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September 2026

Volume 1, Issue 9

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LENNARD HIGH JROTC TRIO SAVE LIFE OF FELLOW STUDENT AFTER STABBING

Staff Report



State Rep. Danny Alvarez presents awards to Lennard High School JROTC cadets Max Britton and sister Tess Britton and Tyler Grooms (center), recognizing their courage and lifesaving actions after a fellow student was critically injured.

State Rep. Danny Alvarez, Michael Owen and Lennard High School JROTC leadership recognized three JROTC cadets for their extraordinary courage, quick thinking and life-saving actions after encountering a fellow student critically injured near Lennard High School.

Cadets Max and sister Tess Britton and Tyler Grooms sprang into action on in August after witnessing a fellow student in need of immediate medical assistance.

Max and Grooms quickly began providing first aid, using a belt as an improvised tourniquet to help control severe bleeding. Tess called 911 and ran to Lennard High School's administrative office to get additional help.

The cadets remained with the injured student until first responders arrived, working together and remaining composed under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

"These three young leaders saw someone in desperate need of help, and they didn't hesitate. They acted," Alvarez said. "Max, Tess and Tyler showed courage, compassion and leadership well beyond their years. Their actions helped save a life, and they should make every parent, teacher and member of this community incredibly proud."

The cadets were recognized Thursday during a news conference in Lennard High

School's JROTC classroom, where speakers also highlighted the role JROTC instructors play in preparing students to lead, serve and respond when their communities need them.

Grooms said, "My scouts and JROTC first aid training came into action when we saw the

bleeding."

"What happened that day demonstrates the tremendous character being developed in young people right here in our community," Owen said. "These cadets relied on one another, kept their composure and put someone else's well-being ahead of their own. That is service. That is leadership. And that is exactly why programs like JROTC and the instructors behind them are so valuable."

Lennard High School's JROTC program emphasizes leadership, teamwork, responsibility and service, preparing cadets to carry those principles beyond the classroom.

The cadets' actions exemplify the Army values at the heart of JROTC, including duty, respect, selfless service, honor and personal courage.

"What these cadets did is a reminder that leadership isn't just about wearing a uniform or holding a title," Alvarez said. "Leadership is recognizing when someone needs you and having the courage to step forward. These three stepped forward, and a young man is alive today because people were willing to act."

The mother of the injured student sent a letter to Britton and Grooms and thanked them for their life-saving actions. The student is home and recovering.

LAKE TOSCANA ENTERS FINAL CHAPTER AS SUNRISE HOMES OPENS REMAINING LOTS

By Kelly Wise Valdes

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

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

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

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

The community, developed in phases over several years, has drawn buyers looking for oversized lots and access to preserved landscapes. Hall said these last sites continue that theme, providing wide-ranging views and a sense of seclusion that were established in earlier phases.

Sunrise Homes is also offering buyers a sizable incentive that Hall described as especially valuable for those wanting to personalize their new build.

"This incentive may apply to any upgrades at our design center," he said, referring to



a \$50,000 credit often used toward flooring, cabinetry, countertops, fixtures and other high-end finishes.

Hall said the environmental setting plays a key role in how Sunrise

Homes approaches its layouts.

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

For buyers looking to build from the ground up, Sunrise Homes provides a hands-on design experience.

"Sunrise Homes offers the experience of customizing your design features independently (not 'packages' like other builders)," said Hall. "We allow some structural changes such as larger garages, wall extensions and door/window openings, depending on the buyer's needs."

He added that the overall timeline is straightforward.

"The process takes approximately 11 months from the purchase agreement to move-in," said Hall.

For more information, visit www.sunrise-homescorp.com. You can visit the model home at 5333 Lake Venice Dr. in Wimauma or call 813-934-2206.

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Lennard High School JROTC cadets and community members participate in the 9/11 Cadet Memorial Walk on September 11, honoring the 2,977 lives lost in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The 2.977-mile walk began at 8:46 a.m., marking the time Flight 11 struck the North Tower. See full story on Page 7.

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MOM CREATES SOCIAL CIRCLE INSPIRING PLAY AND CREATIVITY

By Libby Hopkins

Lisa Sosa is a military wife and a proud mom of two amazing children. She had a fabulous career as a retail buyer that took her all over the world and let her meet many people and see all the latest fashions.

"I truly had my dream job, and I was proud to say, 'I LOVE my job,'" Sosa said. "It challenged me, allowed me to travel domestically and internationally, introduced me to incredible people and gave me the opportunity to make a measurable impact on the businesses I helped lead."

After having her two children, her definition of success began to change.

"I realized that while I was helping build successful businesses, the most important thing I wanted to build was a strong foundation for my own family," Sosa said. "I wanted more time with my children and husband, and I wanted to help build the kind of village I wanted them to grow up,"

As she became more involved in her local community, she discovered she wasn't alone.

"I met so many families who were searching for the very same thing: more opportunities to connect, meaningful experiences to share with their children and a place where everyone felt welcomed, included and supported," she said. "Those conversations became the foundation for Our Social Circle."

Our Social Circle officially launched in April 2025 with its very first event, the Founding



Lisa Sosa is the founder of Our Social Circle, an organization in SouthShore that brings families together of play-dates and creative events.



Families Play Date, at a local park in Brandon.

"From the beginning, my goal wasn't simply to organize another playdate; it was to intentionally create a space where both children and parents could connect," Sosa said. "While the kids enjoyed sensory tables, coloring stations, lawn games and other hands-on activities, parents had a dedicated lounge where they could relax, have conversations and begin building relationships with other families."

Since then, Sosa has continued hosting smaller, more intimate gatherings while thoughtfully planning what's next.

"We're now working toward larger community experiences that bring together families alongside local businesses, organizations and

community leaders," Sosa said. "One of the things that's important to me is helping families discover the incredible businesses and organizations already serving our own backyard. There are so many people making a positive difference, but many families simply don't know they exist. Our Social Circle creates opportunities for those connections to happen naturally. When a family discovers a resource that enriches their lives and a local business gains a lifelong customer, everyone wins."

If you'd like to learn more about Our Social Circle, you can visit Sosa's website at <https://oursocialcirclefl.com/>.

100 WHO CARE VALENCIA LAKES DONATES TO MAGNIFIED VOICES

Staff Report



The 100 Who Care Valencia Lakes Giving Circle is proud to announce that it chose Magnified Voices as the recipient of its 2026 second-quarter donation. Thanks to the generosity of the 100 Who Care VL members, its donation was \$7,000.

Magnified Voices (<https://magnified-voices.org/>) was born from a simple belief: When people have knowledge, community and someone standing beside them, they can change their own lives and their neighborhoods. Magnified Voices is a community-based outreach and civic empowerment organization that believes change happens when communities come together to support one another and take action. Its mission is to ensure that every community member, especially those in underserved areas, has access to the support, information and opportunities needed to thrive.

The check presentation to Shelondria Hicks and Gianni Hunt, co-founders of Magnified Voices, took place on Sep-

tember 10 at the quarterly meeting of the 100 Who Care at the Valencia Lakes Clubhouse. The joyous event was attended by many members of the 100 Who Care.

The 100 Who Care Valencia Lakes Giving Circle was established in April 2021 by Karen Corbin, a Valencia Lakes resident and has grown from 21 members to 72. The sole purpose of the 100 Who Care is to bring together men and women of Valencia Lakes who care about local causes and, using the power of collective giving, to make a difference for local, deserving nonprofits. Over the years, thanks to its generous and caring members, it has donated over \$167,000, 100 percent of which goes directly to the chosen local nonprofit.

If you are a Valencia Lakes resident and are interested in joining, contact Corbin at kscorbin1@gmail.com or visit its website at www.grapevine.org/giving-circle/KXMhmP/100-Who-Care-Valencia-Lakes.

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LEGOLAND DEBUTS ALL-NEW & EXPANDED
BRICK OR TREAT STREET

Staff Report



Families looking for a not-so-scary way to celebrate Halloween will find plenty of tricks, treats and LEGO fun at LEGOLAND Florida Resort this fall as the popular Brick or Treat event returns with a major new attraction.

Running on select dates from Saturday, September 5, through Saturday, October 31, Brick or Treat will once again transform the park into Mischief Town, where younger children and their families can enjoy a full day and evening of Halloween entertainment. This year, the event introduces Brick or Treat Street, an immersive, interactive trick-or-treat experience featuring six life-sized LEGO Monster homes.

"Brick or Treat has always been about creating a Halloween experience families can enjoy together, and this year we're taking it to a whole new level with the addition of Brick or Treat Street," said Brian Bacica, president of LEGOLAND Florida Resort.

Families can explore the homes of some of their favorite LEGO Monster characters, each offering its own surprises and interactive experiences. Visitors can search for runaway frogs at Wacky Witch's Cottage, witness Wolf Guy's full-moon transformation, encounter creepy-crawly surprises at Spider Lady's Castle and awaken an an-

cient curse in Mummy's Throne Room. Other stops include Plant Monster's Greenhouse, where curious explorers can encounter giant vines and hungry plants, and Scarecrow's Barn, where guests can strike silly poses and collect a LEGO brick before continuing their adventure.

The Halloween fun continues throughout Mischief Town with monster meet-and-greets, live entertainment, interactive shows and seasonal LEGO building activities. Families can also experience The Great Monster Chase 4D Movie, featuring special effects and an action-packed LEGO Monster adventure.

After dark, guests can stroll through the new Potion Mischief Light Trail, featuring colorful projections, glowing effects and interactive experiences. On select Saturday evenings, the fan-favorite Monster Skytacular drone show will return, with hundreds of illuminated drones creating LEGO Monster-inspired scenes in the night sky.

All Brick or Treat activities are included with general admission and annual passes, making the event an accessible option for families seeking Halloween fun designed especially for younger children.

LEGOLAND Florida Resort is located in Winter Haven, approximately midway between Tampa and Orlando, and offers more than 50 rides, live shows and attractions across its 150-acre resort.

For event dates and additional information, visit LEGOLAND Florida Resort's website at www.legoland.com/florida/.

AMERICAN LEGION POST 246 APPOINTS
ORATORICAL CONTEST CHAIR

Staff Report

American Legion Post 246 has appointed Bob Claycomb as chair of the National High School Oratorical Scholarship Program for the post. Claycomb co-chaired the successful Oratorical Contest for his post in Arizona. He is excited to revitalize the Oratorical Contest for the Sun City Center post.



Bob Claycomb.

The American Legion's annual High School Oratorical Scholarship Program is part of the Legion's mentoring youth and promoting Americanism missions. In addition to refining public speaking skills, students develop leadership qualities, critical thinking and appreciation of the rights and privileges of American citizenship. Winners at the national level are awarded scholarships of \$25,000 for first place, \$22,500 for second and \$20,000 for third. There are also awards for local, district, regional and state winners.

Participants are required to prepare an eight to 10-minute speech on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States. In addition to their prepared speech, contestants will present a three to five-minute extemporaneous talk designed to test their knowledge of the Constitution.

"The students who accept the challenge are amazing," said Claycomb. "They know much more about our government and the Constitution than most

adults. It's truly marvelous to listen to their speeches."

