year: Pat Magruder

2026 Chamber Member Awards winners:

- Emerging Business Award: Skyline Transport
- Small Business Award: 2nd Amendment Armory
- Medium Business Award: The GOAT Plumbing Company
- Large Business Award: Grease Monkey
- Nonprofit Award: A Kid's Place
- Individual award honorees:
 - Citizen of the Year: Melissa Canfield
 - Volunteer of the Year: Pat Magruder
 - Ambassador of the Year: Allie Savvides
- Community Leadership Award: Colonel Nikki Bosley, HCSO
- Business of the Year finalists:
 - Emerging Business: Camp Mirage and United Direct Lending
 - Small Business: G-Force Parking Lot Striping of Tampa and Parwani Law, P.A.
 - Medium Business: Fluent Cannabis and T&J Painting
 - Large Business: Spectrum Reach and Suncoast Credit Union
 - Nonprofit: ECHO and Easterseals Florida

restaurants and food vendors and voted for their favorite. This year's winner was Embassy Suites Tampa Brandon.

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

Celebrating Community Impact

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

Event Partners

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

About the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce

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

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MACBETH & CHEESE ANNOUNCES NEW THEATER HOME IN BRANDON

Staff Report

Brandon Performing Arts, also known as MacBeth & Cheese, is proud to announce its



MacBeth & Cheese
BRANDON PERFORMING ARTS

expansion into Brandon with the acquisition of a new performance space located at 225 E. Brandon Blvd., next to the Fox and Hound. Renovations are currently underway to transform the venue into an intimate and immersive theater space that will serve as the organization's primary home.

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

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

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

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

an experience that feels both professional and personal."

The upcoming season will feature the original thriller Murder

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

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

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

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

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

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

For updates, show announcements and ticket information, visit <https://macbethandcheese.com/>.

BRANDON ROOTS PROJECTS HELP GROW NETWORK OF VOLUNTEERS

By Olivia Clark

Brandon Roots Group, a local non-profit organization, continues to build momentum in the community through acts of service, most recently completing its third cleanup project at the historic Brandon Family Cemetery. Founded five years ago by Robert 'Stanley' Goins, the organization was created to unite residents through random acts of kindness and volunteerism while strengthening community pride.



Volunteers from Brandon Roots Group work to restore the Brandon Family Cemetery.



With a leadership team that includes Goins as founder and president, Charlie Horne as vice president and Devan Moretti as chief financial officer, Brandon Roots has steadily expanded its reach and impact. Its mission centers on fostering a strong and reliable network of volunteers dedicated to improving the local community while also preserving its history for future generations.

The recent cemetery cleanup reflects a long-standing goal for the group. According to Goins, restoring the Brandon Family Cemetery has been a priority since the organization's inception. The effort brought together 10 volunteers who spent the day clearing debris, removing overgrown vegetation and carefully cleaning headstones to restore dignity to the site. The project concluded with a full mowing of the grounds, completing a comprehensive revitalization effort and improving overall accessibility.

"As our network of volunteers contin-

ues to grow, we are constantly evolving and expanding our community engagement," said Goins.

Beyond cemetery restoration, Brandon Roots has completed a variety of service projects, including pressure washing and tree removal for elderly residents in need, as well as hosting free summer barbecues that encourage neighbors to connect. The organization also active-

ly participates in local events such as the Fourth of July parade, where it earned first place in 2025, along with both the Plant City and Brandon Lighted Christmas Parades.

The group's continued growth highlights its commitment to building meaningful connections through service. By focusing on both immediate community needs and long-term preservation efforts, Brandon Roots is creating a lasting and visible impact throughout the area.

"We want the community to know that Brandon Roots is here to foster connection through service," said Goins. "We are always looking for more volunteers and support to continue our mission."

Residents interested in getting involved can connect with Brandon Roots through its social media platforms.

For more information, contact Stan-goins0821@gmail.com or call 813-359-4800.

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Catsino Night, VBS, ReCreate Camp & More.....

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Catsino Night Fundraiser For A Kitten Place

Join A Kitten Place for its inaugural Catsino Night on Friday, June 5, at Center Place Fine Arts & Civic Association in Brandon. The event is presented by the Fuddy Fund and will be an unforgettable evening supporting A Kitten Place and all the lifesaving work it does for kittens and cats in need. Tickets are \$75 and include casino-style gaming, food, beverages and a fun, high-energy night with fellow animal lovers. Tickets are available at <https://akittenplace.org/events/>.

Hillsborough County Public Schools Recognized As A 2026 Best Community For Music Education

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) has once again been named a Best Community for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation, a national honor that celebrates school districts demonstrating a strong commitment to providing comprehensive, high-quality music education for all students. The designation reflects the passion, professionalism and dedication of HCPS music educators, whose efforts ensure students across the district have meaningful opportunities to learn, perform and grow through music. From classroom

instruction to performances, advocacy and community collaboration, HCPS music programs continue to make a lasting impact on students and the broader community.

"Being recognized once again at a national level is a testament to the passion and commitment of our music educators," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "Because of their work, students throughout our district experience high-quality music education and arts programs that inspire creativity, build discipline and foster collaboration at every grade level."



A KITTEN PLACE

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

Vacation Bible School At First Presbyterian Church Of Brandon

First Presbyterian Church of Brandon, located at 121 Carver Ave. in Brandon, invites families in the community to register for its upcoming vacation Bible school (VBS), Illumination Station, taking place Monday through Friday, June 22-26, from 8:45 a.m.-12 Noon each day. Designed for children ages 3 through completed fifth grade, this engaging and faith-centered program offers a week of learning, activities and fun in a welcoming environment. Participants must be potty trained. The registration fee is \$25 per child. This year's theme, Illumination Station, promises an exciting experience filled

with interactive lessons, crafts, music and opportunities for children to grow in faith and friendship. Attendees are encouraged to bring friends along — there may even be an extra surprise in store.

Additional details and online registration are available at <https://fpcbrandon.org/event/vbs/>.

School Board Member Honored With Distinguished Leader Award

Hillsborough County School Board Member Patti Rendon has received the Distinguished Leader Award from the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA), recognizing outstanding leadership and a commitment to effective school board governance that supports student success.

The Distinguished Leader Award recognizes board members who demonstrate dedication to professional learning, leadership development and governance excellence. Recipients must first earn both the Certified Board Member (CBM) and Advanced Certified Board Member (ACBM) designations through FSBA.

"School board members who earn this award go above and beyond in their commitment to effective governance and public service," said Tina Pinkoson, direc-

tor of leadership services for the Florida School Boards Association. "By earning the Distinguished Leader Award, member Rendon demonstrates outstanding leadership, a commitment to continuous learning and a lasting positive impact on students, schools and their community."

The Florida School Boards Association is the statewide professional association representing Florida's 67 elected school boards.



