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TAMPA BAY MISSION OF HOPE EXPANDS
THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

By Makenzie Atkins Noel



The new Brandon facility of Tampa Bay Mission of Hope serves as the only cold weather shelter in East Hillsborough County.

Tampa Bay Mission of Hope is a faith-based nonprofit organization providing critical support services to individuals and families across East Hillsborough County while helping them move toward long-term stability.

The organization is expanding in East Hillsborough County with the opening of a new building in Brandon, strengthening its ability to serve individuals and families facing crisis. The facility, located at 110 S. Parsons Ave., now operates as the Brandon Cold Weather Shelter in partnership with Hillsborough County Homeless Services. This location serves residents from Riverview, Valrico, Dover, Seffner and Plant City during severe cold weather and is currently the only cold weather emergency shelter operating in East County.

Alongside this expansion, Tampa Bay Mission of Hope is focused on addressing a growing need among women and children in the community.

"We are seeing a significant increase in the number of women and children seeking assistance, which has highlighted a growing gap in available resources within our community," said Dr. Reba Haley, founder

and CEO of Tampa Bay Mission of Hope. "In response to this need, we are working toward opening Hope Haven, a dedicated shelter designed to provide safe, supportive and transitional housing for women and children facing homelessness, abuse and other crises."

The planned shelter aims to provide a safe and supportive environment through emergency and transitional housing, meals, clothing, case management, counseling support, life-skills training and connections to community resources, with dignity, faith and compassion at the core of its services.

Dr. Haley's professional background spans counseling, mediation, education and ministry. Dr. Haley serves as pastor of The Gathering Place, where she provides family and marriage support, prayer and weekly worship services. Under her leadership, Tampa Bay Mission of Hope offers a wide range of services, including counseling, mediation, substance abuse support, parenting classes, case management and more.

By expanding its services and facilities, Tampa Bay Mission of Hope remains committed to supporting families and individuals in crisis while fostering long-term stability and resilience in East Hillsborough County.

For more information or to donate, please visit www.tbmissionofhope.org or call 813-716-3996.

A SHOW-STOPPING SURPRISE:
HILLSBOROUGH TEACHERS GET
ACCESS TO NCL COSTUME CLOSET

By Kelly Wise Valdes

Hillsborough County theater and dance teachers received an unexpected surprise when Norwegian Cruise Line opened its Riverview costume warehouse, offering educators the chance to select from thousands of professional garments and accessories.

Rachel Anderson, costume production coordinator at Norwegian Cruise Line, said the idea grew from a desire to support young performers. Anderson said she wants students to love dance and drama and hopes these costumes will help inspire students to continue with theater. For years, the company has donated retired costumes only to employees, but then Anderson had the idea to open it up to theater programs across Hillsborough County, where Norwegian's warehouse is located.

This year, teachers arriving at the warehouse found an expansive selection with more than 30 racks filled with costumes, including leather jackets, sequins, feathers, fur, dancewear and tap shoes.

Educators wasted no time selecting pieces for upcoming productions.

"Strawberry Crest High School's theater department, preparing for an upcoming



A Hillsborough County theater teacher looks through racks of donated costumes at Norwegian Cruise Line's Riverview warehouse.



performance of Aladdin, stocked up on shimmering pieces, while York PreK-8, launching its theater program, gathered a wide variety of essentials," said Debra Bellanti, director of public relations at Hillsborough County Public Schools. "She was very excited to be able to get some basics that she could use year-round, and they are also planning a production of Beauty and the Beast, so she grabbed a lot of costumes she thinks will work for that."

The process for teachers is straightforward. Laura Hobby, the K-12 art and theater supervisor, has formed a relationship with Norwegian, so it will contact her when it has costumes it wants to donate, and Hobby will notify all the Hillsborough County theater and dance departments of the time and date. This is expected to take place annually.

Organizers called the donation transformative for Hillsborough County schools' theater and arts departments. With more than tens of thousands of dollars in costumes and shoes generously donated to Hillsborough schools, the impact is enormous.

The warehouse is located at 6423 S. Falkenburg Rd. in Riverview. Anderson can be reached at raanderson@ncl.com or 645-240-5078.

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PATTICAKES FEATURED AT GOVERNOR’S LUNCHEON

By Logan Walz

PattiCakes Custom Cakes LLC has been selected to provide desserts for this year’s Governor’s Luncheon, held on opening day at the Florida State Fairgrounds. The opportunity marks a significant milestone for the locally owned business, which has grown steadily through word of mouth and custom orders over the past several years.

Owner Patti Burnett said being chosen for the event was both exciting and meaningful.

“I was so honored to be asked,” Burnett said. “I think it’s a huge opportunity, and the visibility of having my brand featured for these honored guests will be priceless for the future growth of my business.”

The opportunity came after an event coordinator with the Florida State Fair noticed one of Burnett’s previous dessert table displays. After seeing her work, the coordinator reached out to ask if Burnett could create something similar on a much larger scale.

“There was a dessert table display that I had done for another client, which the event coordinator for the Florida State Fair happened to see,” Burnett said. “She asked me if I could accomplish something like that on a much larger scale. I was shocked and honored by the request, but I know I can rise to



PattiCakes owner Patti Burnett.



the occasion.”

To prepare for the high-profile luncheon, Burnett said she has been carefully planning and organizing to ensure everything runs smoothly.

“I have extra hands on deck, and I’m doing lots of strategic preparation and organizing to make sure everything is fresh and ready to go,” she said.

Guests at the Governor’s Luncheon can expect a large-scale dessert display featuring a variety of PattiCakes’ specialty items.

“I will be doing a large-scale variety dessert table featuring an assortment of my specialty desserts,” Burnett said.

PattiCakes Custom Cakes began as a small operation while Burnett stayed home with her children after leaving her teaching career. Over time, the business grew organically through consistent quality and customer satisfaction.

“When I left teaching to stay home with my children, my business began as me simply baking for friends and family,” Burnett said. “PattiCakes has grown organically over the last seven to eight years through word of mouth, one satisfied customer at a time.”

“I hope this accomplishment encourages readers to keep me in mind for their own events, no matter how big or small,” she said.

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/patticakescustomcake/, call 352-942-3455 or email patticakescustomcakes@gmail.com.