American Legion Post 246 will be promoting this scholarship program for bona fide students in grades nine through 12. Claycomb will reach out to counselors, history and speech teachers and debate coaches at four local high schools — East Bay, Lenard, Morgan and Sumner — to discuss the Oratorical Contest. He will also be available to assist contestants with speech and

delivery preparation.

High school students under age 20 are eligible. Competition begins at the post level and advances to a state competition. Legion department representatives certify one winner per state to the national contest, where department winners compete against each other in two speaking rounds. The contest caps off with a final round that decides the three top finishers.

Speaking subjects must be on some aspect of the U.S. Constitution, with some emphasis on the duties and obligations of citizens to our government. Speeches are eight to 10 minutes long; three- to five-minute speeches on an assigned topic also are part of the contest.

Further information is available on the American Legion national website, www.legion.org/oratorical; on the American Legion Post 246 website, <https://americanlegionfla.net/>; or by contacting Claycomb at rsclay2012@gmail.com.



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CYPRESS CREEK CELEBRATES BEST OF THE BEST WIN AT ANNUAL CHILI COOK-OFF

Staff Report

Cypress Creek Assisted Living & Memory Care Residence is celebrating another year of recognition and community connection after being named a 2026 Tampa Bay Times Best of the Best Winner in both Assisted Living and Memory Care. The honor marks the third consecutive year Cypress Creek has received the distinction in both categories.

For the family-owned community, the recognition represents more than an award. It reflects the trust of residents and their families and the compassion and dedication of the Cypress Creek team.

"Being recognized for a third consecutive year is an incredible honor," said Jim Biggins, owner of Cypress Creek. "As a family-owned residence, our roots run deep and our dedication is personal. We know that recognition like this is only possible because of the people who make Cypress Creek what it is — our incredible team, our residents and the families who trust us."

The community will celebrate its Best of the Best recognition while also bringing residents, families and neighbors together for its annual Chili Cook-Off on Tuesday, October 6, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at 970 Cypress Village Blvd. in Sun City Center.

The event offers free admission and invites guests to enter a pot of chili, sample the entries and vote for their favorites. Prizes will be awarded for both Judge's

Choice and People's Choice, making the event an afternoon of friendly competition, food and community spirit.

This year's cook-off will also support Southern States Bully Rescue (SSBR), a Florida-based, all-volunteer, foster-based 501(c)(3) rescue organization dedicated to rescuing, rehabilitating and rehoming bully breed dogs, many

of which come from situations of abuse and neglect.

Cypress Creek is proud to make a donation in honor of Annie, Bleu and Theo, three special dogs who are part of the Cypress Creek family, and all the dogs SSBR works to place in loving forever homes.

"We are honored to bring our community together for an event that celebrates both our residents and the organizations making a difference around us," Biggins said.

Joining the cook-off as judges will be Master Deputy Jeffrey E. Merry Jr. of the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office; Bonnie Peacock, executive director of the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce; and Sarah Baez, CSA senior living placement specialist with CarePatrol of Bradenton & Southshore.

Guests are encouraged to RSVP by calling 813-633-7777 or emailing joy@cypress-creekalf.com.

For more information, visit www.cypress-creekalf.com or call 813-633-7777.

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NONPROFIT BRINGS INDEPENDENCE THROUGH ADAPTIVE E-BIKES

Staff Report

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

The Mobility Blessing Initiative (MBI), founded by U.S. Army veteran and longtime community leader Rande Harris, provides new adaptive electric bicycles and tricycles to individuals who need safe, comfortable transportation.

Serving residents across Hillsborough and Polk counties, the organization focuses on seniors, veterans, individuals with disabilities and families facing financial challenges.

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

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

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

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

"I kept meeting people who weren't asking for luxury," Harris said. "They were ask-



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

ing for the ability to move."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Freedom of movement is a gift," he said. "And we're here to make sure everyone has access to it." For more information or to get involved, visit the charity website at www.mobilityblessinginitiative.com.

CENTER 4LIFE LEARNING BEGINS FALL SEMESTER OF CLASSES

Staff Report



Come learn and be entertained. The 2026 Center 4Life Learning Fall Semester begins the week of October 5. The classes are open to all adults in the community and are held on the campus of The United Methodist Church of Sun City Center (SCCUMC), located at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center. The classes provide intellectual stimulation and fellowship with a wide variety of subjects. Class descriptions, instructor bios, class dates and times are listed on the Center 4Life Learning website, www.lovethehighlight.com/4lifelifelearning.

On Thursday, September 24, Center 4Life Learning with the Pelican Players Community Theater will host registration day and a comedy production, Love... Or Best Offer, in SCCUMC's Life Enrichment Center. Fall class registration will held from 1-3:30 p.m. and 6-8:30 p.m. There will be two shows, one at 1:30 p.m. and the other at 6:30 p.m., for \$20. Fall courses include:

- Art: 'Beginning Paper Quilling,' 'Adventure in Crafting,' 'Make Your Mark - Doodling' and 'Modern Dot Art.'
- Discussion: 'Chautauqua XIII' and 'Artifi-

cial Intelligence - Revisited.'

- Finance: 'Investment, Estate and Tax Planning' and 'What Would Happen If You Got Hit by a Bus?'
- Health: 'End-of-life Planning for You and Your Family,' 'Enriching Relationships Through Self-discovery'

and 'Plant-powered Living: A Holistic Approach to Vibrant Health.'

Living: 'A Holistic Approach to Vibrant Health' and 'Therapeutic Writing Can Enhance 12-step Recovery.'

- History: 'The Amazing Adames' and 'High-altitude Reconnaissance During the Cold War.'
- Language: 'Sign Language' and 'Beginners Conversational Spanish Level II & Level III.'
- Live Theater: Fun With Improv.
- Technology: 'Smartphone Pictures - How To Take, Store and Share' and 'Streaming Movies, TV & Music.'

Center 4Life Learning also has day trips. To learn more or register for classes, the show or trips, go to www.lovethehighlight.com/4lifelifelearning or visit the Center 4Life Learning office. The Center 4Life Learning office is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Credit card, check and cash are accepted in the center office. Sign up today. For more information, call 813-634-8607 or email center4life@sccumc.com.



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HILLSBOROUGH COLLEGE LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN FOR SS WORKFORCE BUILDING

Staff Report

Hillsborough College is inviting community members and business leaders to invest in the future of South Hillsborough County through its Harvesting the Future Campaign, a \$5 million fundraising effort supporting the planned Pop and Glenn Dickman Family Workforce Education Building at the college's SouthShore Campus.

"The SouthShore Campus sits on land the Dickman family farmed for generations before they gave it to Hillsborough College," said Dr. Jennifer China, president of Hillsborough College's SouthShore Campus. "They understood something that guides our work every day — you plant what you want to see grow. Today, we are planting careers, and the harvest is a workforce that will sustain South Hillsborough County for decades to come."

The campaign will be highlighted at the Harvesting the Future Gala on Friday, October 23, at 6 p.m. at the Hilton Tampa Downtown, located at 211 N. Tampa St. in Tampa. Hosted by the Glenn and Danita Dickman family, the gala will include a performance by The Temptations Review featuring the Legacy of Dennis Edwards.

The planned Pop and Glenn Dickman Family Workforce Education Building will expand instructional capacity, provide modern learning spaces for workforce-focused programs and create additional opportunities for students to prepare for high-demand careers while supporting the region's continued economic growth.

The need for expanded workforce educa-



tion in South Hillsborough County continues to grow as the region experiences rapid population growth. Between the 2010 and 2020 censuses, the Ruskin, Apollo Beach and Wimauma areas added more than 26,000 residents,

a combined increase of roughly 70 percent. That growth has increased demand for accessible education and workforce training while creating a greater need for skilled talent among local employers.

To learn more about the campaign, sponsorship opportunities or tickets, visit <https://hcfgive.org/hcc-southshore-giving/>. All gifts will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$500,000.

Hillsborough College serves more than 47,000 students annually at its five campuses located throughout Tampa Bay. For more information, visit <https://hcfl.edu/>.

Hillsborough College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. Hillsborough College also may offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Questions about the accreditation of Hillsborough College may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097; by calling 404-679-4500; or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org).

Visit <https://hcfl.edu/accreditation> for more information.

LENNARD HIGH SCHOOL JROTC HOSTS "9/11 CADET MEMORIAL WALK"

By Madeline Gardner



On September 11, the Lennard High School JROTC program hosted its 9/11 Cadet Memorial Walk, inviting the local community to remember the tragedy that befell the nation 25 years ago.

Gathering on the Lennard High School track, the event began with the national anthem and the presentation of the colors. The memorial walk commenced shortly thereafter at 8:46 a.m. sharp, a gesture to the hour at which Flight 11 struck the North Tower. Participants then walked 2.977 miles, a march to honor each life lost on 9/11.

Among those in attendance were the Lennard JROTC Cadet Corps, Fire Rescue 17, county sheriffs, SouthShore Chamber members, representatives from the Military Order of the World Wars (MOWW) and local news outlets, including Fox News 13 and Bay News 9. The event's guest speaker was retired U.S. Army Col. Thomas Hanley.

Participating cadets were grateful for the opportunity to remember 9/11 alongside members of their JROTC and Ruskin communities.

"I was very excited because it definitely is a tragic event that needs to be covered,"



said Peyton McGregor, a sophomore and a company commander. "So, the way that we handled it, I definitely thought that was done very well."

Nathan Roberts, a junior and battalion adjutant, echoed McGregor's enthusiasm, explaining, "I was very excited as it

would allow me to ... memorialize, I think. Just everyone who ha[d] fallen that day and to really just show them respect."

Roberts and McGregor also explained how this memorial

walk helped shape their understanding of 9/11.

"It really put into perspective for me, at least, how many people had fallen that day," said Roberts. "As when I heard the number of people that died, it really made me understand why we were walking those 12 laps, we walked [those] ... 2.977 miles."

McGregor emphasized how the distance traveled by cadets was something that resonated with her, too.

"It definitely made me understand more, just walking," said McGregor. "You think about it first and you're like, we're just going to do these 12 laps. And then as you're walking, you're thinking [about] how everything happened, how many families this affected and just friends. These are just ordinary people out there that lost their lives, as well as like the firefighters."

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MIDDLE SCHOOL NAMED IN HONOR OF EDUCATOR KENNETH R. OTERO

By Marie Gilmore



A new middle school under construction in Wimauma will bear the name of a long-time Hillsborough County Public Schools leader whose career spanned nearly four decades.

On September 1, the Hillsborough County School Board voted to name the new campus Kenneth R. Otero Middle School. Currently referred to as Middle School VV, the school's name was selected following a community naming process that generated more than 1,100 recommendations for consideration.

Located on West Lake Drive in Wimauma, on the same property as Aquilla J. Morgan High School, the approximately \$72 million middle school is scheduled to open in August 2027. The school will serve students in grades six through eight, with capacity for up to 1,600 students.

The new campus will provide students with a variety of academic and enrichment opportunities designed to complement the educational offerings at nearby Aquilla J. Morgan High School, which opened in 2025.