ReCreate Camp Turns Trash Into Treasure

Recreate Camp at Creative Junk Therapy will use and repurpose everyday items to create one-of-a-kind masterpieces. Campers will learn how simple materials, basic techniques and some imagination can be combined to make extraordinary creations. Each



week will work on a new project, and camps run every week in June and July. The cost is \$125 per week, or \$30 per day; add a child and get \$25 off a week. This camp is suitable for children ages 7 and over. Creative Junk Therapy is located at 772 W. Lumsden Rd. in Brandon. For additional information, visit www.creativejunktherapy.org/our-events or call 813-324-9777.



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BRANDON MEALS ON WHEELS MARKS 50 YEARS OF SERVING NEIGHBORS

By Libby Hopkins

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

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

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

Volunteers delivered meals through COVID and hurricanes as long as it was



Greater Brandon



safe for its drivers. Many of these volunteers were honored at the recent celebration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

FLVS FLEX OFFERS TUITION-FREE SUMMER COURSES FOR STUDENTS

Staff Report

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

academic plans.

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

Course Offerings

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

Middle school courses include:

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

High school courses include:

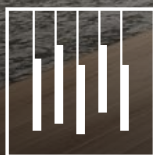
- Career Research and Decision Making
- Critical Thinking and Study Skills
- Driver Education/Traffic Safety
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- HOPE - Physical Education (Core)
- Leadership Skills Development
- Life Management Skills
- Outdoor Education
- Personal Fitness

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ALL ABOARD: HENRY'S HIDDEN TRAIN HUNT BRINGS FUN TO PLANT CITY

By Brian Bokor

Families looking for a free, interactive way to explore downtown Plant City can hop aboard a new adventure that blends history, discovery and a bit of mystery.

Henry's Hidden Train Hunt invites residents and visitors to search for 10 hidden trains scattered throughout the downtown district. The self-guided activity begins at the Robert W. Willaford Railroad Museum, where participants can pick up a free map and clues or download a printable version in advance.

From there, the hunt is on.

Using the provided clues, participants will navigate downtown streets in search of each hidden train, solving fill-in-the-blank trivia along the way. Once all 10 trains have been located and the trivia has been completed, hunters can return to the museum during regular hours to claim a prize.

Organizers said the event is designed to be flexible and family-friendly, allowing participants to start their hunt at any time and explore at their own pace. It's also an opportunity to experience the charm of downtown Plant City while learning a bit about its railroad roots.

Participants are encouraged to share their experience on social media using the hashtag #HenrysHiddenTrains, though or-



ganizers ask that the exact train locations remain a secret to keep the challenge fun for others.

The event is presented by Historic Plant City Main Street, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving and revitalizing the city's historic downtown. As part of the national Main Street America network, the organization focuses on strengthening the local economy while celebrating the area's cultural heritage.

Known for hosting community favorites such as Oktoberfest, Last Friday and the Strawberry Drop, Historic Plant City Main Street continues to create engaging events that bring people together while supporting local businesses and attractions.

Henry's Hidden Train Hunt builds on that mission, offering a playful way for families to connect with the community, discover local landmarks and enjoy time together — no tickets required.

With clues to solve, trains to find and prizes waiting at the finish line, the event promises a memorable outing for all ages, right in the heart of downtown.

Visit the main street website at www.plantcitymainstreet.org/hiddentrains for the free downloadable train map.



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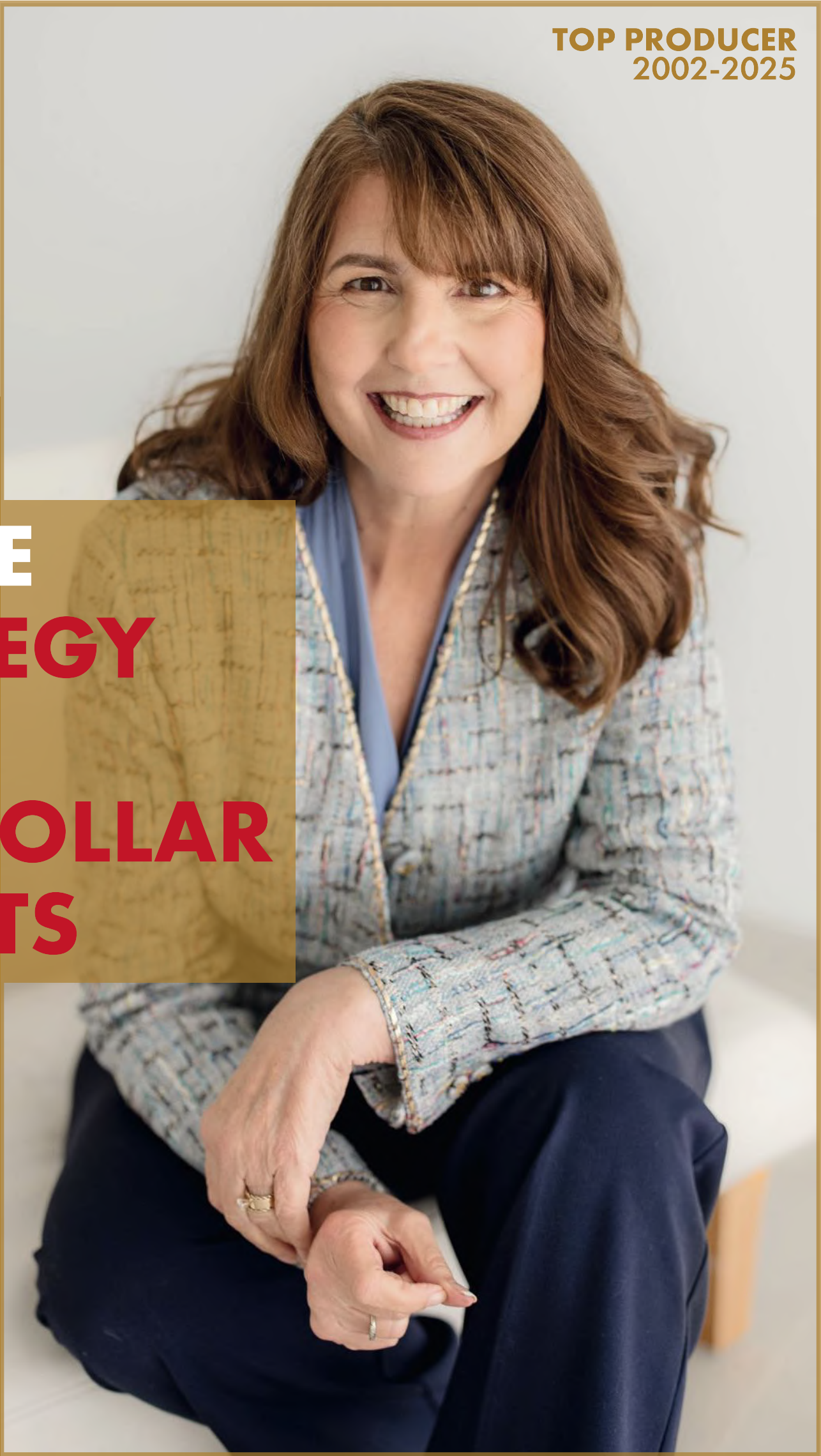
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PERSONAL CARE AT THE HEART OF SUN CITY CENTER FUNERAL HOME

By Olivia Clark

Sun City Center Funeral Home has built its reputation on providing compassionate care and personalized services for families during some of life's most difficult moments. Since



Staff members at Sun City Center Funeral Home provide compassionate, personalized care to families in the community.

becoming part of Foundation Partners Group in January 2017, the funeral home has maintained its family-oriented atmosphere while continuing to serve the community with dignity and respect.