PITCH GROUP MARKS MILESTONE, REAL ESTATE PROS INVITED

By Olivia Clark



Real estate professionals gather at Three Bulls Tavern & Brewery on Bell Shoals Road for weekly Brandon/Valrico Real Estate Pitch Group meetings.

The Brandon/Valrico Real Estate Pitch Group, a free weekly meetup for real estate professionals, is marking a milestone year with record attendance and a renewed push to grow participation in the new year.

The group meets every Wednesday from 9:30-10:30 a.m. at Three Bulls Tavern & Brewery on Bell Shoals Road and is open to anyone involved in the home-selling industry, including realtors, brokers, builders, roofers, insurance professionals, title companies and other real-estate-related businesses. The meetings are designed to encourage collaboration, networking and the exchange of timely market information.

The group recently logged its largest turnout to date with 54 attendees. Participants representing a wide range of brokerages and service providers attend to pitch current listings, discuss price changes, promote open houses, share buyer wants and needs and highlight recent success stories.

“It’s one of the reasons we’re here. Sixteen years we’re doing this now. I think

we have the most successful pitch group anywhere,” said Tim Ryan, an employee of Fidelity National Financial and founder of the Brandon/Valrico group.

Along with listings and buyer needs, professionals use the meetings to

share real-world market experiences. One Realtor described a property that “went on the market before the hurricanes last year and it took 15 months to sell,” eventually closing on December 29, 2024.

Guest speakers also provide practical guidance on marketing, pricing and client relationships. “Be out amongst the people, that’s what is going to help you do great in this business,” said Steve Moran, who spoke at the most recent networking event.

Ryan said the group meets every Wednesday for the next 48 weeks and is structured to ensure attendees leave with useful information.

“We want everyone to come here and pitch their listings, learn something and get a piece of information,” he said.

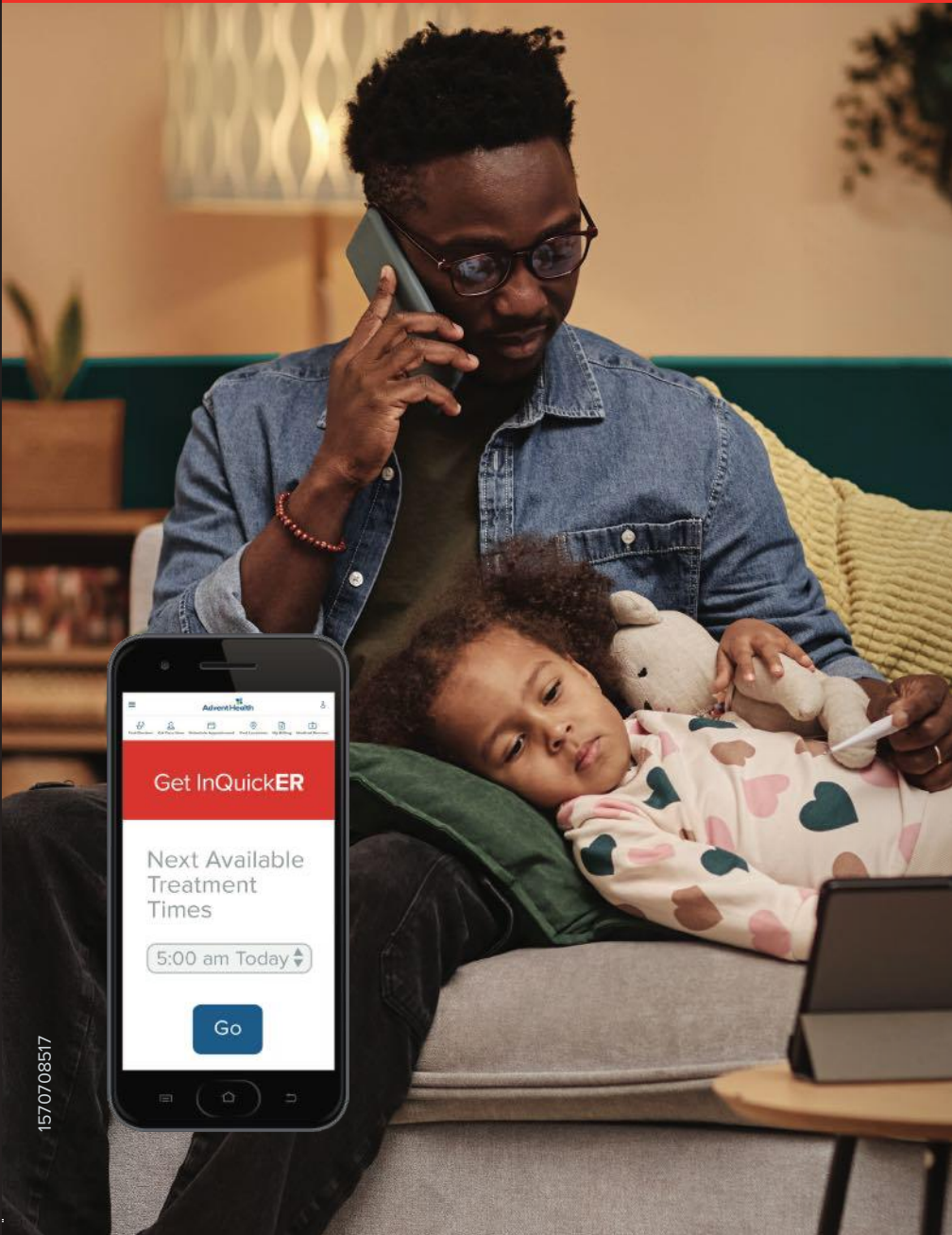
Jim Gaffney and Mike Holmes assist with coordinating the meetings.

A state-of-the-industry address focused on the current market is planned for Wednesday, January 21. For more information, contact Ryan at tryan@fnf.com or 813-928-2862.

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CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: 2026 NEIGHBORHOODS EXPO BRINGS COUNTY SERVICES TO RESIDENTS

Hillsborough County's neighborhoods are as diverse as the nearly 1.5 million people who call them home, stretching across 1,266 square miles from the rocky shores of Old Tampa Bay to the coastal prairie

of the county's southern edge. On Saturday, February 28, residents from every corner of the county are invited to come together to celebrate that diversity at the 2026 annual Neighborhoods Expo.