Planned programs include rigorous and accelerated coursework, opportunities to earn high school credits, career and technical education, industry certifications and extracurricular activities. Students will also

have opportunities to participate in clubs and sports based on student interest.

Kenneth R. Otero Middle School will honor an educator and administrator who dedicated 38 years to Hillsborough County Public Schools, serving from 1975 to 2013.

Otero began his career as a teacher at Plant High School in 1975 before becoming an assistant principal at the school. He later served as principal of Sligh Junior High School and Tampa Bay Technical High School.

In 1996, Otero transitioned into district leadership as general director. He subsequently served as assistant superintendent for administration and deputy superintendent.

Throughout his career, Otero helped support student success, strengthen school leadership and advance educational opportunities throughout the district.

"This new middle school represents our continued commitment to providing students with access to innovative learning environments in communities experiencing rapid growth," said Superintendent Van Ayres.

"We look forward to opening the Kenneth R. Otero Middle School in 2027, which will honor an exceptional former leader whose contributions helped shape the success of our district and the students we serve."

The school's opening will expand educational opportunities for families in the rapidly growing South Hillsborough County community.

POP-UP CENTERS OPENING FOR REBUILDING FOR TOMORROW PROGRAM

Staff Report

Hillsborough County will open pop-up service centers in Town 'N Country, Brandon and Ruskin for one day each this month to



help income-eligible residents who had property damage from Hurricanes Helene or Milton in 2024. The service centers will offer assistance to residents applying for relief funds as part of the county's Rebuilding for Tomorrow Homeowner Repair and Reconstruction Program.

The pop-up centers will be open from 3:30-5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, September 29, at Ruskin Branch Library, located at 26 Dickman Dr. SE in Ruskin.

In addition to the pop-up centers, the Rebuilding for Tomorrow Service Center, located at 1029 E. Hillsborough Ave. in Tampa, remains open. Hours for the Hillsborough Avenue site are from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Hillsborough County also has a call center to help with the application process. Residents can call 813-540-7767 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Hillsborough County was awarded \$709 million by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist with recovery and mitigation efforts related to Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which struck in 2024. About \$211 million of that amount will be dedicated to the Homeowner Repair and Reconstruction Program. Qualified homeowners may get funding and support to repair or rebuild their homes. For those who have already repaired home damages from Hurricanes Helene or Milton, reimburse-

ment programs are available for qualified homeowners. Eligible residents can qualify for up to \$350,000 to replace or rebuild storm-damaged housing; \$10,000-\$50,000 in eligible reimbursement costs for permitted work already completed by the homeowner; or up to \$150,000 in repairs that have not been covered under other programs. The program is for homeowners earning up to 120 percent of area median income (\$110,100 annual household income for a two-person household), with priority given to those earning 80 percent or less of area median income (\$73,400 annual household income for a two-person household).

The Rebuilding for Tomorrow program will remain open until all funding is obligated. In addition to funding for homeowner assistance, some of the grant money will go toward projects to repair damage the storms caused to roads, canals, culverts, pump stations, wastewater lift stations and other infrastructure, as well as to projects that will improve the area's resilience for future storms.

About the Rebuilding for Tomorrow Program

Rebuilding for Tomorrow is a Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program administered by Hillsborough County and funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that provides funding to help communities recover from Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

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CHAMBER CELEBRATES SHEAR STYLE STUDIO'S REOPENING AFTER HURRICANE

Staff Report



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

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

"This morning felt like pure triumph," said Bonnie Peacock, executive director of the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce. "Jeanine has rebuilt something truly special. The studio is beautiful, the energy was joyful and the turnout showed just how much this

business and this owner mean to people in Ruskin. Watching her cut that ribbon after everything the hurricanes took was one of those moments that remind you why local businesses matter so much."

Shear Style Studio has spent the past eight years building a reputation for beauty, faith and genuine community connection. The reopening celebrates both that history and a hopeful new chapter.



ter. Friends, clients, chamber members and neighbors filled the refreshed space to cheer Jeanine on and mark the occasion together.

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

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

TAMPA THEATRE COMMEMORATES 100 YEARS WITH MULTI-EVENT CELEBRATION

Staff Report



TAMPATHEATRE

Welcome To The Show

Tampa Theatre is preparing for a milestone celebration filled with classic films, live entertainment and a first look at its newly restored Duncan Auditorium as the historic movie palace approaches its 100th birthday.

The theater will host a weeklong series of events from Saturday, October 10 through Thursday, October 15, marking the beginning of a yearlong centennial celebration. The festivities will celebrate the restoration of the iconic landmark and the community that has supported it for a century.

The celebration begins on Saturday, October 10, with a members-only party featuring a special screening of the 1985 mystery comedy *Clue*. Activities and complimentary refreshments begin at 1:30 p.m. New President and CEO George Levesque will answer questions at 2:15 p.m. and discuss upcoming projects, including accessibility improvements to the stage, restoration of the Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ and Peacock Room, a new second-floor event space.

On Sunday, October 11, the public is invited to explore the restoration during an open house from 1-5 p.m. Volunteers and staff will offer information and mini tours, while a digital guide provides historic photographs and details about the building. At 3 p.m., Levesque and retired CEO John Bell will discuss the restoration and answer audience questions.

Classic movie fans can enjoy three screenings at 7 p.m., with doors opening at 6 p.m. *Casablanca* will screen Monday, October 12, followed by *The Wizard of Oz* on Tuesday, October 13. The Marx Brothers comedy *A Night at the Opera* returns to the big screen Wednesday, October 14. Tickets are \$13 per film.

The festivities culminate Thursday, October 15, exactly 100 years after Tampa Theatre first opened its doors in 1926.

Presented by Urban E Recycling, the centennial birthday party begins at 6 p.m. with live music and swing dancing by The Jazz Phools, along with professional portraits in front of the historic marquee. Guests are encouraged to wear 1920s-inspired attire. Complimentary champagne, souvenir programs and limited-edition merchandise will also be available.

At 7 p.m., theater officers and Tampa's mayor will offer remarks before the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and the Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ accompany Buster Keaton's 1924 silent comedy *Sherlock Jr.* The evening concludes with Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, featuring special effects celebrating the theater's original opening-night program.

Birthday party admission is \$26. Tickets for all Centennial Celebration events are available at the website at www.tampatheatre.org.



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TANDEM T FOUNDATION CREATES NEW PATHS FOR FAMILIES AND YOUTH

By Makenzie Atkins Noel

For families navigating some of life's hardest chapters, finding a way forward can begin with something as simple as having someone show up. The Tandem T Foundation, a Tampa Bay nonprofit, works to support domestic violence survivors, justice-involved youth and their families through practical resources, wellness initiatives and community partnerships.

Founded by Chrissy Thompson and Rohan Taylor, Tandem T Foundation was created from experiences within the founders' own families. Those experiences gave them a personal connection to the challenges faced by the people they serve and inspired the foundation's focus on providing hope and opportunities for a new beginning.

"Our mission was not chosen from a list; it grew from experiences within our own family," Thompson said.

For mothers and children rebuilding after domestic violence, Tandem T provides personal care essentials, food, transportation support, referrals, encouragement and resources for children. One of its initiatives, New Beginnings Bags, provides essential personal care and comfort items to mothers and children leaving or transitioning from domestic violence situations. The bags are intended to offer more than immediate necessities, helping recipients feel seen, valued and supported during an uncertain time.

The foundation also works with justice-involved youth and their families, providing



Through initiatives such as New Beginnings Bags, Tandem T Foundation provides practical resources and encouragement to mothers and children rebuilding after domestic violence.

positive experiences, mentoring, career and education exposure, wellness opportunities and practical support. Through its developing Next Move program, Tandem T is building opportunities such as family fishing

experiences, cooking classes, mentorship and other experiences that will create positive memories. The goal is to help young people feel less lost, more connected to their community and equipped with new skills and confidence.

While the needs of each family may look different, Tandem T approaches its work with an emphasis on partnership, presence and family. Families can connect with the foundation through community partners, outreach events, social media and direct contact.

"A new beginning says: You are not alone, you are not defined by what happened to you and you do not have to rebuild by yourself," Thompson said.

At the heart of Tandem T is the belief that a difficult chapter does not have to be the end of someone's story. Whether support begins with a bag of essentials, a new experience or simply someone showing up, the foundation works to help families move forward and believe in what comes next.

Email partners@tandemtoundation.org or <https://tandemtholdings.com/foundation>.

ANGEL FOUNDATION CELEBRATES 20TH EVENING OF HOPE GALA

Staff Report

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

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

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

"This 20th anniversary is more than a celebration of our history — it's a celebration of every family we've had the privilege to serve and every supporter who



has made our mission possible," said Liz Brewer, CEO of Angel Foundation FL and founder of the Foundation Angel Program. "Together, we

continue to bring hope, healing and financial relief to families when they need it most. Every ticket purchased, every sponsorship secured and every donation made helps us continue lifting up families in crisis throughout our community."

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

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

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

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



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AUDUBON SOCIETY FALL LINEUP OF NATURE PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

Staff Report

Pumpkin-spiced lattes, cooler weather and fall festivities are on the horizon, and Eagle Audubon Society is welcoming the season with a new schedule of educational programs and outdoor adventures for nature enthusiasts throughout South Hillsborough County.

The local chapter of the National Audubon Society has planned a series of monthly speakers and field trips from October through December, offering members and guests opportunities to learn about birds, explore Florida's natural landscapes and connect with fellow nature lovers.

The fall speaker series will feature presentations highlighting birding destinations, local water quality and the fascinating stories of Florida wildlife.

In October, Mike Round will share photographs and experiences from Lake Erie's Magee Marsh Boardwalk, offering a glimpse into one of the most exciting weeks of the birding year. The presentation will highlight the birds and experiences that make the destination a popular gathering place for bird enthusiasts.

November's program will feature Nick Muzia, who will explore the important role underwater vegetation plays in improving water quality. The presentation will offer insight into how aquatic plants contribute to healthier waterways and support local ecosystems.

December brings a special presenta-



tion from author and scientist Hilary Flower, who will share the surprising story of the Everglade Snail Kite, a bird that saved itself. Attendees will have the opportunity to purchase books and meet Flower for a signing.

In addition to its monthly programs, Eagle Audubon Society is planning several field trips that allow participants to experience nature firsthand.

October activities include a seasonal hawk watch and a visit to Oscar Scherer State Park. November excursions will take participants to Little Manatee River State Park and its Window in the Woods. December trips will explore Felts Preserve and Circle B Bar Reserve. Several trips are open to nonmembers, providing opportunities for newcomers to experience the organization's activities.

Eagle Audubon Society meetings are held on the third Monday of each month from October through April at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, located at 1239 W. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. Meetings are free, and everyone is welcome.

The next meeting is Monday, October 19. Coffee and snacks will be available at 1 p.m., followed by the program at approximately 1:30 p.m.

For additional information about upcoming meetings, field trips and activities, visit www.eagleaudubonflorida.org.

ACEING AUTISM BRINGS INCLUSIVE TENNIS CLINICS TO APOLLO BEACH

Staff Report

Families in the Apollo Beach area will soon have a new opportunity to connect, build skills and enjoy the sport of tennis through an inclusive program designed for children and teens with autism.