Established with a mission centered on honoring each life, Sun City Center Funeral Home focuses on guiding families through the grieving process with understanding and support. Nicole Sharp, funeral director, emphasized the organization's commitment to thoughtful service.

"Our mission has always been to honor each life with dignity, respect and meaningful tribute while supporting families with guidance and understanding every step of the way," said Sharp.

What distinguishes the funeral home is its deep connection to the local community. Its staff actively participates in organizations such as the Sun City Center Rotary, the Southshore Chamber of Commerce and the Daughters of the American Revolution, while also supporting causes including the Walk to End Alzheimer's and the Out of the Darkness Walk.

"We take the time to listen and understand each family's wishes, ensuring every service reflects the unique life being

honored," said Sharp.

Sun City Center Funeral Home offers a full range of services, including traditional funerals, memorial services, cremation options and celebration of life gatherings. Personal-

ization plays a central role, allowing families to incorporate meaningful elements such as music, hobbies, cultural traditions and special tributes.

In addition to its general services, the funeral home takes pride in honoring veterans. With a former member of the military on staff, it assists families in securing military honors, coordinating with national cemeteries and incorporating patriotic elements into services.

"It is a true honor to serve veterans and their families," said Sharp.

Beyond services, the team remains committed to supporting families long after arrangements are complete, offering guidance, resources and a compassionate presence.

"We want residents to know that we are here not only in times of loss, but also for pre-planning and guidance or simply for a cup of coffee and a chat," said Sharp.

For the staff, the most meaningful aspect of their work is helping families find comfort during difficult times.

Sun City Center Funeral Home is located at 1851 Rickenbacker Dr., Sun City Center, FL 33573. For more information, call 813-279-8330.

VALRICO FOUNDERS TABLE PROVIDES CONNECTION FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

By Jane Owen



Every week in Valrico, local business owners meet over coffee to talk about their businesses, what's working and not working and how to grow successfully. They meet to assist each other with problems, brainstorm how to improve processes, and connect.

The Valrico Founders Table meets twice weekly at Chill Cawfee on Lithia Pinecrest Road. There are no dues, no business pitches and no pressure. The group has a question for discussion, time to share wins and failures and offer praise or 'shout-outs' to each other.

Connor Blackmon owns the Heroes Fitness gym in Valrico. During the summer of 2025, he started the Valrico Founders Table with a desire to connect with other local business owners. At the time, Blackmon was feeling the frustration of a business valley or a dip in revenue. Inspired by the mastermind principle in the book Think and Grow Rich, by Napoleon Hill, Blackmon posted in a community page on Facebook that he wanted to start a Friday morning coffee club for like-minded, service-based business owners who wanted to work together towards improvement.

"I didn't have a lot of expectations going into this. I went into this saying I want to

connect with people, and I want a place where I can talk about my struggles — more than anything, because I was struggling at the time," Blackmon said.

The group began meeting on Fridays in July 2025. It grew quickly and added a second meeting on

Wednesdays at lunchtime.

"It's evolved into a support group. It's a place for business owners to connect and share insights. It's a place where you can be vulnerable and be heard as well," Blackmon said.

Patti Sutherland, national marketplace director for Christians in Business, said she loves the Valrico Founders Table because it is not a pitch group.

"Connor has put together a group of young and older entrepreneurs who share ideas and experiences. The exchanges every meeting are different because of the questions he brings every time we meet. I have learned a lot from this group, and I think some of my expertise has been appreciated too," Sutherland said.

Chill Cawfee owner Tom Quigley said the Valrico Founders Table creates real connection that benefits the community.

"When local founders support each other, it builds a stronger, more resilient community," Quigley said.

The Valrico Founders Table meets at Chill Cawfee, located at 3407 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico, on Wednesdays at 12:30 p.m. and Fridays at 8 a.m. The Valrico Founders Table can be found as a public group on Facebook.

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AMERICAN SEWING GUILD BRANDON WINS BIG AT STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

By Libby Hopkins



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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TESSERA SENIOR COMMUNITY REIMAGINED AS AMBIANCE AT BRANDON

By Marie Gilmore

A familiar senior living community in Brandon is entering a new chapter under new ownership, bringing a refreshed vision while maintaining its longstanding commitment to care.

Now known as Ambiance at Brandon, the community formerly operated as Tessera of Brandon continues to offer assisted living and memory care services for seniors, including those living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Providence Senior Living is a private company, backed by senior housing developers, that functions as an owner/operator of senior living communities exclusively in Florida. Thanks to the new ownership, Ambiance at Brandon is now locally owned and managed. It believes senior care is meant to be hands-on and that every life it touches is a member of its family.

That's why it carefully chose its team members for its passion and senior living backgrounds. Its team has more than 75 years of assisted living and memory care management experience combined, residents are known from the top down and its executives are integrated into daily operations. It is committed to serving residents in a manner that aligns with its Providence Senior Living pillars: love, empowerment, excellence and purpose. With new leadership in place, the goal is to blend enhanced amenities and updated programming with a resident-centered approach that prioritizes individual preferences and daily routines.

The transition reflects a broader investment in elevating both the environment



and experience for residents and their families. Community leaders said the focus remains on creating a supportive, engaging atmosphere where residents can maintain independence while receiving personalized assistance when needed.

Residents at Ambiance at Brandon have access to a range of services designed to simplify daily life and promote well-being. These include restaurant-style dining across multiple venues, weekly housekeeping and laundry, scheduled transportation and help with activities of daily living. On-site therapies and a fitness center featuring specialized HUR equipment are also available to support physical health.

Beyond essential services, the community emphasizes lifestyle and connection. Residents can spend time outdoors on landscaped patios, relax under a gazebo, stroll through garden paths and take part in recreational activities such as bocce ball, pool and putt-putt golf. Social opportunities and structured activities are designed to encourage engagement while respecting each resident's pace and interests.

Jill Andrew, marketing director, said the transition represents "new owners, same heart," emphasizing continuity in care alongside thoughtful improvements.

They invite prospective residents and families to visit, meet staff, and explore whether the updated Ambiance lifestyle is the right fit.