Hosted by Hillsborough County Neighborhood Relations, the free event will take place from 9 a.m.-12 Noon at Feeding Tampa Bay's new facility, located at 3624 Causeway Blvd. in Tampa. Doors open at 9 a.m., with a welcome from the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners scheduled for 9:30 a.m.

Now in its 21st year, the Neighborhoods Expo has become a beloved civic tradition, offering residents a unique opportunity to connect directly with the county departments and agencies that help their communities thrive. This year's theme, 'Love Our Neighborhoods,' reflects a renewed focus on building strong relationships between residents and local government.

"This event is really about connection," said Stephanie Agliano, who directs the county's engagement efforts with residents. "We want people to feel comfortable asking questions, learning what resources are available, and under-



Staff Report

standing how county services support safe, healthy and engaged neighborhoods."

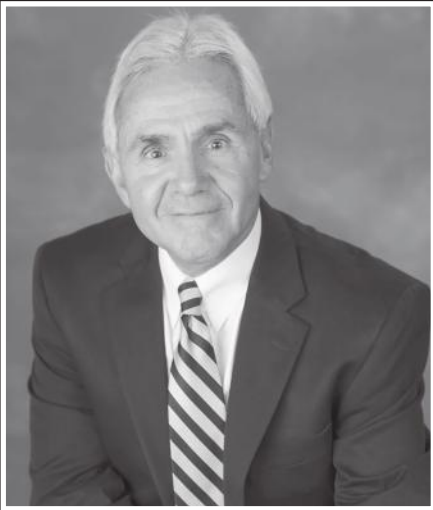
Throughout the morning, attendees can meet face-to-face with representatives

from county departments ranging from public safety and code enforcement to permitting and neighborhood services. While the expo is not intended for conducting official business, staff will be on hand to provide guidance, answer questions and point residents in the right direction for follow-up assistance.

The event is designed for longtime neighborhood leaders and first-time attendees alike. Participants can expect informative conversations, hands-on learning and a welcoming atmosphere — along with a few giveaways to take home.

Registration is recommended to help organizers better understand the interests of attendees, but walk-ins are welcome. County officials encourage residents to spread the word and bring neighbors along.

For Hillsborough County, the Neighborhoods Expo is more than an event — it's a reminder that strong neighborhoods are built through shared knowledge, open communication and community pride. Residents interested in attending can register online and learn more at <https://hcfl.gov/>.



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LOCAL RAPTOR CENTER IS BRINGING
THEIR PUPPET SHOW TO PRINT

PENNY JAR INITIATIVE ENCOURAGES
SMALL CONTRIBUTIONS WITH
LONG-TERM IMPACT

By Denise Sansosti

By Logan Walz

The Raptor Center of Tampa Bay (RCTB) has been based in the Brandon area since 2018. From bald eagles to skunks, social media followers can catch a glimpse of the steady stream of animals coming in and out of the facility. When Florida native Nancy Murrah, president and founder, is asked what her favorite animal is, she always replies, "Whichever one is in front of me."



A bald eagle currently in care at Raptor Center of Tampa Bay.

deeply committed to education and environmental awareness. Its Magical Bird Bus offers hands-on learning experiences, while an engaging puppet show teaches children about wildlife and conservation in a fun, memorable way. The performance brings more than a dozen animals to life through the I Can Save the Planet puppet show. The production is moving from puppets to print with an upcoming children's book of the same name.

"I try to inspire the next generation about the planet and conservation," said Murrah. "When we started writing the book,

it was important to talk not only about what people can do to help animals but also the role each animal plays on the planet."

The book is scheduled for release this spring and is beautifully illustrated by local artist Samantha Dormio, owner of Wild Planet Creations.

"We met at an event, and once we saw her eye-catching paintings, we knew we wanted to partner with her to make the book appealing to kids of all ages," said Murrah.

For information on donating, volunteering or upcoming events to meet winged ambassadors, visit www.raptorcenteroftampabay.org or follow RCTB at www.facebook.com/raptorcenteroftampabay. To report a sick or injured animal, please call the hotline at 813-205-1851.

A new community-focused project is taking shape in Brandon with the launch of Penny Jar, an independent savings initiative designed to help meet local needs through small, voluntary contributions. Created by Brandon resident Honey B. Blues, the project emphasizes accessibility, simplicity and collective participation. Blues said Penny Jar was created to remove barriers often associated with traditional giving. "Not everyone can donate \$20 or \$50, but almost everyone has a penny," she said. "I wanted to build something where participation mattered more than wealth — where even the smallest contribution could become part of something permanent and useful."

Penny Jar is a standalone, community-driven savings model and is not connected to any business services, debt programs or revenue-generating activity.

The Penny Jar initiative is currently in its early setup phase. While the structure and system have been designed, physical jars and collection locations have not yet been placed. The current focus is on sharing the concept, building community interest and connecting with individuals or organizations interested in hosting jars or starting their own Penny Jar locally.

"When implemented, the process is simple," Blues said. "Jars are placed at partici-



pating locations, people drop in spare change voluntarily and the funds are saved rather than immediately spent."

Over time, the collected funds are intended to be converted into safe, interest-earning accounts to support community needs.

Blues said keeping the project simple was intentional.

"If people can understand it instantly, they're more likely to participate and trust it," she said. "When the community can literally

see a jar filling up, it feels collective — not abstract. There's no gatekeeping, no application process and no pressure. Just shared ownership."

The Penny Jar project is focused on addressing small but meaningful gaps that are often overlooked. Long-term goals include supporting emergency assistance, local scholarships and other community priorities by building steady, reliable resources over time.

"This isn't about charity — it's about building something that lasts," Blues said. "Pennies are usually ignored, but when people act together over time, they become a form of local infrastructure."

Community members, clubs and organizations interested in learning more or participating are encouraged to reach out directly by contacting Blues at honeybblues@icloud.com or 813-416-7497.

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A photograph of a display for Parkay flooring. The display features a large sign that reads "PARKAY The most natural choice in flooring". Below the sign, there are several large stacks of flooring samples, including wood-look planks and tiles. The display is set up in a way that shows the variety of flooring options available.

A photograph of a display for Schrock cabinetry. The display features a large sign that reads "Schrock". Below the sign, there are several large stacks of cabinetry samples, including cabinets and drawers. The display is set up in a way that shows the variety of cabinetry options available.