Experienced Autism Alliance (EAA) is partnering with ACEing Autism to bring weekly tennis clinics to Apollo Beach Racquet Club this fall. The six-week program will take place on Saturdays from Saturday, October 10, through Saturday, November 14, and is designed to provide participants with a welcoming environment where they can learn tennis skills, participate in games and build confidence.

Clinics will be divided by age. Children ages 5-13 will participate from 11 a.m.-12 p.m., while participants ages 14 and older will have a clinic from 12 Noon-1 p.m. The program will be held at Apollo Beach Racquet Club, located at 6520 Richies Way in Apollo Beach.

The program costs \$120, with an early-bird discount available for families who register by Thursday, September 10. The code, Early30, provides \$30 off the registration fee.

ACEing Autism also offers scholarship opportunities to help make its programs accessible to families regardless of financial circumstances. Funding



options include Self-Determination Funding or Scholarship Accounts and the ACEing Autism Scholarship.

Founded in 2008 in Boston, ACEing Autism has grown into a nationwide program serving more than 6,000 children with autism at approximately 200 locations.

Its programs are tailored to the individual needs of each participant and use tennis as a way to promote connection, confidence and community.

The Apollo Beach program will also provide opportunities for community members to volunteer. Volunteers will help teach tennis skills, lead games and encourage participants. No previous tennis or autism experience is required, and training will be provided.

Volunteers can participate alongside friends, gain leadership and teamwork experience and make a difference in the lives of local children and teens.

Families interested in registering for the Apollo Beach program can learn more about ACEing Autism and available scholarship opportunities at <https://aceingautism.org/>.

Questions about the Apollo Beach program can also be directed to apollobeach@aceingautism.org.



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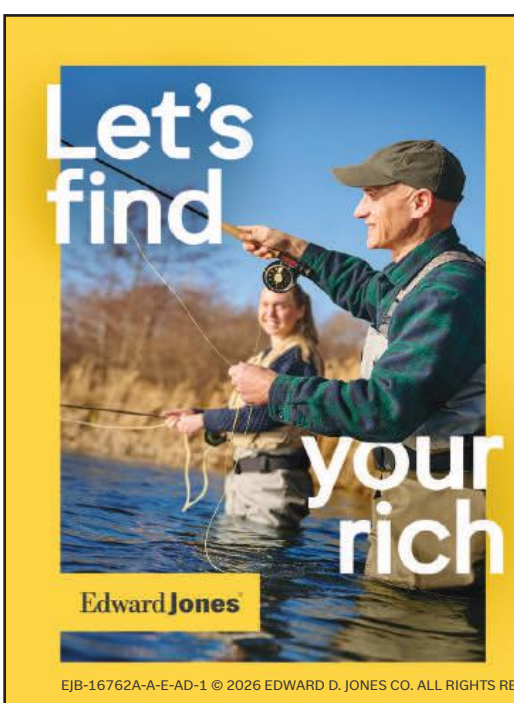
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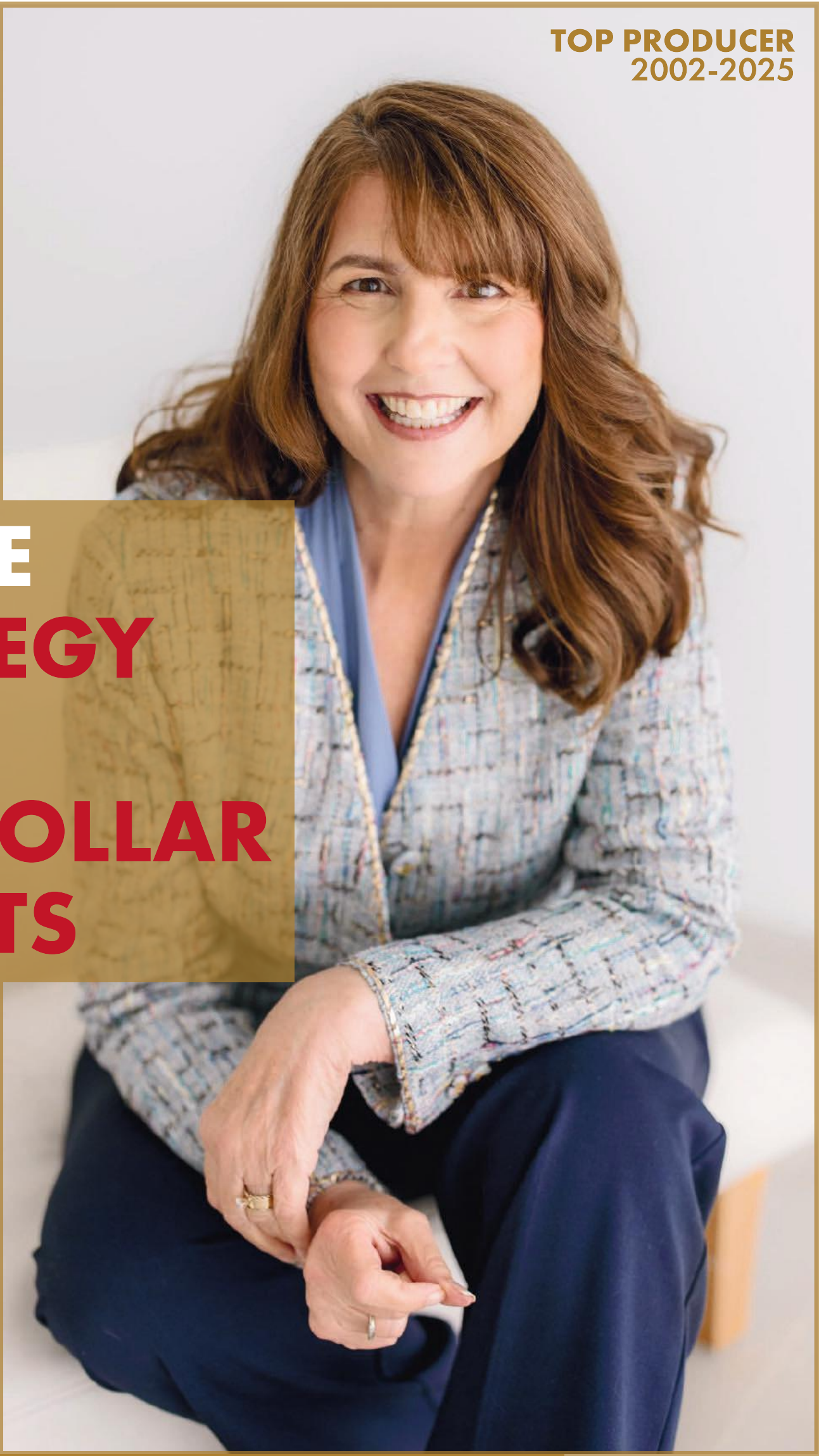
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NBS ESTHETICS HELPS CLIENTS FEEL CONFIDENT AT EVERY AGE

By Marie Gilmore

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

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

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

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

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

Today, NBS Esthetics has expanded



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

Delgado, who served in the Army Reserves, also

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

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

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

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

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

SHADETREE OFFERS RESORT-STYLE RENTALS IN THE HEART OF RUSKIN

Staff Report



For residents looking for more than just a place to live, Shadetree Apartments in Ruskin offers a lifestyle centered around comfort, convenience and connection.

Located at 3511 Great Cypress Circle in the Cypress Village neighborhood, Shadetree features 260 apartment homes spread across 30 acres of lush landscaping, green space, ponds and walking paths. The community is designed to provide residents with resort-style amenities while keeping everyday conveniences close to home.

Recent community upgrades include brand-new grills, enhanced resort-style amenities and a robust calendar of resident events designed to encourage neighbors to connect and enjoy the community together.

At the heart of Shadetree is its 9,000-square-foot clubhouse, which provides spaces for both relaxation and productivity. Residents can work from the collaborative workspace, relax in the TV lounge, challenge friends to a game of pool or poker or gather around the wet bar. A book nook, a coffee bar and social areas offer additional places to unwind.

Outside, residents can enjoy a beach-style entry swimming pool with a fountain, private cabanas, a poolside pergola and a turf game lawn. New grilling options make it easy to host a barbecue or enjoy an evening outdoors. There are also two dog parks, expansive lawns and scenic walking paths for residents and their four-legged companions.

Wellness is another focus, with a fully equipped fitness center and therapeutic sauna available within the community.

Apartment homes feature open floor plans, 9 or 10-foot ceilings, expansive windows, quartz countertops, stainless steel appliances, full-size front-loading washers and dryers, luxury vinyl flooring and large walk-in closets. Select homes also offer private balconies or patios, garages, dens and views of ponds or green spaces.

Shadetree is also conveniently located near shopping, dining, outdoor recreation and Gulf Coast attractions that make Ruskin a popular place to call home.

For more information, visit www.shadetree.apartments and select "Schedule A Tour," or call 813-610-0079. Limited-time move-in specials may be available, including up to three months free for qualified applicants.

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CHICK-FIL-A BALM ROAD
CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING

Staff Report



Chick-fil-A Balm Road operator Lorena Kurtjian Hernandez hosted the Jule F. Sumner High School Stingray Battalion Honor Guard, Orchestra and JROTC and a special Feeding America check presentation during the grand opening.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) joined community leaders, local organizations, students and guests to celebrate the grand opening of Chick-fil-A Balm Road with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony on August 19. The celebration marked the opening of the new restaurant and provided an opportunity to welcome Chick-fil-A Balm Road and its team to the Brandon-Riverview business community.

The ceremony began with a patriotic flag-raising ceremony and national anthem, with participation from the Jule F. Sumner High School Stingray Battalion Honor Guard, Orchestra and JROTC. Guests were welcomed by Joseph Martinez, who shared information about Chick-fil-A's history and mission before introducing operator Lorena Kurtjian Hernandez. Hernandez spoke about her vision for the new Balm Road restaurant and its commitment to serving and becoming an active part of the surrounding community.

The program also included a special Feeding America check presentation, reinforcing Chick-fil-A's commitment to supporting communities and helping address hunger.

BRCC President Amber Aaron welcomed Chick-fil-A Balm Road to the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce and the local business community. Aaron congratulated Hernandez and her team on the opening and wished them continued growth and success as they begin serving the Balm Road area. Adding to the celebration, BRCC Ambassador and Honorary Mayor Abraham 'Abe' Agosto presented a special proclamation officially declaring August 19, 2026, as Chick-fil-A Balm Road Day.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Chick-fil-A Balm Road, Hernandez and the entire Chick-fil-A team on this exciting milestone and looks forward to their continued involvement and positive impact throughout the community.

ONE DAY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE:
CEOS INVITED INTO CLASSROOMS

By Marie Gilmore

Tampa Bay business leaders are being invited to trade their offices for classrooms and experience firsthand the impact they can make on the future workforce through the 2026 CEOs in Schools: 1 Day of Change program.