Ambiance at Brandon is located at 1320 Oakfield Dr. Brandon. For more information, visit www.ambiancebrandon.com.

'ART OF READING' PROGRAM OPENS CHALLENGE FOR ALL AGES

Staff Report



The Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative is inviting residents of all ages to turn the page on summer boredom by joining its annual Summer Reading Challenge, with registration opening Monday, May 25.

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

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

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

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

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

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

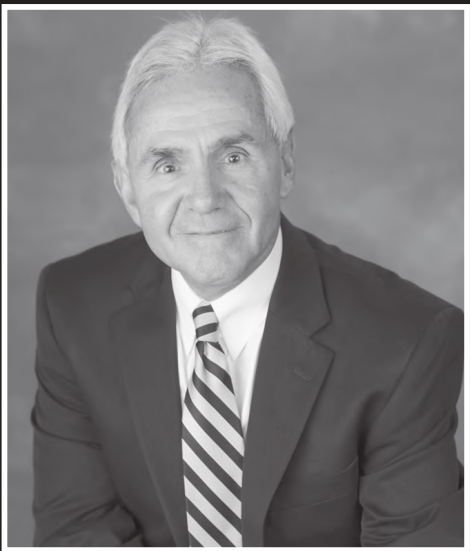
Additionally, readers can participate in 'Score Through Stories,' another incentive-based program that rewards reading time. Rogers noted that hours logged count across all programs, giving participants more chances to win.

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

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

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

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TAX COLLECTOR LAUNCHES BUS BRINGING SERVICES TO RESIDENTS

Staff Report



Hillsborough County Tax Collector Nancy Millan announced the launch of MILES (Mobile IDs, Licenses and Essential Services), a mobile service center bringing key tax collector services directly into neighborhoods. Services offered include driver licenses, IDs, property tax payments, vehicle registration renewals, handicap placards and vehicle titles.

"MILES is about accessibility and convenience. Not everyone can get to an office, so we're bringing the office to them," said Millan. "Whether you're a senior, a small business owner or a family juggling a busy schedule, MILES makes it easier to stay up to date on registrations, renewals and essential services. We're committed to ensuring no community is left behind."

Accessibility features include: An ADA-compliant ramp, widened entry and maneuverable interior space, lower counters and bilingual signage and Staff trained for disability and seniors.

"MILES will make a meaningful difference for seniors and underserved communities," added Hillsborough County Commissioner Gwen Myers. "For many families,

something as simple as renewing a registration or updating paperwork can become a real hardship. This mobile resource helps lift that burden and ensures our most vulnerable residents aren't left behind."

MILES will begin a scheduled rotation of senior centers, rural communities, libraries and major neighborhood events. Residents can learn more about MILES at www.milesbushctc.com.

MILES is a first-of-its-kind commitment to proactive public service — one that moves beyond traditional office walls to bring real, in-person tax collector services directly into the neighborhoods, senior centers, business districts and community spaces that make up Hillsborough County.

This initiative is part of Millan's ongoing commitment to accessible government services. MILES is a fully equipped mobile service unit that travels directly into Hillsborough County communities, bringing IDs, driver licenses, registration renewals and other essential tax collector services to residents where they live, work and gather.

If you are interested in requesting a MILES appearance, visit www.hillstaxfl.gov/miles-bus/.

EXPRESS OIL CHANGE & TIRE ENGINEERS OPENS NEW LOCATION

By Olivia Clark

A new automotive service option has arrived in Riverview with the opening of Express Oil Change & Tire Engineers. The new location is designed to provide convenience, efficiency and comprehensive vehicle care for local residents, eliminating the need to navigate heavy traffic along Big Bend Road for routine maintenance and repairs.

Owner Jeremy Persinger said the decision to open in Riverview was driven by a clear need in the community.

"We wanted to give customers a more convenient location to service their vehicles and avoid the congestion on Big Bend Road," said Persinger.

The facility offers a wide range of services, combining speed with full-service automotive care. Customers can remain in their vehicles for oil changes completed in less than 15 minutes while also having access to more extensive services, including tires, brakes, alignments, diagnostics, electrical work and major engine and transmission repairs.

What sets the business apart is its ability to deliver both quick oil changes and comprehensive automotive services under one roof. According to Persinger, this dual capability is unique within the market and designed to meet the varying needs of busy customers.

The opening also represents a broader



Express Oil Change owner Jeremy Persinger.

impact beyond automotive services. Persinger emphasized that the new location brings job opportunities to the area while contributing positively to the local economy.

Community involvement is already a priority. The business is sponsoring Sumner High School, located nearby, and continues to support pediatric cancer initiatives through 'Round Up' programs. Persinger has also served as a board member with the National Pediatric Cancer Foundation for nearly 20 years, supporting clinical trials for children across the United States.

To celebrate the grand opening, customers can take advantage of promotional offers, including 50 percent off any oil change when using an Express Oil Change & Tire Engineers card and 25 percent off future oil changes with the card.

Additional conveniences include no appointment requirements for oil changes, same-day service on most repairs and Saturday hours for those unable to visit during the workweek. The location also stocks more than 1,000 tires to meet a wide range of vehicle needs.

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MEET PETERKIN: HIGH 5, INC AQUATIC DIRECTOR AND FORMER OLYMPIAN

By Emily Harper



Jamie Peterkin is the aquatic director and head coach of Blue Wave Swimming at High 5 Inc. He started with the organization almost five years ago as the head age group coach. Since then, he has worked his way up to the roles he holds today.

Peterkin was born in Barbados and raised in Saint Lucia. Growing up in the Caribbean, he has many memories of going to the beach, being outside and playing different sports. At age 16, he was awarded an Olympic Solidarity scholarship for swimming at Pine Crest High School in Fort Lauderdale and was coached by Jay Fitzgerald.

Two years later, at age 18, Peterkin was selected to represent Saint Lucia in the 2000 Sydney Olympics. There, he and his teammate, Sherri Scobbie Henry, became the first male and female swimmers to represent Saint Lucia at the Olympics.

"This opportunity sparked my desire to give back to my country, and it guided me to become a swim coach, as well as being raised by a swim coach, my dad, David," said Peterkin.

He started to coach in 2007, which opened up many more opportunities for

him to represent his country. He became Saint Lucia's national team coach and eventually returned to the Olympic stage as a coach.

Because of his reputation in the swimming world, he was invited to provide live broadcast commentary for the swimming events of the 2008 and 2010 Olympics for the Caribbean. Additionally, Peterkin hosted several sports radio shows in Saint Lucia, along with a weekly show with his father called AquaScope, to promote aquatic sports and safety. Now, he co-hosts a podcast called *Cinco Squad* with his close friends, which he has been doing for the past four years.

Peterkin uses his past experiences in the sports world, specifically swimming, to succeed in his role with High 5 Inc. He strives to not only be a caring coach but also to build camaraderie within his program, creating a second family for his athletes.