A photograph of the interior of a Flooring USA store. A sign on the wall reads "WELCOME TO FLOORING USA & MORE...". Below the sign, there are several large stacks of flooring samples, including wood-look planks and tiles. A lamp is visible on the right side of the image.

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CAMPO FAMILY YMCA OFFERS YEAR-ROUND ADULT SPORTS LEAGUES

By Nick Nahas

The Campo Family YMCA encourages adults of all ages to stay active and socialize through its AAA Adult Sports League programs. It offers sports such as volleyball, pickleball and basketball.



Photos courtesy of the Campo Family YMCA
Pickleball participants currently range in age from 12-68.

The basketball and volleyball leagues are open year-round and are available to adults 18 and older as well as 35 and older. Registration through the website for the winter season started on January 16. The link to register is <https://tampaymca.org/campo-family-ymca/programs>.

According to the YMCA website, the current adult eight-week pickleball league began on January 11 and runs through Sunday, March 1. It is a doubles league, so either sign up with a partner or one will be provided. There are beginner and intermediate levels. The following eight-week session begins on Sunday, April 12.

According to Senior Program Director Michelle Leahy, the league is open to participants of all ages. League divisions are established based on enrollment and participant skill levels to promote fair, competitive and enjoyable play. For the current season, the league includes both beginner and intermediate divisions. Participants currently range in age from 12-68. League sessions are offered seasonally, with start dates in January, April, August and October.

"Our pickleball league offers a meaning-

ful opportunity to partake in physical activity while fostering inter-generational connections within the community," said Leahy. "Pickleball is an inclusive sport that accommodates a wide range of ages and skill levels, providing a welcoming and supportive environment for all participants."

The players have access to an open gym and don't have to have a YMCA membership to play; however, if you do have a membership, it is cheaper to participate. Volleyball and basketball cost \$70 for members and \$120 for nonmembers. Athletes are guaranteed at least eight games during a 10-week season, not counting playoff games. Jerseys and equipment are provided, and peers are in charge of coaching as well. Medals and trophies are awarded to the winning teams. Pickleball is \$45 for members and \$70 for nonmembers.

Regional Sports Director Zack Murphy, who is in charge of the basketball and volleyball adult sports programs at the Campo Family YMCA, said that most teams are composed of friends who want to join a team together, but single players without a team will be added to one with an open spot, or a team of free agents will be put together by the YMCA.

"Adult sports at the Campo YMCA are a great way to stay active, meet friends and have fun in a positive, competitive atmosphere," said Murphy.

LOCAL CENTENARIAN SHARES WISDOM, TRAVEL STORIES AND GRATITUDE FOR LIFE

By Olivia Clark

Arlene Strehlau recently celebrated a milestone that still catches her off guard: her 100th birthday. Strehlau said the reality of reaching triple digits feels both "strange" and "fantastic," not because she feels older but because the years seemed to arrive faster than she ever expected.



Arlene Strehlau celebrated her 100th birthday on December 28, 2025.

"It was more so a feeling you never thought you'd get to, or it seems so far away," said Strehlau. "I just don't think about being old. That's the strange thing about it."

Her December 2025 birthday celebration stood out not for the number itself, but for the people who helped mark the occasion. Strehlau said she was surprised with thoughtful gifts, including new walking shoes and a new name badge, and she was especially touched by how many people gathered to celebrate with cake.

"The amount of people that came in for the cake, I don't know how many it was, but it was quite a few," said Strehlau. "Oh boy. That was something that surprised me."

When reflecting on her life, Strehlau said she is most proud of her long working career, lasting friendships and her creative talents. She worked until age 67 and continues to value her artistic ability,

particularly watercolor or painting.

Travel has also played a major role in her life. Strehlau said she has visited 49 states and traveled internationally to countries such as Norway, China and Germany. Norway remains her favorite destination, including a memorable trip she took at age 94.

"We sat around a fire, and we had elk skins on our feet," said Strehlau. "I would take photos on my travels and then come home and paint them."

Strehlau credited staying active as one of the keys to a long life. Walking remains part of her daily routine, and she said she recently logged 5,100 steps in a single morning.

Her advice for younger generations is straightforward.

"Walking. Being active," said Strehlau. "Everybody should be traveling while they can."

Today, Strehlau said she finds comfort in routine and simple pleasures, from enjoying meals to getting dressed for the day. Church is another source of peace.

"I'm happy for the rest of that day," said Strehlau.

Looking back on a century of life, Strehlau described her journey with gratitude.

"I feel like I have been on the train of life," said Strehlau. "It has been a good train ride."

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CHAD'S PROMISE KEEPS VETERANS AND THEIR DOGS TOGETHER

By Libby Hopkins

Chad Landrey of Plant City served as a combat military police soldier in the Army National Guard from 2001-08. He was sent to Afghanistan in 2004 and stationed at Bagram Air Force Base. After he returned to the U.S., he worked as a police officer in Sebring, Lake Wales and Lakeland.

Landrey started his nonprofit, Chad's Promise in 2023 when he and his wife, Tracy, were getting calls from some of his veteran friends who had to go for inpatient treatment for mental/medical issues.

"They had no place else to take their dogs except the humane society," said Carol Tracey of Chad's Promise. "The Humane Society only keeps the dogs for about a week, then the dogs are adopted out or euthanized. Veterans weren't going for the help they needed for fear of losing their dog, oftentimes their best and only friend. Many have no family members to care for their pet while they are getting well."

Chad's Promise was born out of a deep-seated desire to make a difference in the lives of veterans and their furry companions. Chad's Promise is a free boarding facility for veterans' dogs while they receive medical or mental health treatment.

"The service is free for 30 days and includes food, veterinary care, grooming, daily exercise and the outdoor kennels that are sterilized two times a day," Tracey said. "The



Chad's Promise in Plant City is a local nonprofit organization that offers free boarding for veterans' dogs while they receive medical or mental health treatment.

indoor kennels are in a temperature-controlled environment and are also cleaned daily."

Tracey became involved with Chad's Promise through Patriot Canine Services, which is the business the Landreys also operate at their facility.

"I had my dog Todd trained there because he was an unruly puppy and too strong for me to handle," Tracey said. "I also had my dog Lucy trained there to be a therapy dog so I can take her to the hospital to visit the veterans whose dogs we have. Lucy is finishing up her final training. She is a 15-month-old standard poodle."