The countywide volunteer initiative, presented by Vistra Communications and the Hillsborough Education Foundation in partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools, encourages CEOs and other business leaders to spend a day immersed in the daily life of a local elementary school. This year's official volunteer day is Friday, November 6, though participants and their assigned principals may coordinate another date if needed.

The program was inspired by Vistra Communications CEO Brian Butler's longtime relationship with Mort Elementary School. Butler once spent an entire day shadowing former Principal Woodland Johnson, taking on a variety of responsibilities that included teaching, planning, serving lunch and more.

That firsthand experience gave Butler a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing public schools and inspired him to challenge other business leaders to do the same.

Since then, Vistra's relationship with Mort Elementary has continued to grow through employee volunteerism, student visits to the company's headquarters, teacher appreciation events and other school initiatives. The idea expanded into CEOs in Schools in



Tampa Bay business leaders will step into local classrooms on Nov. 6 as part of the 2026 CEOs in Schools.

2019, and Vistra partnered with the Hillsborough Education Foundation the following year to continue growing the initiative.

Today, nearly 150 Tampa Bay-area CEOs partici-

pate each year, gaining a unique perspective on the work of educators and the experiences of students while building relationships with the schools helping prepare tomorrow's workforce.

"Our schools are shaping tomorrow's community members, future workforce and leaders," said Hillsborough Education Foundation CEO Anna Corman. "We have a vested interest in their success."

Participants may greet students, read in classrooms, share their career experiences, attend leadership or planning meetings, tour school operations, have lunch with students or teachers and observe classrooms in action. Each visit is designed in collaboration with the school principal, giving participants an authentic 'day in the life' experience.

Superintendent Van Ayres praised the impact of the program, noting that even the smallest moments can make a meaningful difference in schools.

Business leaders interested in participating can reserve an available school online. Schools are matched with CEOs, who then work directly with the schools' principals to plan their visits.

For more information or to reserve a school, visit www.1dayofchange.com/ceos-inschools/.

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Free Electronics Recycling, Craft Fair, Blood Drive & More....

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Free Electronics Recycling Event

Redeemer Lutheran Church, located at 701 Valley Forge Blvd. in Sun City Center, is offering the community an opportunity to recycle old electronics they may have around the house. The event will take place on Friday, October 16, from 10 a.m.-12 Noon. Items not accepted are CRT monitors, televisions, household batteries, glass bulbs, paint, varnish or other chemicals and large home appliances.

Craft Fair

The Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians is sponsoring a craft fair on Saturday, October 24, at Prince of Peace Catholic Church, located at 702 Valley Forge Blvd. in Sun City Center. All craft fair items are hand made by its members and local artists. New items this year are adorable tiny dolls and handmade resin items. Usual favorites include seasonal table runners, towels, jars of preserves, greeting cards, kitchen items, wall decor, religious items, holiday gift items, ceramics, crocheted items, water colors and wreaths. Start your Christmas shopping early with unique Christmas decorations.

The Ladies Hibernians always donate a portion of proceeds to charitable causes.

Sun City Center American Legion Post 246 Meeting

The next meeting of the Sun City Center American Legion Post 246 will be held on Friday, October 16, at 9:30 a.m. in Room 3 of the Sun City Center Community Hall, located at 1910 S. Pebble Beach Blvd. in Sun City Center. The guest speaker will be retired Col. Roland J. Tiso Jr. His talk will focus on Italian Heritage Month, including Columbus Day, and also draw on his 35 years of military stories and insights.

In addition to the usual coffee and donuts prior to the meeting, a light (surprise) lunch will be offered following the meeting. All veterans, spouses and veterans' caregivers are welcome. For more information, call Paul Wheat at 813-391-7309 or email pawheatjr@aol.com.

Community Market/Blood Drive

Come out and enjoy a day of great finds and meet friendly faces at the community market and blood drive. Discover unique handmade items, art and locally made items at the River Bend community, located at 2502 Dakota Rock Dr. in Ruskin. The market and blood drive will run from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Appointments for donating blood are encouraged and can be made online at www.oneblood.org/donate-now using sponsor code 80411. Please remember to bring ID.

South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting

The South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting will be on Tuesday, October 20, at the South Hillsborough Elks Lodge No. 2672, located at 1630 S. U.S. 41 in Ruskin. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., there is an optional round table discussion, followed by a sit-down luncheon at 12 Noon. Following the luncheon at 1 p.m., the guest speaker will be Peggy Jude. Jude's presentation will be 'Coming to America.' This program traces the major waves of immigration to America. The cost is \$18 per person, which includes the meal and presentation. For reservations and meal choice, please call Vicki at 360-608-1647.

Beth Israel Sisterhood Presents 'Mosaic Mirrors — Make It And Take It'

On Tuesday, October 6th at 1 pm, Beth Israel's Sisterhood members will learn to make Mosaic Mirrors in their social hall at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. The instructor, Robin Blumberg, has been working with stain glass for over 45 years. She thought it would be fun to venture out and try mosaics. Everyone will be given a circular mirror piece, plus glass, supplies and mosaic tiles. Each attendee will choose a color, and Blumberg will walk everyone through the process. Refreshments will be served. For information on this fun event or to join Sisterhood, contact Donna at sisterhood@jcscc.org.

Democratic Women's Club Meeting

The Democratic Woman's Club of Southeast Hillsborough County will meet at the Jim Johnson Community Center Room A & B in the Riverview Public Library, located at 9951 Balm Riverview Rd. in Riverview, on Thursday, October 1, at 6:30 p.m. The club welcomes Ashley Hermann, a candidate for FL House District 69, and Pamela Castellana, an expert on increasing political engagement. If you would like to know more about the club, come join the meeting. For more information, please email sedwcinfo@gmail.com or call 813-503-8639.

A LEGENDARY WHODUNIT COMES TO RUSKIN AND BRANDON

Staff Report

Following its last production, *Murder, Denied*, an original murder mystery that kept audiences guessing, MacBeth & Cheese is returning to the scene of the crime. But this time, it's trading an original mystery for a legendary one.

MacBeth & Cheese invites you to climb aboard the world's most famous train for Agatha Christie's classic mystery, *Murder on the Orient Express*, adapted for the stage by Ken Ludwig and directed by Amy Windle. The production promises the suspense, wit, memorable characters and twists of Christie's famous mystery.

"Bringing *Murder on the Orient Express* to the stage has been an absolute joy. It has everything you want in a great night of theater — a fantastic cast of characters, plenty of laughs, a little glamour and, of course, a murder to solve," said Amy Windle, director and co-founder of MacBeth & Cheese. "We've had so much fun creating this world, and I can't wait for our audiences to climb aboard and experience it with us."

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and nowhere to escape, the question is ... can YOU solve the murder before Poirot does?

Experience *Murder on the Orient Express* this October with MacBeth & Cheese, your local all-volunteer community theater.

Performances begin on Friday, October 16, at the Firehouse Cultural Center, located at 101 First Ave. NE in Ruskin, with additional performances at Brandon Performing Arts, located at 225 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon, beginning on Friday, October 30.

Mystery. Suspense. Humor. And an ending you won't want spoiled!

See the complete performance schedule at <https://macbethandcheese.com/>.

MacBeth & Cheese — live theater that pulls you in and doesn't let go.

For tickets and information: MacBeth & Cheese, a community theater company, presents productions in partnership with the Firehouse Cultural Center in Ruskin. Visit macbethandcheese.com or email info@macbethandcheese.com.

MacBeth & Cheese has a Brandon location at 225 E. Brandon Blvd., Brandon, FL 33511. Call 813-485-4341 for information.

The Firehouse Cultural Center is located at 101 1st Ave. NE, Ruskin, FL 33570. For tickets, upcoming performances and arts programming, visit firehouseculturalcenter.org or call 813-645-7651.

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FROM SPELLS TO SCARE ZONES: GUIDE TO FUN AREA EVENTS FOR ALL

By Jenny Bennett



Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party

Get your favorite costume ready and come and collect candies and treats while Magic Kingdom park thrills and chills you with eerie entertainment, delightful attractions and some beloved Disney characters in Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party. Watch three sinister sisters bewitch and bedazzle in the Hocus Pocus Villain Spelltacular, boogie down with friends from Disney Junior shows at Disney Moonlight Melodies and finish the evening watching Disney's Not-So-Spooky-Spectacular, a wickedly wild fireworks display hosted by Jack Skellington. This frightfully fun experience runs on select nights through Saturday, October 31. Tickets can be purchased at <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/>; please review the dress code and costume guidelines before attending.

Howl-O-Scream At Busch Gardens

Busch Gardens' Howl-O-Scream returns in full force, taking over the entire park with haunted houses, scare zones, sinister shows and more. Unspeakable horror lives in every dark corner, including on Busch Gardens' pulse-pounding thrill rides. Howl-O-Scream is bringing fear to the next level, and once you're in there's nothing you can do about it. This event is intended for mature audiences



and contains adult content; costumes are not allowed. Tickets can be purchased at <https://buschgardenstampa.com/>. The event runs on select nights until Saturday, October 31.

Friends Of The Tampa Riverwalk Trick Or Treat

The free Riverwalk Trick or Treat event returns on Saturday, October 24, from 4-9 p.m. Dress up in a costume and then trick-or-treat along the Tampa Riverwalk and enjoy the family-friendly fun activities. There will be over 50 stations to enjoy throughout the route with trick-or-treat bags available from Catanchobee Park, located at 601 Old Water St. in Tampa, while supplies last. There will also be a costume contest at Catanchobee Park at 5 p.m. and a movie on the lawn starting at 7:15 p.m.

Creatures Of The Night At ZooTampa

Join Tampa Bay's number one family Halloween event, Creatures of the Night, at ZooTampa for a night of eerie family frights. Ghouls and goblins of all ages can enjoy howling outdoor experiences, spooky characters, creepy culinary treats and much more. This year's event features a colossal adventure, Mesozoic Mayhem. Tickets are available at <https://zootampa.org/>.



Haunted Woods Events At Hillsborough River State Park

Are you ready to face your worst nightmare? Haunted Woods at Hillsborough River State Park is where your nightmares become alive. As night falls, the woods come to life and turn into pure terror. Brave the Scare Trail — Beyond the Grave — where the undead are clocking in. This is recommended for children over 12 years of age and will take place from 7-10 p.m. at Hillsborough River State Park, located at 15402 U.S. 301 in Thonotosassa, on Friday and Saturday, October 16-17. For a more family-friendly event, bring younger children to the Beyond the Grave Kids Trail event, which runs from 3-6 p.m. only. This is a cash-only event.

Tall Tales Of Old Florida

Explore Tampa's 19th-century living history museum, Cracker Country, by lantern at night in its Tall Tales of Old Florida event. Along the way, storytellers will spin wild yarns about Florida's unexplained oddities, including skunk apes, misbehaving trains, cow-hunting giants and more. A little bit scary, a little bit funny and always family-friendly. After your tour, enjoy a festive snack and drink, which are included in your admission. Tall Tales of Old Florida will be held at Cracker Country on the Florida State Fairgrounds, located at 4800 U.S. 301 in Tampa, on Saturday, October 24, from 7-10:30 p.m. Visit www.crackercountry.org to purchase your tickets



crackercountry.org to purchase your tickets (advance purchase is required) and select the start time of your tour, which will last about an hour. This event is not recommended for children under 6 years of age.