"Coaching isn't for the faint of heart, but getting to really know these families and kids and becoming part of their life beyond the pool is awesome," said Peterkin.

For more info on swim and aquatic programs, visit www.high5inc.org/

A KID'S PLACE OF TAMPA BAY CELEBRATES LIVES CHANGED DURING FOSTER CARE AWARENESS MONTH

Staff Report



May is National Foster Care Awareness Month. This is a time to help shine a light on more than 4,000 children in foster care across the Tampa Bay area. At A Kid's Place of Tampa Bay, this month reminds us of our mission: To provide a safe, loving and nurturing home for children in foster care. Since opening our doors in 2009, we have helped more than 1,700 children and over 750 families. We are able to care for children from newborns to 18 years old on our main campus, and we are also proud to have expanded our services through our Extended Foster Care program, supporting young adults ages 18-23 as they transition into adulthood.

Every day at A Kid's Place is centered around creating stability, comfort and normalcy for the children who call our campus home. From school support and counseling to fun activities and shared meals, our goal is to make sure each child feels safe, valued and supported while they are with us. To help our community better understand the heart of our mission, we want to introduce you to some of the incredible young people who live at A Kid's Place. While every child has their own unique story, they all share the same hopes: to be heard, to be supported and to be treated just like any other kid.

We sat down with four of our teens and tweens for a very special 'Take 5' conversation to learn more about them beyond their circumstances. We talked about their favorite foods, hidden talents, funniest moments, dream vacations and the activities they are most excited to try this summer. Their answers were full of personality, creativity and resilience. This small glimpse into their lives reminds us that foster care is not just about placement; it is about childhood, growth and possibility. These kids are more than their circumstances; they are athletes, friends and dreamers.

When siblings Emma (8) and Lucas (7) arrived at our home, they carried visible trauma. Both struggled academically, had difficulty regulating emotions and were physically withdrawn. Most of all, they were terrified of being separated — something they had already endured once before. Today, Emma is reading above grade level and leads her class with confidence. Lucas, once silent, is now joyful, engaged and thriving socially. Their health has improved; their laughter has returned, and — most importantly — their trust has been restored. We are proud to share that Emma and Lucas are currently in the process of being fostered-to-adopt by a loving young couple, ready to provide them with a permanent home — together.

We invite you to take a moment this month to learn more, show support and help us continue building a place where children feel safe, seen and loved.

Visit our website, <https://akidsplacetb.org/>, or call 813-381-3839 to learn more.

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BRANDON ROTARY DEDICATES HISTORICAL MARKER AT CLUB HOUSE

Staff Report



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

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

Established 1890

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

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

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

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

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

LOCAL NONPROFIT SOUNDING JOY HELPS AREA CHILDREN WITH ACCESS TO HEARING AIDS

By McKenzie Brown

Sounding Joy, a non-profit organization, focused on providing hearing aids to children who's families can't afford them, so they can be the best they can be. The main goal of Sounding Joy is to try and reduce then chance of the kids later in life to become addicted to substances and to reduce the chances of suicide as a young adult.

At the age of 11, the founder of the organization, Christy Vogel was diagnosed as hard of hearing and unconsciously taught herself to read people's lips. Because she occasionally responded slowly when having conversation, people assumed she was not smart, which damaged her confidence. Having no access to hearing aids because of challenges presented by finances, she struggled until her 20s, when she was finally able to buy her first pair. They transformed her life, helping her flourish professionally. In 2021, Christy founded Sounding Joy, working with providers such as Tampa Children's ENT, USF Audiology, and John Hopkins All Children's, the organization that has helped more than 100 children in the Tampa Bay area get hearing aids.

Dr. Cecilia Camacho is a board member and an audiologist who has fitted more than 70 of the kids through Tampa Children's ENT. She shared a story about a 14 year old boy named Logan. She said, "His experience changed the way I work and



provide the best to all children." Logan had an initial test done when he was three, but they showed very slight hearing loss when he started kindergarten, and Camacho recommended a classroom system in order to hear his teachers better, but she didn't think that he had enough hearing loss at the time to justify hearing aids. Camacho reported that Logan loved the classroom system and told her, "I want to hear well ALL the time, not just at school." Camacho says, "Ever since then, I look at all kids with slight hearing losses as being potential candidates for hearing aids. He has done great with his aids and uses them every day. His last set of hearing aids was funded through Sounding Joy, and he uses them to hear his family cheer for him from the stands when he is playing baseball, which he didn't hear before he had hearing aids."

Vogel mentions that there are two days in the kids' Sounding Joy journey. The first day they say is called "Approval Day," where the kid's parents are told they have been approved to have their hearing aids paid for by Sounding Joy. The second day is when they get their hearing aids and they get pictures and stories about the fitting.

Sounding Joy is located at 330 3rd St S Unit 1706, St Petersburg, FL 33701. For additional information, you can email them at info@soundingjoy.org or call them at 813-526-1870.



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HCA BRANDON AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS, INCLUDING TWO \$20,000 AWARDS

Staff Report



Madeline Estabrook
Bloomingdale High



Shayla Commons
Brandon High



Izabel Wiltz
Lennard High



Aditi Menon
Middleton High



Emma Kasting
Newsome High



Bradon Martis
Riverview High



Claudia Maguire
Riverview High

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital recognized seven high school seniors from across Hillsborough County with college scholarships totaling \$45,000. Five students received the HCA Florida Brandon Hospital Healthcare Achievement Award, worth \$1,000 each, and two students received the HCA Florida Brandon Hospital and Physicians Healthcare Scholars Award, worth \$20,000 each. Students from approximately 30 public and private high schools, as well as homeschooled students, were considered.

"Each of these students shared their personal 'why' behind choosing health care as a future profession," said Dr. Anthony Furiato, emergency room physician at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital. "Their dedication, hard work and diverse career goals will enrich the health care community. Some are inspired by loved ones who received life-changing care, while others are drawn to specialties such as anesthesiology, occupational therapy and cancer treatment. HCA Flor-



ida Brandon Hospital and our medical staff are proud to collaborate in recognizing this outstanding group of future health care leaders."

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital and Physicians Healthcare Scholars Award

The HCA Florida Brandon Hospital and Physicians Healthcare Scholars Award is a highly competitive \$20,000 scholarship jointly funded by HCA Florida Brandon Hospital and its medical staff. Recipients must plan to attend the University of South Florida.

Recipients:

- Bloomingdale High School: Madeline Estabrook
- Middleton High School: Aditi Menon.

Hospital leaders will present the award to Estabrook and Menon during their respective school awards ceremonies.

Recipients:

- Brandon High School: Shayla Commons
- Lennard High School: Izabel Wiltz
- Newsome High School: Emma Kasting
- Riverview High School: Claudia Maguire and Bradon Martis.