Being involved with Chad's Promise is a very heartfelt experience for everyone at the organization.

"When we pick up a veteran's dog, it is very emotional for the veteran because they are going to be separated from their dog," Tracey said. "When the veteran is finished with their treatment, the reunions are the best! It is our goal to reunite them with their pet. Occasionally, the veteran is unable to care for their dog after treatment, so we find the dog a forever home."

If you'd like to learn more about Chad's Promise or donate to the organization, you can visit their website at <https://chadspromise.com/> or call 813-296-4906. Chad's Promise is located at 7314 W. Knights Griffin Rd. in Plant City.

BUSCH GARDENS TURNS BACK THE CLOCK WITH RETURN OF REAL MUSIC CONCERT SERIES

Staff Report

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay is turning up the volume once again with the return of its longest-running concert tradition, the Real Music Series. Now through Friday, February 20, the park will host a lineup of celebrated performers delivering timeless hits from the 1970s, '80s and '90s, offering guests a chance to relive the soundtrack of their lives six days a week.

Held Monday through Friday with select Saturday performances, the Real Music Series features live concerts included with park admission. Guests can enjoy performances spanning classic rock, soul, pop, jazz and R&B, all presented by artists known for capturing the sound and spirit of legendary music icons. Shows take place at the Stanleyville Theater, making it easy for visitors to build live entertainment into their day at the park.

New this year, select Saturdays add extra excitement with special performances by iconic acts. Village People brought their high-energy hits to the stage on January 17, following a January 10 appearance by Blue Öyster Cult. These special concerts add a weekend highlight to the weekday-focused series.

JAN 5 - FEB 20 At Stanleyville Theater		
Martha Reeves and The Vandellas JAN 5-9	Blue Öyster Cult JAN 10	Blood, Sweat & Tears JAN 12-16
Village People JAN 17	Pablo Cruise and Their Hit Songs JAN 19-23	The Artimus Pyle Band Honoring Ronnie Van Zant's Lynyrd Skynyrd JAN 26-30
The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra FEB 2-6	Revisiting Creedence FEB 9-13	Magic Moments Performing the songs of The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Platters and The Drifters FEB 16-20

The 2026 weekday line-up (all Monday through Friday) began in the week of January 5-9 with Martha Reeves and The Vandellas, followed by Blood, Sweat & Tears from January 12-16. Fans can catch Pablo Cruise and Their Hit Songs from January 19-23, and the Artimus Pyle Band honoring Ronnie Van Zant's Lynyrd Skynyrd from January 26-30. February opens with The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra from February 2-6, Revisiting Creedence from February 9-13 and concludes from February 16-20 with Magic Moments, featuring original singers Theo Peoples, Joe Coleman and Jerome Jackson performing classics from The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Platters and The Drifters.

Park officials said the Real Music Series is designed for guests of all ages, whether they are rediscovering favorite songs or hearing classic hits for the first time. With concerts included in admission, the series offers a value-added experience for families, couples and music lovers alike.

For showtimes and additional details, visit www.buschgardens Tampa.com.

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MAJOR MILESTONE REACHED AS 9,000 CORAL BABIES ARE TRANSFERRED TO RESTORATION PARTNERS

Florida's investment in coral reef restoration reached a major milestone as The Florida Aquarium successfully transferred 9,000 juvenile corals to restoration partners Reef Renewal USA and The Reef Institute. This marks one of the largest statewide deployments of land-grown coral babies under the Florida's Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery (FCR3) Initiative.

The corals — born and raised at The Florida Aquarium's Coral Conservation and Research Center — are part of the state's FCR3 Initiative, led by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The effort marks a critical step toward large-scale reef recovery and the long-term goal of restoring at least 25 percent of Florida's coral reef by 2050. The initial phase of the initiative focused on increasing infrastructure for coral breeding and raising coral offspring on land in addition to training a workforce to scale coral production for reef restoration.

"This moment shows what's possible when long-term state investment, science and collaboration come together," said Keri O'Neil, Coral Conservation Program director at The Florida Aquarium. "Coral reefs are vital to Florida's economy, tourism and marine life. These corals began as microscopic larvae here in Apollo Beach. Now, they're on their way to our partners for further growth on land and, ultimately, Florida's reefs — where they'll help replenish coral populations that were heavily impacted by stony coral tissue loss disease. Thanks to the



Photo courtesy of The Reef Institute

packed and transported corals from the 2024 and 2025 spawning seasons, including great star corals, boulder brain corals, symmetrical brain corals and grooved brain corals.

The Reef Institute received approximately 4,500 coral babies, which will continue growing at its new 23,000-square-foot, land-based facility in West Palm Beach before being outplanted onto reefs in Palm Beach and Martin counties.

Reef Renewal USA received its first group of corals in December 2025 and just received an additional 4,000 7-month-old grooved brain corals produced during the 2025 spawning season. These corals will continue growing at the organization's land-based coral production nursery in Ruskin before being outplanted onto reefs throughout the Florida Keys over the next year.

"Scaling restoration is essential to keeping pace with the challenges facing Florida's reefs," said Martha Campbell, operations manager at Reef Renewal USA. "FCR3 funding allows us to bridge the gap between coral spawning and reef restoration by growing corals to a size where they are more likely to survive and contribute to reef recovery. This partnership helps turn science into measurable, real-world impact."

Staff Report

FCR3 Initiative, we now have a functional pipeline to scale coral breeding efforts and get these corals back to the reef."

During the transfer, biologists carefully

THE VILLAGE PLAYERS COMMUNITY THEATRE PRESENTS JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

Staff Report

The Village Players is bringing one of the most powerful and enduring rock operas of all time to the stage with *Jesus Christ Superstar*, opening this February with a limited run at the historic James McCabe Theater in Valrico.