Boo Bash Bingo

Boo Bash Bingo returns to New Hope Church on Thursday, October 29, starting with light bites at 6 p.m., followed by bingo at 6:45 p.m. Dress up in your favorite Halloween costume (if you want to) and join Brandon Juniors for a fun night of 10 rounds of bingo, in which you can win your choice from a selection of designer handbags, including Kate Spade, Michael Kors, Coach and more. Along with bingo, there will be raffle baskets, silent auction items and a 50/50 drawing. Contact treasurebjwc3509@gmail.com.

Annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run Benefiting A Kitten Place

Animal lovers are invited to lace up their sneakers and make a lifesaving difference at the sixth annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run, presented by The Fuddy Fund and benefiting A Kitten Place, a local nonprofit rescue dedicated to saving homeless cats and kittens throughout the Tampa Bay area. The untimed 5K fun run and 1-mile walk will take place on Saturday, October 24, in the Twin Lakes neighborhood at 3002 Beaver Pond Trail in Valrico. Registration is now open. For more information visit <https://akittenplace.org/events/>.

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THE MORELAND WAY FAMILY HEALTH: HEALTH CARE WITH HEART

Staff Report



The Moreland Way Family Health team brings together expertise in advanced nursing practice, lactation counseling, pharmacy, social work and health care administration to provide compassionate, personalized care for the whole family.

The Moreland Way Family Health was built on a simple belief: Health care should be personal, compassionate and centered on the whole patient. Its practice is uniquely comprised of a family with backgrounds in advanced nursing practice (APRN), lactation counseling, registered nursing, pharmacy, case management through social work, and health care administration. Together, they bring a comprehensive perspective to patient care that has been shaped not only by their professional experience but also by their personal experiences as patients and caregivers.

The Moreland Way Family Health understands that health care is about more than treating symptoms. Every patient has a story, and every concern deserves to be heard. It takes the time to listen, understand everyone's needs and work alongside patients and families to address both physical and mental health concerns. Whether it's managing a chronic condition, navigating life's challenges or supporting preventive wellness, the Moreland Way's goal is to provide care that is thoughtful,



to expanding services to include adult primary care this November and mental health therapy in January 2027. It invites you and your family to experience a different approach to health care, one where you're treated as more than a patient; you're treated like family.

To learn more or schedule an appointment, contact The Moreland Way Family Health today. Your family's health and well-being are its priority.

The Moreland Way Family Health is located at 10315 Black Mangrove Lane in Riverview. For more information, contact 813-320-6370 or visit the website directly at www.tmwfamilyhealth.com.

respectful, and whole-hearted. The practice believes strong relationships are the foundation of better health. By combining clinical expertise with compassion and personalized attention, it strives to create an environment where patients feel valued, supported and empowered in their health care journey. Currently, it is welcoming new pediatric patients and looks forward

PREPARING FOR MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT WITH MB INSURANCE

By Makenzie Atkins Noel

Choosing the right insurance plan is about more than finding a familiar name. Doctors, prescriptions, costs and coverage can all change from year to year, making an annual review an important part of protecting both health and finances. With Medicare's annual enrollment period (AEP) approaching, MB Insurance Solutions is helping local clients prepare for the changes ahead.

Owned by Michele Bartock, MB Insurance Solutions is an independent health and life insurance agency serving Florida. Bartock, who has lived in the community for over 20 years, specializes in supplements, Medicare Advantage, prescription plans and life insurance. As an independent agent, she has access to 12 organizations and more than 80 Medicare plans, allowing her to compare options rather than limiting clients to one plan.

Bartock also helps clients with under-65 health insurance, off-market plans and group health insurance for small businesses. Additional coverage options include dental, vision, hearing, life, accident, indemnity, cancer and heart/stroke plans, as well as long-term care and annuities.

With Medicare's AEP approaching, now is the time for beneficiaries to start reviewing their coverage for 2027. AEP runs from October 15 through December 7, giving Medicare beneficiaries a limited window to make changes to their plans.

That review is especially important because Medicare plans can change from year to year. Prescription drug plans may



Michele Bartock, owner of MB Insurance Solutions, helps clients navigate Medicare coverage and understand their options during Annual Enrollment Period.

change their formularies, deductibles and co-insurance, while out-of-pocket maximums can also increase. Bartock's goal is to compare the available options based on each client's doctors, medications and priorities so they can make an informed decision before the deadline.

"Every client has different needs, and I want them to understand their options rather than simply telling them what plan they should choose," said Bartock.

"When clients know they can call with questions throughout the year and have someone who knows their situation, that is what makes the difference."

As the end of the year approaches, Bartock wants Medicare beneficiaries to keep a few important things in mind. Some Medicare Advantage plans offer a Part B premium 'Give Back,' while individuals may also qualify for Medicaid or the Low-Income Subsidy based on their income and assets. She also cautions beneficiaries about unsolicited calls promising gift cards or food cards, noting that these benefits are only available to those who meet certain qualifications. For those who miss the annual enrollment period or are unhappy with a new Medicare Advantage plan, there may be another opportunity to make a change between January and March.

Outside of Medicare and Affordable Care Act plans, Bartok can also help clients with ancillary and small group plans. Visit online at www.medicareofflorida.com; call 813-553-3822, ext. 2; or mlbartock@gmail.com.

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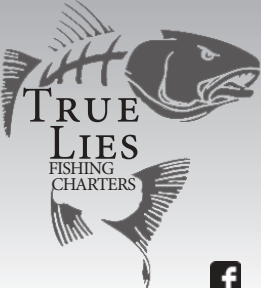
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KAREN BROOKS SHARES JOURNEY OF FAITH AND REDEMPTION

Karen Brooks' dream to write and publish *Becoming a Display of HIS Splendor* was born out of much disappointment, defeat and discouragement. She discovered that delayed or denied dreams are not dead; they are sometimes redirected and rebirthed for God's greater victory and glory. She truly believes in her heart that God has a redeeming purpose for every disappointment and loss we face if we will surrender our pain to Him.

Brooks invites you to join her on this eight-week spiritual and emotional growth journey as she vulnerably shares parts of her painful past that led her to encounter God's perfect love, trust her Father's heart and stand firm with an unshakeable faith. Her hope and prayer are that her redemption story and the truths from God's word will inspire and ignite your faith to flourish and remain strong as "an oak of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor," (Isaiah 61:3).

As you experience this spiritual journey, you will:

- Be securely planted with your roots growing deeper in God's love and truth.



Karen Brooks recently celebrated the publication of her new eight-week spiritual and emotional growth workbook, *Becoming a Display of HIS Splendor*, with a book signing at Foxtail Coffee Riverview South.



warfare against the attacks of the evil one.

- Discover how abiding daily in His presence equips and empowers you to stand your ground in spiritual warfare against the attacks of the evil one.
- Display His splendor as you build and leave a legacy of faith, bearing eternal fruit to His glory.

Brooks recently hosted a book signing event at Foxtail Coffee Riverview South. She is truly grateful and feels blessed for all those who came to celebrate and rejoice with her. She especially wishes to thank Shanna Tvenstrup, franchisee, and her wonderful staff for hosting such a successful event.

Brooks looks forward to walking you through this spiritual workbook because you were created for the display of HIS splendor.

Her book can be purchased on Amazon at www.amazon.com/dp/1919386726.

Staff Report

RUSKIN SEAFOOD FESTIVAL SERVES UP TWO DAYS OF FLAVOR AND FUN

By Kelly Wise Valdes

The 36th Annual Ruskin Seafood Festival is set to return to E.G. Simmons Park on Saturday, November 14– Sunday, November 15, bringing two days of food, family activities and live entertainment to the SouthShore community. Produced by the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce, the popular waterfront event will once again offer free admission, along with free entry to the park thanks to local sponsorships. "Admission to the Festival is free, and admission to E.G. Simmons Park has been covered by our generous sponsors, Advent Health and Elite Marine Dock & Seawall," said Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bonnie Peacock.

This year's event is made possible by many community sponsors including Council Growers, Meals on Wheels, Sunset Grill, Coastal Mobile Lube and Tire, Christopher Ligor & Associates, Ruskin Fresh Market, Dream Vacations, Waterset, Beacon Animal Hospital, Friends of the Southshore Library, TECO, SmileLYNN Pediatric Dentistry, Suncoast Credit Union, T-Mobile, Bay Area Veterinary and more. The festival is expected to welcome an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 visitors across the weekend. Crowds will find the festival expanded in size and offerings. "This year's festival will be bigger and better than ever," said Peacock.

The festival will showcase 22 food trucks and booths serving fresh seafood and classic fair favorites. A "Party Barge" bar and several smaller bars will be located throughout



the grounds. Live music will fill two stages both days, including steel drums, reggae, country and local performers. Saturday's lineup includes opening ceremonies followed by J Lowery Steel Drums, Josh Bidwell, Randy McNeeley and Iruption Reggae. Sunday will feature a Sea Glass Church service along with return performances by J Lowery, Emma Christine, Bidwell and McNeeley.

Two special areas will be available for visitors needing breaks or accommodations. The Sensory Zone will provide quiet spaces overseen by the festival's Special Needs Committee. "Last year's Sensory Tent is this year's Sensory Zone," said Peacock. "This area is managed by our Special Needs Committee, and will have two 'respite' tents, one for children and one for adults, where those that may need a quiet break can go. We will also have several Special Needs Vendors including Applied Behavior Analysis, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and more."

For attendees arriving with pets, the Bark Zone offers a dedicated rest spot. "The Bark Zone is a shaded area set aside within the Festival that has water bowls and toys for the canine festival-goers that may need a little break," Peacock said.

The festival runs Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at E.G. Simmons Park located at 2401 19th Ave N.W. in Ruskin. Shuttle service from parking areas will be available. For more information visit www.ruskinseafoodfest.org.



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DINE LOCAL, SUPPORT LOCAL, WIN LOCAL

I love supporting local businesses, and there is something especially exciting about an event that gives our community a reason to get out, try something new and celebrate the incredible businesses right in our own backyard.

That is exactly what is happening with the first-ever Winthrop Restaurant Week, coming September 17-27.

For 11 days, Winthrop will be filled with opportunities to enjoy special Restaurant Week menus, discover new favorite dishes and support locally owned restaurants that help make Riverview such a wonderful place to live.

Participating restaurants include Acropolis Greek Taverna, CALI, Cappy's Pizzeria, Donovan's Meatery, Himes Breakfast House, Longshots Sports Bar & Lounge, The Patio at Winthrop Liquors and Tutto Tavola.

As someone who is always looking for ways to encourage people to shop, dine and experience local, I am particularly excited about what Riverview Fun and Events is doing alongside Restaurant Week.

We are celebrating with more than \$1,000 in giveaways from local restaur-



rants and businesses. That includes gift cards, shopping packages, beauty and self-care prizes and some very generous \$100 and \$200 gift cards.