Members of the HCA Florida Brandon Hospital leadership team will present the Healthcare Achievement Awards to each student.

All scholarship recipients submitted essays describing how they hope to make a difference through a career in health care.

For more information, visit <https://www.hcafloridahealthcare.com/locations/brandon-hospital>.

The HCA Florida Brandon Hospital Healthcare Achievement Award recognizes students for strong academic performance, extracurricular involvement and a demonstrated interest in pursuing a career in health care. Each recipient received a \$1,000 scholarship.



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DAVID WEEKLEY HOMES MARKS 30 YEARS OF BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Staff Report



David Weekley Homes, one of the largest privately held national home builders, is celebrating 30 years of home building in the Tampa area this year. The company was founded in Houston, Texas, in 1976, and expanded to Tampa in 1996. Today, the company builds in more than 35 communities.

"Celebrating 30 years in the Tampa market is a milestone we're truly grateful for," said Kristina Lloyd, division president of David Weekley Homes in Tampa. "We're proud of the communities we've built, the people behind them and enhancing the lives of our customers and those in the communities where we work and live through our volunteer efforts. This journey has been incredibly rewarding, and we look forward to continuing that momentum in the years ahead."

Over the company's 30 years in Tampa and surrounding areas, the builder has enjoyed several notable milestones. Since opening in 1996, the company has closed more than 6,900 homes in the Tampa area. The company has built in many communities throughout Tampa, including Encore at FishHawk Ranch, Waterset, Barrington Preserve, Hidden Lakes and Magnolia Creek. David Weekley Homes has earned more than 150

David Weekley Homes prides itself on enhancing lives by giving back to the community. The company's outreach program, CARE, is a charitable and volunteer program that joins team members with homeowners, homebuyers, community partners and local nonprofit organizations to live out the company's purpose of 'building dreams, enhancing lives.' This is accomplished by team members volunteering countless hours to different organizations in their communities and Dovetail Impact Foundation donating more than \$340 million in the past 35 years.

Locally in Tampa, David Weekley Homes partners with many organizations, including BridgePoint Church – Building Beds, Feeding Tampa Bay, United Way Suncoast, Gigi's Playhouse Tampa, 9/11 Day of Service, Ronald McDonald House Charities Tampa Bay, ShowerUp Tampa Bay and OneBlood. The division also participates in companywide events, such as Build Month, the School Supplies Drive and the Giving Thanks, Giving Back Thanksgiving Drive.

For more information about David Weekley Homes in Tampa, contact 813-774-4155.

Tampa-area awards, including more than 120 for product design.

In addition to a commitment to excellence in home building and customer satisfaction,

LEADERSHIP CLASS COMPLETES LEGACY PROJECT BENEFITING A KID'S PLACE

Staff Report

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

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

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

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

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

Additional excitement was provided by



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

The class dedicated a full day of service to completing the project and worked together to purchase supplies, build, and install four custom benches

with attached planters surrounding the children's play area.

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

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

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

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

By Jay Braden



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

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

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

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

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

Parents often describe the program as life-changing. Beyond the physical benefits of exercise, participants develop social

skills and independence. Many form lasting friendships, while others discover a newfound confidence that carries into other areas of their lives.

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

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

As the program has grown, so too has its influence. Organizations in other regions have looked to TFF as a blueprint for devel-

oping inclusive sports programming, thus demonstrating that such initiatives can be both impactful and sustainable. Moore and her team have helped significantly to broaden access to recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

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

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

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

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

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

SUPPORT CHRIS CIULLA FOR HONORARY MAYOR OF EAST HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Meet Chris Ciulla, the former executive who swapped his corporate cape for a chef's apron and is now a culinary crusader in East Hillsborough County!

Since planting his roots in the local scene, Chris has been a whirlwind of community spirit; championing small businesses, rallying for nonprofits, and throwing himself into initiatives like a party planner on a mission. Whether he's hosting shindigs, volunteering his time, or crafting alliances, Chris is the local hero with a heart of gold!

IN BENNEFIT OF:



FUNDRAISING EVENTS:

- Monday, June 1**
KICK OFF EVENT
- Tuesday, June 9**
Boot Scootin' Bingo - BINGO + Line Dancing
- Saturday, June 13**
Sit, Stay & Sip - All Day Dog Party
- Friday, June 19**
Mayoral Royale Casino Night & Chef Soiree at The Regent
- Saturday, June 27**
Chris Rocks The Vote - Music Festival

Chris for
Honorary
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June 11th
Music Bingo 6:00 pm
@ Tiki Docks River Bar & Grill

June 19th
Chef Soirée
Doors Open 6:30 pm
@ The Regent

June 26th
The Amazing Race 6:00 pm
@ Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale
To Register, email
Glaros4mayor@gmail.com

I'm running for the 2026 Honorary Mayor of East Hillsborough with a simple mission: to support and amplify the organizations already doing meaningful work in our community.

For more than 20 Years, I've served Tampa Bay families as an attorney, focusing on family law and personal injury. I've helped people through some of life's most difficult moments, which has shown me how important strong support systems truly are. Before opening my firm, I served as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Florida, reinforcing my commitment to advocacy and standing up for others.

Outside of work, I'm a proud father of two. Like many families here, we're focused on raising our children with strong values, responsibility, and a commitment to showing up for others.

That perspective is what led me to support the organizations behind this campaign.

High 5 Inc provides after-school programs, mentorship, and opportunities that give kids a safe place to grow and succeed. The Impact Program equips young people with the tools to make informed decisions through education, prevention, and character development. Raining Cats and Dogs Shelter and Sanctuary cares for animals while promoting compassion, responsibility, and community values.

This campaign is an opportunity to make a real impact. You can get involved by attending events, sponsoring, donating, or helping spread awareness.

At the end of the day, what we do here matters. The way we show up for our community matters. The opportunity to make a difference is right in front of us.



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TOO BLESSED TO BE STRESSED AUTHOR LAUNCHES NEW DEVOTIONAL SERIES

By Olivia Clark

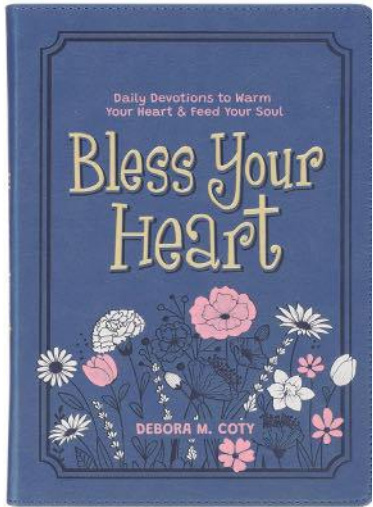
Debora Coty has spent two decades helping women trade burnout for peace through a blend of biblical truth, practical strategy and humor. The Central Florida author and inspirational speaker is best known for the *Too Blessed To Be Stressed* brand, a collection of more than 35 products that includes books, devotionals, journals, planners, a cookbook and calendars. Coty stated that the series has sold over 2 million copies.