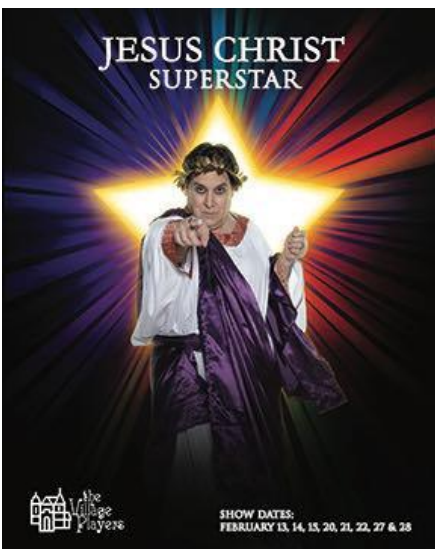
With music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice, *Jesus Christ Superstar* tells the story of the final days of Jesus Christ through

a modern, human lens, focusing on the personal struggles, doubts and conflicts of the people closest to Him. Featuring an iconic rock score and emotionally charged performances, the show explores faith, loyalty, ambition and betrayal in a way that remains strikingly relevant.

This production is directed by Domin Pazo, artistic director of The Village Players, who brings more than four decades of theatrical experience to the stage. Pazo has been with The Village Players for 39 years and has been working in theater for 45 years, with credits spanning television, radio, film and more than 200 stage productions. In addition to his work in community theater, he works for Disney during the day.

"This show asks big questions and doesn't offer easy answers," said Pazo. "It's intense, emotional and deeply human. I'm incredibly grateful to this cast and crew for their endless hard work, dedication and trust in telling this story."

Jesus Christ Superstar features a dynamic



cast, powerful vocals and choreography that drives the story with urgency and emotional weight. This production continues The Village Players' tradition of presenting ambitious, high-quality musical theater while spotlighting local talent.

Performance dates:

- Evening performances, 8 p.m.: Friday and Saturday, February 13-14, 20-

21 and 27-28.

- Matinees, 3 p.m.: Thursday, February 15 and 22.

Doors open at least 30 minutes before curtain time.

General admission tickets cost \$23, and tickets for seniors, students and military cost \$20. Tickets are available now at <https://thevillageplayersvalrico.com/>. Advance purchase is recommended, as performances are expected to sell out.

About The Village Players

The Village Players is a nonprofit, all-volunteer teaching theater performing at the James McCabe Theater, located at 506 N. 5th St. in Valrico. Dedicated to making theater accessible and affordable, The Village Players focuses on developing local talent of all ages while fostering a welcoming, creative community.

Bold, emotional and unforgettable, *Jesus Christ Superstar* is a theatrical experience that stays with you long after the final note. This is a production you won't want to miss.

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TAMPA BAY FERRY MOVES CLOSER TO RELAUNCH WITH NEW VESSEL

Plans to restore passenger ferry service across Tampa Bay advanced in early December 2025 when the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) unanimously approved key elements of a restructured, long-term program linking downtown Tampa and downtown St. Petersburg. The service, temporarily branded the Tampa Bay Ferry, is intended to replace the former Cross Bay Ferry, which ceased operations in April 2025 following contractual disputes with its previous operator. Officials said the new model is designed to address the financial and operational challenges that hampered the pilot service.

Under the newly approved plan, PSTA will oversee ferry operations and has selected Hubbard's Marina to operate the service through its subsidiary, Tampa Bay Sea Taxi Inc. The agreement establishes a five-year operating contract with an optional five-year extension, allowing for up to a decade of continuous service if performance benchmarks are met.

Unlike the prior arrangement, which relied on an out-of-state operator and leased vessels, the new model emphasizes local operators and publicly owned assets, an approach officials said will reduce costs and improve reliability.

PSTA has approved the purchase of a high-speed ferry currently operating in the San Francisco area for \$1.5 million using federal grant funds. With transportation, refurbishment and upgrades, total investment is expected to reach approximately \$2.5 million.

Built in 1994, the vessel will undergo



major improvements before entering service, including installation of a refurbished engine scheduled for January, interior renovations, repainting, inspections and sea trials. Once delivered to Tampa Bay via the Panama Canal, the ferry will provide seating for up to 250 passengers, up from the previous service's 149-passenger capacity.

PSTA officials are also continuing to search for a second vessel to further increase capacity and reduce wait times during peak travel periods.

The relaunch is supported by a combination of federal funding and local government contributions. Tampa and St. Petersburg have each approved interlocal agreements committing up to \$350,000 annually toward the service.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Transportation approved the transfer of nearly \$5 million in federal grant funding from the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority to PSTA to support vessel acquisition and startup costs.

Initial service is expected to operate from temporary docking facilities in both cities, with Tampa's dock remaining at the Tampa Convention Center. St. Petersburg plans to establish a temporary dock near the Vinoy Basin while pursuing a permanent facility near the Museum of History.

If final approvals from the Federal Transit Administration are secured and refurbishment proceeds as planned, officials expect the Tampa Bay Ferry to begin operations this spring or summer, with the potential for year-round service.

STEVE HOLLAND, BRANDON AUTO OWNER, URGES SAFE LITHIUM BATTERY DISPOSAL AS FIRE RISKS GROW

As lithium-ion batteries power more everyday devices, from e-bikes and power tools to electric vehicles, local industry leaders said safe disposal has not kept up with demand. The result is a growing public safety concern, especially when damaged batteries are stored or tossed into household trash.

Steve Holland, owner of Brandon Auto Services, said the salvage industry is facing a major gap in Florida: There is currently no reliable destination for damaged lithium batteries removed from wrecked electric vehicles. Holland serves as legislative chairman and past president of the Florida Auto Dismantlers & Recyclers Association, also known as FADRA, and works with the national Automotive Recyclers Association on policy issues affecting recyclers.

"Our salvage industry has no source to send damaged lithium batteries to at this time," said Holland. "The few salvage yards that are processing EV vehicles are storing these batteries in metal containers away from buildings and areas that can flood."

Holland said lithium batteries can ignite without warning, which makes transport



Steven Holland, owner of Brandon Auto Services, and longtime business partner Ken Anderson have operated the family-owned business in Valrico for more than five decades.



difficult. Many hauling companies will not accept them due to fire risk. He added that undamaged batteries may be reused for other projects, including off-grid power systems, but recycling options can be limited and expensive.

At the state level, Holland said a bill addressing the management and storage of lithium batteries was introduced during the 2025 Florida legislative session but did not advance. He said discussions have continued around storage requirements for damaged electric vehicles, including proposed legislation related to towing and storage fees.

For residents, Holland's message is simple: Do not place lithium batteries in the garbage or recycling bin. Hillsborough County has also warned that lithium-ion batteries can cause fires in garbage trucks and at waste facilities and directs residents to disposal guidance through its Fire Prevention & Battery Recovery resource page at <https://hcfi.gov/>.