We have teamed up with businesses including CALI, Donovan's Meatery, Acropolis Greek Taverna, Himes Breakfast House, Tutto Tavola, Cappy's, Longshots, Foil & Hue Salon, Mainstream Boutique and more. Giveaways will be revealed leading up to Restaurant Week, with prizes being awarded throughout September 17-27.

But honestly, the giveaways are just the bonus.

The real prize is having an opportunity to experience the restaurants, entrepreneurs and small businesses that make Winthrop and Riverview special.

So mark your calendar, gather your friends and family, and make plans to dine local. And be sure to follow Riverview Fun and Events so you don't miss the giveaway announcements.

I'll see you in Winthrop!

LOCAL MOM, MATH TEACHER AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER

By Libby Hopkins

Wearing many hats comes easily to Brandon resident Rebecca McDonagh. She is a mom with two teenagers and a rescue dog, Foxy. She has been teaching for 18 years with Hillsborough County Schools and loves to travel, but it's what she does in her off time that has made her a social media influencer. On Instagram, she is @mathwithmissmcd, and her reels are hysterical.



Rebecca McDonagh is a local mom, teacher and social media influencer. Her funny reels and videos she posts on her Instagram account, @mathwithmissmcd are inspired by her life.

"I actually started making content hoping to create a little side hustle; you may have heard teachers aren't exactly the highest-paid profession," McDonagh said. "It sort of slowly evolved into making silly videos instead of a serious business, which is great because this is way more fun."

The inspiration for her reels and videos comes from her real life.

"Luckily, real life gives me all the inspiration I need," she said. "My own interactions with my students, my kids and other people's stories give me plenty of material. My Teacher Hotline videos are what initially took off, and people still send me names to use all the time. I love how there's a part of so many people's experiences in my videos."

Making her videos and reel is cathartic to McDonagh.

"It's honestly just really fun and kind of takes the edge off what can sometimes be a

stressful profession," she said. "I love hearing from my fellow teachers and moms about how something made them laugh or eased the chaos of the day."

Being called a social media influencer is something that McDonagh takes in stride.

"I have a feeling that is a huge overstatement," McDonagh said with a laugh.

"I'm not really an influencer (unless it's influencing people to drink Diet Coke, and then I absolutely am) or a celebrity, but it is the best when people come up and introduce themselves and say they like something on my channel. I've met people in different states and even different countries who've seen one of the videos, and it's a blast chatting and hearing about their own experiences."

McDonagh loves her followers and loves how the community supports her as both a teacher and a social media personality.

"I'm so proud of how our community rallies around teachers," she said. "I've always felt so supported here working in our local schools and I'm proud to call this home. I recently published two math workbooks for fourth and fifth graders called Math to the Music, and it's been amazing hearing such great feedback from everyone."

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TRICK OR TREAT STREET RETURNS FOR FAMILY HALLOWEEN FUN

Staff Report

Halloween will take over Riverview High School on Saturday, October 24, when the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce hosts its annual Trick or Treat Street, bringing local businesses and thousands of area families together for an evening of festive fun.

The free community event will take place from 5-8 p.m. at Riverview High School, located at 11311 Boyette Rd. in Riverview. Families are invited to come dressed in their Halloween best and enjoy trick-or-treating, food, games and activities designed for children of all ages.

One of the highlights of Trick or Treat Street is the opportunity for children to visit decorated booths hosted by local businesses and collect candy along the way. Participating businesses are encouraged to get creative with their displays, wear costumes and create memorable experiences for families.

In addition to trick-or-treating, the event will feature food trucks, a foam party and bounce houses, giving families plenty of ways to enjoy the evening beyond collecting candy.

For Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce members, the event also provides an opportunity to connect directly with local residents and introduce their businesses to potential customers in a fun, relaxed setting.

"Don't just advertise to the communi-



ty — be part of the community" is the message behind the chamber's invitation to businesses to participate.

Businesses can reserve a vendor booth and decorate their space for Halloween while handing out candy to visiting children. Booth participation is \$65 for chamber members and \$100 for non-members. Craft vendor spaces are \$75 for members and \$100 for nonmembers, while food vendor spaces are \$75 for members and \$100 for nonmembers.

The event is sponsored by A League of Their Own Riverview.

Whether families come for the costumes, candy, bounce houses, foam party or simply the chance to enjoy an evening together, Trick or Treat Street offers a festive way to celebrate Halloween while supporting and connecting with local businesses.

Admission to Trick or Treat Street is free for the community.

For businesses, the chamber encourages early registration to secure a booth and join one of its largest community events of the year.

YOGA INSTRUCTOR HELPS PEOPLE RECONNECT, REDUCE STRESS AND FIND PEACE

By Mylena C. Ferman

Jaclyn Peterson, owner of Ascend with Jaclyn, aims to help people reduce stress and burnout through yoga. Peterson leads trauma-sensitive yoga classes throughout the Greater Tampa Bay area and works with local businesses.

Her goal is to teach employees how yoga practices can provide an outlet to trauma and better work-life practices.

"Yoga is for everybody, you know?" Peterson said. "No matter your physical state, ... there is some type of yoga you can do."

Many people have anecdotally claimed yoga to be a great stress reducer.

However, a study done in India earlier this year found that stock market investors who participated in a 30-day yoga intervention reported a reduction in perceived stress. Another yoga study, conducted in 2024, found that the yoga participants showed improved executive function, working memory and processing speed.

Peterson would likely agree with such findings. She claimed those who participated in her yoga classes reported similar benefits, including better sleep, feelings of calm, raised focus levels and less chronic pain. Trauma sensitive yoga can also have an additional benefit of allowing people to feel in control of their own body again.

"When people have experienced trauma,



... they walk away with a diminished sense of self and a lot of times they may not even be aware that they don't trust themselves to

make decisions," she said.

Peterson practiced yoga after surviving an abusive marriage and moving out of state.

"The practice helped me reconnect with myself and slowly begin to rebuild my identity and rebuild my self-worth," Peterson said.

Currently, Peterson hosts a weekly chair yoga

class at the Florida Blue Center in Sarasota. She aims to do more business-to-business work with employee wellness programs and give back to the community with Community Wellness Programs.

"It helps bring a balance and a sense of peace that they need in their lives, as well," Peterson said. "That's really my goal, to help people find that peace and to activate that parasympathetic nervous system."

For more information about Ascend with Jaclyn, please visit <https://ascendwithjaclyn.com/>, follow its Instagram (@ascendwithjaclyn) or follow its Ascend with Jaclyn Facebook page. Those interested in having Peterson host a class may contact her through the contact page on her website or via email at ascendwithjaclyn@gmail.com.

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PULTEGROUP HOSTS NOTES OF LOVE CEREMONY FOR TWO VETERANS RECEIVING MORTGAGE-FREE HOMES

Staff Report



PulteGroup's West Florida Division opened the doors of two future veteran homes to the Riverview community on August 27, inviting employees, trade partners, family members and neighbors to leave permanent messages of love and gratitude inside the walls before they were finished.

The Notes of Love event is part of the division's Built to Honor program, a collaboration with the nonprofit Building Homes for Heroes, which builds, modifies and gifts mortgage-free homes veterans and Gold Star families. Army Spc. Ryan Heard and Army Sgt. Carson Shaw received the two gifted homes in Pulte Homes' Spencer Glen community, located at 13716 Sunlight Meadow Dr. in Riverview.

Visitors were welcome to stop by at any time to write handwritten notes directly on the studs, slab and walls throughout both homes. The messages, typically expressions of encouragement, thanks and support for the veterans and their families, will remain sealed behind the finished walls and flooring for the life of the homes.

Heard arrived at the community at 2:30 p.m. and walked through his future home to see and read the notes left by the community. Following his walkthrough, his family was given time alone in the home to review the messages privately. Shaw arrived at 3:30 p.m. for the same experience in his home next door.

"There is something incredibly powerful about walking a veteran through a home filled with handwritten notes from people they've never met, all of them thanking him or her for their sacrifice," said Tony Campano, vice president of procurement for PulteGroup's West Florida Division. "I cry every single time I walk through with these veterans. Seeing Ryan and Carson read those messages, knowing they'll be part of their home forever, is one of the most meaningful things we get to do all year."

"Notes of Love is a beautiful reminder that when we build a home, we're also building a community around one of our

nation's heroes," said Andy Pujol, founder and CEO of Building Homes for Heroes. "We're so proud to stand with our incredible partners at Pulte's Built to Honor program and encourage the community to come together, welcome these deserving heroes and show them just how grateful we are for their service and sacrifice."

"Seeing all these people coming together, giving their time and their donations to build this home for me and my family, it's overwhelming and unbelievable," said Heard. "Trust the process. Thank you to everybody, to the builders and volunteers who are going to build this home for us."

"This is one of the most special days of our lives," said Shaw. "To everybody who showed up and gave their time — thank you."

The Notes of Love ceremony precedes the completion of the mortgage-free homes, which will be move-in ready for both families by Thanksgiving. The dual gift marks the seventh and eighth mortgage-free homes PulteGroup's West Florida Division has built for veterans in the Tampa Bay area through Built to Honor, and the first time the division has honored two recipients at once.

Across the country, PulteGroup has donated over 100 Built to Honor mortgage-free homes to wounded veterans since founding the program in 2013.

For more information, visit www.pulte.com/homes/florida/tampa/riverview/spencer-glen-211225.

For over a decade, PulteGroup's Built to Honor program has recognized and thanked returning military personnel who have been injured during their term of service by providing mortgage-free homes to veterans and their families. Launched in 2013, the program has built and donated over 100 homes, gifting more than \$40 million in value, across the country. Built to Honor works in partnership with nonprofit organizations to identify veteran candidates. For more information about Built to Honor, go to <http://builttohonor.org/>. Follow Built to Honor on X @BuiltToHonor and www.facebook.com/people/built-to-honor/61574264735162/.



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CIRQUE DREAMS HOLIDAZE RETURNS TO RP FUNDING FOR ONE NIGHT

Staff Report

Cirque Dreams Holiday will captivate audiences in Lakeland this holiday season with a brilliantly breathtaking holiday spectacular for the entire family. As the original cirque holiday theatrical event, this nationally acclaimed annual tradition wraps a Broadway-style production around awe-inspiring contemporary circus arts.

On Christmas Eve, young Clara returns home only to learn that a snowstorm may keep her family from joining her. Just as loneliness begins to settle in, two whimsical singers appear and whisk her away into Holiday, a fantastical world full of color, wonder and breathtaking circus acts. As she journeys through this magical realm, Clara becomes part of the adventure, forming unexpected friendships and discovering her own courage.

Reimagined for 2026, Cirque Dreams Holiday features a world-renowned cast of performers. The ensemble includes aerial circus acts, sleight-of-hand jugglers, fun-loving skippers, eye-popping acrobatics and much more. With new music including beloved holiday favorites sung live, new sets, sparkling scenery and stunning costumes, guests from children to seniors will be on the edge of their seats as holiday characters come to life on the most magical of nights.

Both critics and audiences alike agree that Cirque Dreams Holiday is a show for all ages to enjoy where families can make unforgettable memories together.