"Many women sprint along on the just-get-it-done treadmill with no inkling how to get off," said Coty. "That's the goal of all my Too Blessed To Be Stressed books, ... to offer practical tools and strategies for dealing with stress so that it's manageable, not crushing."

Coty's perspective is shaped by a long career as an occupational therapist specializing in orthopedics. She said physicians referred patients to her for help with managing injuries and pain tied to constant stress. Coty pairs work simplification techniques and therapeutic suggestions with Scripture and what she calls "lots of giggles" to address stress physi-



Debora Coty is a Central Florida author and speaker known for the *Too Blessed To Be Stressed* series and her new devotional, *Bless Your Heart: Daily Devotions to Warm Your Heart & Feed Your Soul*.



cally, spiritually and emotionally.

"I love it that my books have been called 'biblical truth gift-wrapped in humor,'" Coty said. "I believe that laughter is a catalyst for releasing the joy of the Lord in our spirits."

That approach carries into her newest release, *Bless Your Heart: Daily Devotions to Warm Your Heart & Feed Your Soul*, a 365-day devotional that marks the start of a new series. Coty said she stepped away from steady writing after 2019 amid years of family loss and health challenges.

"The gal who encouraged others to look for the funny anywhere," she said.

Coty said a publisher later approached her about writing another yearlong devotional, a project she initially declined. After revisiting a Corrie ten Boom quote about attempting something so big it would fail without God's help, Coty began writing again. The manuscript took 18 months, she said, and ultimately drew interest from multiple publishers.

Coty hopes the devotional reaches "the woman who feels like she's alone, frightened, confused, miserable and exhausted," she said, adding that men have also told her they read her short entries in the bathroom.

Coty continues her long-running Grace Notes column in the *Osprey Observer*.

STUDENTS DESIGN 'I VOTED' STICKERS FOR 2026 ELECTIONS

Staff Report

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



and The Florida Aquarium.

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

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

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

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

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



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CARDINAL ROOFING CO-OWNER BECOMES AN INDUSTRY PIONEER

By Madeline Gardner

For Bridget Jenkins, roofing is more than an occupation. Roofing is in her blood.

Cardinal Roofing, founded by her father, Roger Jenkins, in 1995, quickly became a major part of her early adult life. And when Bridget Jenkins sought a career-pivot, she became more involved with Cardinal Roofing, taking on every job within the company before obtaining her roofing license over 25 years ago. She has since earned her general contractor license and is now a co-owner of Cardinal Roofing, alongside her father and their partner, Chad Curchin.

Bridget Jenkins also serves as the first female president of the West Coast Roofing Contractors Association (WCRCA). The WCRCA is a local organization fostering collaboration between licensed roofing professionals. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the WCRCA, a moment she plans to highlight with a series of special events, including a fishing tournament in October.

She has also become a national influencer with the RoofersCoffeeShop (RCS), which serves as a hub for roofing professionals. The platform provides professionals with access to formal job postings and networking opportunities, as well as its RCS Influencer program, which Bridget Jenkins was invited to



Bridget Jenkins (center) gathers with fellow members of National Women in Roofing, an organization which she co-chairs.

participate in. "Of course, I said yes because I'm always up for a good conversation with people about, you know, my favorite topic, which is roofing and construction, because I'm a total construction geek," she said. "So, they started this program, and I, of course, jumped on board, and at the last convention they gave us little pins that said, 'RoofersCoffeeShop Influencer,' so I'm feeling pretty fancy. I've got an official pin for my lapel."

Reflecting upon her accomplishments, Bridget Jenkins cited the importance of pursuing your career passions.

"Jobs are great, but if you actually geek out about whatever your job is, it makes it so much easier. Construction is one of those jobs [where] nothing is ever the same. It's always different every single day, hour-to-hour, ... and I just love roofing," she said. "I just think it's fascinating. ... Just making sure that people feel safe in their homes. It's just one of those things that I was born into; it's in my blood, I was meant to be this person, so I'm just going to take it and run with it."

For more information on Cardinal Roofing, please visit www.cardinalroofingfl.com or call 813-689-7663. Cardinal Roofing is located at 1312 Orangewalk Dr. in Brandon.

HONORARY MAYOR CANDIDATES READY MONTH OF FUN EVENTS

Staff Report

In East Hillsborough, something special is about to begin. The Valrico Fish-Hawk Chamber of Commerce is getting ready for the 2026 Honorary Mayor's Race, a community-driven initiative designed to bring people together while raising funds for impactful local nonprofits.

The race will officially kick off on Monday, June 1, at 6 p.m., at Lake Michigan Credit Union (LMCU), located at 3467 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. People from across the area are invited to come, meet the 'candidates' and learn how they can take part. The event will mark the start of a month filled with fun activities, all created to raise money for good causes.

The race concludes on Tuesday, June 30, with one final event scheduled for Monday, July 13, at 6 p.m., at The Boulevard at FishHawk, located at 15260 Fish-Hawk Blvd. in Lithia, where the community will gather again to celebrate a month of creative fundraising and community engagement and announce the 2026 Honorary Mayor of East Hillsborough County.

Two participants are leading the way this year, and both are focused on helping others.

Steve Glaros is supporting High 5 Inc.,



Voodoo Brewing owner Chris Ciulla is working hard to support ECHO and Forgotten Angels.



Attorney Steve Glaros is supporting High 5 Inc., Raining Cats and Dogs Shelter and Sanctuary and Impact Program Inc.

Raining Cats and Dogs Shelter and Sanctuary and Impact Program Inc. His events include a Mayor's Summer Splash Bash, Music Bingo, a Chef Soiree and Online Auction and even an 'Amazing Race.' Each event is meant to bring people together while helping youth, families and animals in need. Glaros said he joined the race to "strengthen the community and make a difference."

Chris Ciulla is also working hard to support important groups. He is raising money for ECHO and Forgotten Angels, both of which serve vulnerable individuals and families in the community. His campaign includes Boot Scootin' Bingo, a 'Sit, Stay & Sip' pet-friendly event, a Mayoral Royal Casino Night and a Chris Rocks the Vote Music Festival. Ciulla wants everyone to join in, saying, "There is something for all ages to enjoy while helping others."

This race shows what can happen when people work together. Every dollar raised goes straight to local charities. That means real help for families, children, and others who need support.

For more information, you can visit the candidates' Facebook pages @GlarosForMayor and @ChrisforMayor2026.

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LOVE'S TIRE & SERVICE CENTER MARKS 30 YEARS IN VALRICO

By McKenzie Brown

Love's Tire & Service Center is celebrating 30 years of serving Valrico and the surrounding communities, marking three decades as a family-owned business built on trust, hard work and lasting relationships.