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A Kid's Place's Fostering Hope Gala

This Valentine's Day, skip the ordinary and be part of something truly special by supporting the children of A Kid's Place. The Vinoy Resort & Golf Club in St. Petersburg will provide an elegant backdrop where guests can look forward to an inspiring evening program featuring speakers with heartwarming stories, those whose lives have been touched by A Kid's Place. There will be live and silent auctions, delicious food and cocktails as well as dancing and other activities to enjoy. Your presence helps ensure that every child at A Kid's Place receives the love, care and stability that they deserve. Celebrate love in action and reserve your seats today at <https://bit.ly/AKP2026Gala>.

Big Trucks. Big Smiles. Big Fun! Touch-A-Truck Is Rolling In!

Join in for Touch-A-Truck on Saturday, January 24, from 1-4 p.m. at St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, located at 3315 S. Bryan Rd.

in Brandon. Kids can explore trucks, meet community servicemen and women, play transportation-themed games, create crafts, enjoy hot chocolate, and earn prizes. The event will be fun for the whole family — friends and community welcome.

St. Andrew's is grateful for its community partners for the Touch-A-Truck event: HCA Florida Healthcare, the Hillsborough County Fire Department, Hillsborough County Waste Reduction and Recycling, Coast Guard Auxiliary Unit, Adcock Cranes, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department and The Green Table on Tour food truck. For more details on events happening at St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, visit its website at www.saumc.net.

Life Story Writing Returns To Bloomingdale Regional Public Library

Some of us want to leave a legacy for the next generation or just seek clarity in our own lives. Maybe you are interested in publishing your own books, but it never seems to get started. Whatever your reason, come join in for a free 10-week life story writing course beginning Friday, January 30, from 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m. at Bloomingdale Regional Public Library, located at 1906 Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico.

Space is limited, so registration is required. Contact Val Perry at vperry650@msn.com for more information or to register.



HCA Florida Brandon Hospital's First Baby Of The Year Born

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital is thrilled to announce the arrival of its first baby born in the new year. Baby Jack Theodore Gariepy made his debut at 1:11 a.m. on January 1, weighing 8 pounds and measuring 21 inches long.

Jack's birth is extra special because his proud parents, Kristen and Patrick Gariepy, are both dedicated nurses at Brandon Hospital. Kristen serves as an ICU nurse, while Patrick is the ICU clinical educator. Jack is their first child, and the entire hospital family is overjoyed to welcome this beautiful baby boy into the world (and the hospital family).

Learn To Play Bridge

The Duplicate Bridge Association of Sun City Center is proud to announce that Kathy Smith, a Life Master bridge player and an American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) game director, is offering a series of classes of duplicate bridge for beginners, dubbed Easybridge. Classes are scheduled for Thursday, January 29, from 1-4 p.m. for 15 consecutive weeks in the Horizon Room in the Atrium Building, located at 947 N. Course Lane in Sun City Center. The first four weeks are complementary. The remaining classes are \$4 for Sun City Center residents and \$5 for non-SCC applicants. The classes are structured for a supportive and friendly environment. Sample dealer hands will be available to apply lessons learned.

Registration is taken at kathjosmith@gmail.com.



Baby Jack Theodore Gariepy made his debut at 1:11 a.m. on January 1, 2026, weighing 8 pounds and measuring 21 inches long.

Mission BBQ Delivers Food To Liberty Manor For Veterans

Team Mission BBQ of Brandon, under the direction of Bonnie Kurtis and her dedicated team, delivered a meal for all 68 residents at Liberty Manor for Veterans to express their support for our military personnel. It's truly great to recognize organizations that give back to our community. Mission BBQ Brandon is located at 1504 W. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon. Visit its website at <https://mission-bbq.com/> for more information.

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2025 Year In Review



The Tony Baroni Team wishes YOU and your family a prosperous 2026!



9,880+ Sky Miles

Four national training trips this year — because growth never stops. Pictured with author Phil M. Jones

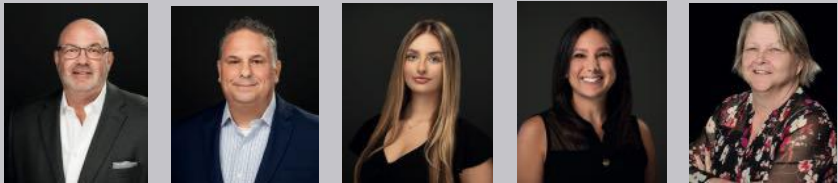
1 RED DAY

Every year in May, our team steps away from real estate and steps into service. This year's RED Day brought us to Feeding Tampa Bay—a mission especially meaningful to our team.



TBT is Growing AND Hiring in 2026!

Our family is getting bigger! We've added incredible talent to our agent roster to serve you better. We also welcomed two new babies to the TBT family—the future of real estate looks bright (and adorable)!



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#1

Tampa Bay Business Journal and Tampa Bay Real Producers listed Tony Baroni Team as Number 1 in units SOLD for the TAMPA BAY area.



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Trunk or Treat event! We loved celebrating with our community and hope you'll join us again next year for all the fun.



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RELAY FOR LIFE RETURNS WITH OVERNIGHT TRIBUTE ON MARCH 7

Staff Report

The American Cancer Society (ACS) has announced that the 2026 Relay For Life of Greater Tampa Bay will return to Raymond James Stadium on Saturday, March 7, from 4 p.m. to 5 a.m., continuing one of the region's most meaningful annual traditions. Ultimate Medical Academy (UMA) has been named the presenting sponsor for the overnight event, which brings together survivors, caregivers, families, schools and businesses in the fight against cancer.

Relay For Life is known as a family-centered, community-driven experience that celebrates cancer survivors, honors caregivers, remembers loved ones and rallies the community to fight back against every cancer. Tampa Bay has emerged as a national leader in the movement, finishing third in the nation last year and earning recognition as the 2025 ACS Southeast Region's Relay For Life Event of the Year for its community impact, volunteer engagement and fundraising success.

The 2025 event demonstrated the strength of local support, with 206 teams, 3,265 participants and more than 100 Tampa Bay-area schools taking part. Together, they raised \$632,040 to support survivors, families and lifesaving cancer research. Organizers are now building on that momentum for 2026, with 121 teams already registered, more than 1,000 participants committed and more than \$150,000 raised toward a \$650,000 goal.