Cirque Dreams Holiday will perform one show at RP Funding Center, located at



701 W. Lime St. in Lakeland, on Thursday, November 19, at 7 p.m. Tickets are available at the RP Funding Center Box Office or by calling 863-834-8111. Groups of 10 or more may reserve tickets by contacting group.sales@vstarentertainment.com. For more information, visit www.cirquedreams.com.

Follow @CirqueDreams and #cirquedreamsholiday on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

About Cirque Dreams

The Cirque Dreams franchise is a globally recognized entertainment brand that has produced a wide array of live stage performances for Broadway, casinos, theme parks, resorts, cruise lines and theatrical venues worldwide. Since 1993, millions of people have experienced Cirque Dreams productions across the globe. Combining the world's finest contemporary circus artists with dynamic choreography and whimsical storytelling, Cirque Dreams productions have captured the hearts and imaginations of both audiences and critics alike. The Cirque Dreams franchise is produced by VStar Entertainment Group, a leading entertainment company acquired in 2018 by Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group. VStar has entertained millions of families with more than 40,000 live performances across 50-plus countries.

FIRE STATION AT CENTER OF NEW DRONE BLOOD DELIVERY PROGRAM

By Marie Gilmore



carrying whole blood can be deployed simultaneously. Once the blood arrives, trained first responders can begin a transfusion at the scene when medically necessary, potentially providing critical treatment before the patient reaches a trauma center.

The two stations were selected because they serve areas of Hillsborough County with high volumes of penetrating trauma and hemorrhagic injuries.

"The golden hour of trauma care has always started at the hospital door until now," said Michele Moran, senior vice president for emergency services at Tampa General. "This program puts whole blood directly into the hands of first responders before a patient ever reaches us."

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue officials said the program will give first responders another tool for treating patients with severe injuries.

"Our crews are often first at the scene of an accident," said Todd Carnell, rescue division chief. "This program puts an essential, lifesaving resource directly in our hands at the scene."

The technology is expected to come online in October, pending approval by the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners. The commission convened on the matter September 2.

The pilot program is intended to generate data that could help expand the coverage area and capacity over time. Tampa General officials also hope the initiative can serve as a model for using drone technology to improve emergency medical response in other communities.

A Riverview fire station will soon play a key role in a new emergency medical program designed to deliver lifesaving whole blood by drone directly to trauma scenes.

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Station 37 in Riverview is one of two stations selected to serve as a launch site for Tampa General Hospital's new emergency drone delivery program. The initiative is designed to get blood to patients experiencing severe blood loss before they reach a hospital, when every minute can make a difference.

The program, developed in partnership with Tampa General Hospital, Hillsborough County Fire Rescue, the University of South Florida Health Morsani College of Medicine, the Florida Center for Emergency Medical Services, OneBlood and Archer First Response Systems, is being billed as the nation's first EMS-driven drone delivery program for prehospital whole blood.

Station 37, along with Station 9 in the Falkenburg/Sabal Park area, will serve as the initial operating locations. Together, the two drone systems are expected to cover a 70-square-mile area and deliver whole blood in less than three minutes on average.

When a 911 call indicates a potentially life-threatening hemorrhage, emergency responders will be dispatched while a drone

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SUNCOAST HEALTH CENTERS EXPANDS CARE IN GROWING RIVERVIEW

By Marie Gilmore

As Riverview and Southeastern Hillsborough County continue to grow, access to convenient and affordable health care is becoming increasingly important. Suncoast Community Health Centers (SCHC) is responding with a new Riverview location that opened in April.

Located at 10334 White Viburnum Way in Riverview, the new

center provides adult and family medical care, with walk-in appointments available as space allows. The location was established to give residents in Riverview, Gibsonton and surrounding communities a nearby option for routine and ongoing health care.

The new location was highlighted as part of National Health Center Week, August 2-8, which recognizes the role community health centers play in providing care to residents regardless of their ability to pay.

SCHC accepts most insurance plans, including Medicaid, Medicare and the Hillsborough County Health Care Plan. For patients without insurance, the organization offers a sliding-fee scale based on household income and family size. The goal is to ensure that cost or lack of insurance does not prevent residents from receiving care.

"As Southeastern Hillsborough County continues to grow, we knew families here needed a local option they could count on, whether they have insurance, are on Medicaid or don't have coverage at all," said Brad-



Suncoast Community Health Centers recently opened its new Riverview location at 10334 White Viburnum Way, expanding access to affordable adult and family medical care for residents.

ley Herremans, CEO of Suncoast Community Health Centers. "Riverview is not just a new location, it's a continuation of nearly 50 years of showing up for this community, and we want people to know the door is open."

SCHC has served Hillsborough County as a not-for-profit Federally Qualified Health Center since 1977. Across its network, the organization serves more than 72,000 unique patients through more than 250,000 visits each year.

The organization's approach extends beyond traditional medical care. Depending on location and patient needs, SCHC connects residents with behavioral health support, financial counseling, social services, insurance enrollment assistance and other resources designed to address factors that can affect a family's overall health and stability.

The Riverview center is part of SCHC's continued expansion as the population of Southeastern Hillsborough County increases.

Residents seeking care at the Riverview location can call 813-653-6100 to schedule an appointment. Walk-ins are welcome as space allows.

For more information about Suncoast Community Health Centers, available services and additional locations, visit <https://suncoast-chc.org/>.

GIBSONTON DESALINATION PROJECT EARNS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Staff Report

A major water infrastructure project in Gibsonton is receiving national recognition for strengthening the region's water supply while addressing the environmental and operational challenges of working along Tampa Bay.

The Tampa Bay Water Desalination Intake Pump Station – Phase II has been named a 2026 National Design-Build Project/Team Award Merit winner by the Design-Build Institute of America (DBIA). The project was one of 32 projects recognized nationwide across 10 categories.

Located at one of Tampa Bay's only desalination facilities, the project was designed to help meet rising water demand and improve the facility's ability to withstand coastal flooding and extreme weather.

The new intake pump station can supply up to 50 million gallons of seawater per day to the existing desalination facility. Critical electrical systems were also elevated above the floodplain to provide additional protection against sea level rise and severe weather.

The project presented significant challenges because construction took place inside an active Tampa Electric Company power plant that was undergoing its own construction work. The team also had to work around existing utilities and remain mindful of a nearby public manatee viewing area and the surrounding marine environment.

Early collaboration was key to completing the project successfully. Tampa Bay Water, the design-build team, TECO operations staff



and TECO's contractor worked together through frequent meetings and real-time communication. The approach allowed the teams to address issues quickly, including previously unknown utilities discovered during construction.

The project was completed in just 18 months, remained on budget and recorded zero safety incidents.

Environmental protection was also an important component. Construction included strict controls and monitoring designed to protect the surrounding marine habitat. The project team also partnered with Clams for Clean Water, a nonprofit organization, to design and construct clam habitats intended to further improve water quality.

The \$21.05 million project was led by Tampa Bay Water, with Black & Veatch Corp. serving as owner advisor and Archer Western Construction LLC serving as design-builder and general contractor. Wade Trim Inc. provided engineering services.

DBIA Executive Director and CEO Lisa Washington said the national award winners demonstrate what can be accomplished when expertise, innovation and a shared commitment to excellence come together.

The Merit Award winners will be recognized at DBIA's 2026 Design-Build Conference & Expo in Cleveland on Thursday, November 5, where additional national honors will be announced.



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Flip Flop Shops Celebrates With A Ribbon Cutting

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce celebrated an anniversary ribbon cutting at Flip Flop Shops, located at 3818 Sun City Center Blvd. in Cypress Village Plaza. Local owner Pamela welcomed the chamber family to her shop, known for Florida-style comfort from brands including OOFOS, OluKai, REEF, Cobian, BIRKENSTOCK and HEYDUDE.

"Pamela has built a store that feels like SouthShore — friendly, comfortable and proudly local," said Bonnie Peacock, executive director of the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce. "We're thrilled to celebrate this milestone with her." Visit <https://flipflopshopssuncity.locally.com/> or call 813-938-5523 for more information.



first year of quality and community spirit.

"What an incredible milestone!" said Bonnie Peacock of the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce.

"They've truly brought people together — we can't wait to toast many more!"

Come raise a glass at and get more info at www.localbrewcompany.com.

Council Growers Farmers Market

Join Council Growers on Saturday, October 10, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at its garden center for a market focused on what farmers markets are all about.

You will find local produce, chicken and eggs, seafood, sourdough, local honey, micro-greens, jams, pickles, coffee and more, all surrounded by our working sod farm and nursery. Come enjoy the farm. Take home something good. The Council Growers Garden Center is located at 3226 24th St. SE in Ruskin.



The Greater SouthShore Chamber Of Commerce Launches New Headquarters

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce officially launched its brand-new headquarters, the SS SouthShore, with a festive rope-cutting ceremony that drew a packed crowd of members, community leaders and supporters.

Guests toured every 'deck,' took part in a sea-shanty scavenger hunt and enjoyed food and fellowship as the celebration ran from bow to stern. Demand was so strong that overflow parking was needed.

"What a day! We officially set sail with a huge rope-cutting for the brand-new SS SouthShore," the chamber shared. "Thank you to everyone who came aboard and helped us make waves. Here's to fair winds and following seas for the Greater SouthShore Chamber!"

The new space marks an exciting chapter

for the organization as it continues serving businesses across SouthShore and South Hillsborough County.

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce is located at 226 W. College Ave. in Ruskin. To contact the chamber, call 813-645-1366. For additional information, visit www.southshorechamberofcommerce.org.

The Local Brew Company Celebrates One-year Anniversary

Cheers erupted as the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce joined neighbors for a lively ribbon-cutting celebrating The Local Brew Company's successful one-year anniversary at 1050 Cypress Village Blvd. in Ruskin. Founded by Aaron and Joelle Schmalzle, this vibrant nano brewery serves small-batch craft beer, robotic espresso and house wines. The chamber congratulates the team on an outstanding

ECHO Named Gold Winner For Non-Profit Organization

ECHO (Emergency Care Help Organization) is proud to announce that it has been named a Gold Winner for Non-Profit Organization in the 2026 Tampa Bay Times Best of the Best awards.

"This recognition is a reflection of our entire ECHO family," said Iris S. Thurman, CEO of ECHO. "Our staff, volunteers, donors and community partners make it possible for us to continue showing up for our neighbors. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who supports our mission and helped make this recognition possible."



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SHAWNA’S MONTHLY MARKET UPDATE

The South Shore market has split into two lanes. Homes priced for today’s buyer are moving, while overpriced homes are sitting. Buyers have not disappeared. They are simply more selective about condition, monthly costs and value. Nationally, August inventory reached 1.62 million homes and a 4.9-month supply, giving buyers more choices and negotiating power. Locally, Hillsborough County’s latest report showed single-family sales up 1.3%, a steady median price of \$430,000 and active inventory down 6.6%. This is not a collapsing market. It is a market rewarding homes that compete well.

Across the South Shore, resale homes face builder incentives, older homes face questions about roofs and insurance, and waterfront homes are judged by seawalls, flood costs and boating access. Buyers have more leverage this fall, but pricing and presentation still determine which homes sell.

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