Owners Scott and Gay Lynn Love purchased the Valrico shop on April 1, 1996, beginning what would become a 30-year journey in the automotive industry. The date may have been April Fools' Day, but the commitment was no joke. Before becoming owners, Scott Love had spent 16 years working for Charles Brazzeal, who owned two Goodyear Tire & Auto Repair locations. In 1994, Brazzeal transferred Scott Love from Tampa to the Valrico location, where he prepared him for ownership before eventually selling him the store.

That purchase launched more than a business. It began a family legacy. Gay Lynn Love joined her husband at the shop, often bringing their two daughters, Peyton and Chloe, with her while they were still young. What started as a husband-and-wife operation soon became a second-generation family business.

Today, both daughters work alongside their parents, as does their son-in-law, Ty Sullivan. Together, they now serve the children and grandchildren of many long-time customers, creating a rare full-circle moment for the family and the community they have served for decades.



The Love family celebrating 30 years of commitment to their community.



Over the last 30 years, Love's Tire & Service Center has remained steady through some of the country's most challenging times, including 9/11, the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Through every hardship, the Love family credits faith, loyal employees and longtime customers for helping sustain the business. Several employees have been part of the team for decades, including two who have worked there for more than 20 years.

During the company's recent 30th anniversary celebration, the Loves were asked what has meant the most to them over the years. Their answer was immediate: the people.

From longtime employees to loyal customers, the relationships built over the past three decades have been the heart of the business and the foundation of its success.

Located at 1701 E. SR 60 in Valrico, Love's Tire & Service Center continues to provide trusted tire sales and auto repair services to Valrico, Brandon, Seffner and nearby communities, carrying on a 30-year tradition of treating customers like family. Visit www.lovesautorepair.com.

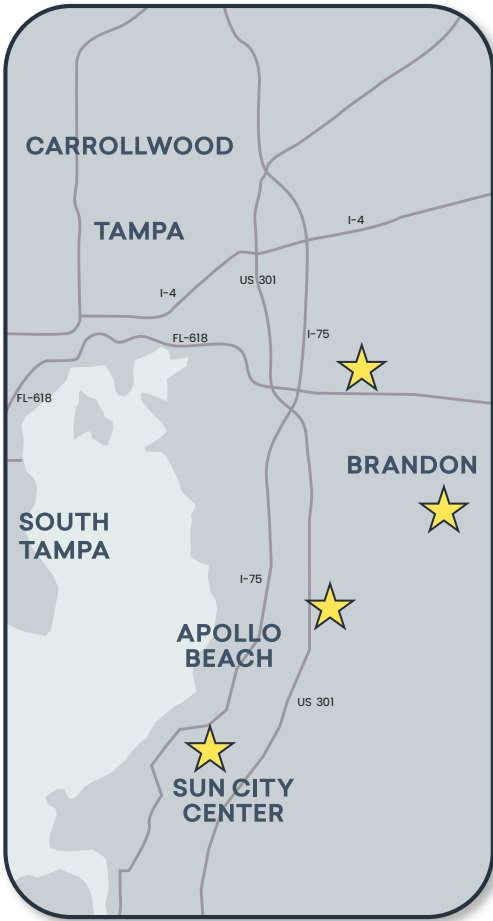


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Yellowfin Realty Celebrates Excellence And Community Impact

Yellowfin Realty, a brokerage known for its commitment to growth and community involvement, recently awarded Debbi Tinker Figlewski the prestigious Founder's Finlife Award. This distinguished recognition is reserved for agents who exemplify a strong commitment to both business success and community service — values that are central to Yellowfin Realty's mission.

This year marks a significant milestone for Debbi, as she celebrates 20 years in the real estate industry. A longtime resident of the Tampa area for over 45 years, she has built a reputation not only as a trusted real estate professional but also as a passionate advocate for her community.

Figlewski is actively involved in numerous local initiatives, most notably her work with the Angel Foundation FL. The organization provides vital support to families facing catastrophic events or life-threatening illnesses, offering assistance and hope during some of life's most challenging moments.

Healthcare Solutions Celebrates Opening Of New Seffner Location

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce proudly celebrated the grand opening of Healthcare Solutions Team's new Seffner location, 731 Cactus Ridge Circle, Ste. B, with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony. The event marked an exciting milestone for

Healthcare Solutions Team as they expand their presence in the community, offering accessible and personalized insurance solutions to individuals and families throughout the Seffner area.

Healthcare Solutions Team specializes in providing flexible, customized insurance options for those without traditional employ-

er-sponsored coverage, including freelancers, contractors and small business owners. Its comprehensive offerings include health, life, dental, vision, accident and critical illness plans. With a focus on simplicity, transparency and one-on-one support, the team is committed to helping clients navigate complex insurance decisions and secure coverage that aligns with their lifestyle, budget and long-term needs.

76 Fence Continues Expansion

76 Fence has announced its largest multiterritory commitment in Florida to date: seven territories awarded to Tom and Kate Donnelly. Tom Donnelly brings leadership and operations management experience, while Kate Donnelly contributes expertise in business administration and client relations. To-



SHADETREE

gether, they are building a family-operated fencing business designed to scale across multiple territories.

76 Fence provides top-quality gates and fences for home and business owners in the local community. With years of experience in the fencing industry, it has established a reputation for delivering high-quality personalized fencing solutions.

Visit <https://76fence.com/tampa>.

Shadetree Apartments Is More Than A Place To Live — It's A Place To Belong

From the moment you arrive, you'll feel the sense of community that sets Shadetree Apartments in Ruskin apart. Residents enjoy fun and engaging events, on-site food trucks, and thoughtful experiences that make Shadetree a place people are proud to call home for the long term. At Shadetree, you'll find a perfect balance of peace, comfort and connection. Every space is designed to help you slow down, recharge and truly feel at home. It's proudly pet-friendly; with two spacious dog parks, dog water fountains, outdoor pet washing stations and plenty of room to run and play, your four-legged family members are just as

welcome here as you are. Whether your lifestyle is active, laid-back, social or somewhere in between, Shadetree Apartments fits your rhythm. Schedule a tour at www.shadetreeapartments.com, meet its friendly team and experience firsthand why life at Shadetree isn't just lived — it's enjoyed.



Sunset Estate Liquidations

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

Sunset Estate Liquidations is located at 4057 Forecast Dr. in Brandon. Call 813-460-1647 or visit its website at <https://sunsetestateliquidations.com/> for additional information.



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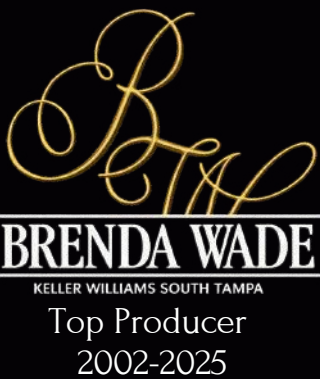


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