"Relay For Life is where Tampa Bay comes together for hope," said Shelly Hollingsworth,



Relay For Life of Greater Tampa Bay Executive Ambassador Chair. "It's not just an event - it's families camping out overnight, students showing up in huge numbers, survivors taking a victory lap, caregivers receiving the recognition they deserve, and an entire community lighting the stadium with luminarias for love and remembrance. We're grateful to Ultimate Medical Academy for stepping forward to help elevate this lifesaving movement across Tampa Bay."

The overnight event will once again feature Relay For Life's four signature elements: a Survivor Celebration, Caregiver Celebration, Luminaria Ceremony and the Fight Back Together call to action.

Ultimate Medical Academy, an accredited nonprofit educational institution focused on training healthcare professionals, said its sponsorship reflects a shared commitment to compassion and service. "We are honored to serve as the Presenting Sponsor for the 2026 Relay For Life of Greater Tampa Bay," said April Neumann, EVP of Workforce Transformation at UMA. "Our learners enter the healthcare field to make a difference in people's lives, and Relay represents that same spirit of compassion and service. We're proud to stand with the American Cancer Society and with every family touched by cancer."

Community members are encouraged to participate by forming teams or registering at relayforlife.org/tampabayfl.

MAGIC COMES TO THE FARM: WIZARDFEST SET FOR LIMITED RUN AT RAPRAGER FARMS

Staff Report

A new immersive festival celebrating magic, fantasy and family fun is coming to Raprager Farms this winter with the debut of its first-ever WizardFest.

The limited-time event begins on Friday, February 20, and will run on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays only, transforming the farm into a world of magic and mystery inspired by legendary wizards such as Gandalf, Harry and Merlin. Tickets for WizardFest are on sale now.

WizardFest is designed to appeal to both fantasy fans and visitors who simply want to enjoy a unique seasonal attraction. Guests who purchase Wizard tickets will be able to take part in themed wizard classes, including Defense Against the Dark Arts, Monsters Class, Herbology, Potions, Broom Flying, Magic Class, Magical Crafting and Divination. An interactive Escape from Dark Wizards experience will challenge participants to work together to solve magical puzzles.

Nonmagic guests, known as 'wuggles,' are also welcome and will have access to all farm activities, which will be specially themed for the festival.

In addition to the magical programming, the event features more than two acres of attractions, including a 300-animal petting zoo and farm animal experience. Visitors can explore a 17,000-square-foot maze; slide



Children can enjoy hands-on attractions at WizardFest, including Fort Merlin and farm animal experiences.

down a 40-foot, second-story hay chute; jump into a corn pit; or play inside Fort Merlin, a 2,000-square-foot kids fort.

Additional attractions include a bounce pillow with tormentors, battle-axe throwing, a mechanical bull and a variety of games such as cornhole, Connect 4 and field chess. Entertainment and photo opportunities are located throughout the property, including a chance to take pictures with a full-sized dragon.

WizardFest will also debut all-new menus and specialty offerings. The SweetShop will feature gourmet fudge, coffee and cider donuts, while other food stands will offer ice cream, kettle corn and additional treats. The Lemonade Stand will serve fresh-squeezed lemonade, cinnamon roasted nuts and sno cones. Adult guests can visit The Packing House Bar, which will offer beer, wine and batch cocktails, including special wizard-themed drinks.

Optional add-on activities include face painting, unicorn rides and gem mining, available for an additional fee.

Raprager Family Farms is located at 16907 Boy Scout Road in Odessa. Call (813) 922-2799 or visit <https://rapragerfamilyfarms.com/for> details.



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Call (727) 877-8051 to schedule your Welcome Visit!

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By McKenzie Brown

Online Print Smart is a full-service print consulting company dedicated to helping businesses use print effectively to support growth and brand visibility. Rather than operating as a traditional copy shop or order-taking service, its team focuses on understanding each client's objectives and developing customized print solutions that align with those goals.

The company's services are built around four core pillars: print, signage, promotional products and graphic design. Online Print Smart produces a plethora of materials, including business cards, brochures, flyers, postcards, booklets, catalogs, banners, signage, packaging, labels, promotional items and more. In addition, it designs and manages Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) programs, allowing businesses to reach targeted neighborhoods with professionally printed mail pieces.

As a print broker, Online Print Smart partners with a nationwide network of vetted trade printers. This model enables them to provide competitive pricing while maintaining consistent quality across different projects. Its team also offers consultation and education for DIY clients, carefully reviewing all supplied artwork to ensure it is fully print-ready prior to production. For clients who require creative support, professional design services are available.

Founded by Jack Parry, Online Print Smart is backed by more than 38 years of print in-



Jack Perry, founder of Online Print Smart.

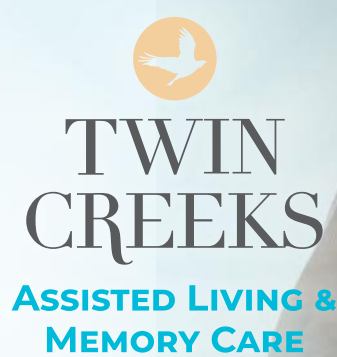


dustry experience. Jack established the company with the goal of guiding small and mid-sized businesses through the complexities of print, delivering reliable results, cost-effective solutions and exceptional service. His commitment to client success has resulted in a strong base of long-term, returning customers. Jack's slogan, "If you're not happy with your current printer, then you don't know Jack," proves itself true time and time again.

The leadership team has recently expanded with the addition of David Parry, Jack's son and Online Print Smart's operations officer. David brings a background in U.S. Army operations and construction management, contributing strong organizational and planning skills that ensure projects are produced accurately and delivered on schedule.

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Year In Review – Updates On Our Top Stories From 2025

TAMPA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT BREAKS GROUND ON AIRSIDE D

Staff Report

"The design of Airside D is currently being finalized and is soon expected to go to the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority Board of Directors for approval," stated Josh Gillin, C.M., senior manager of communications at Tampa International Airport. "Site preparation is ongoing, with drainage systems and foundation work being done now. Further enabling work like a contractor complex, secure fencing and access road construction has been completed or is near completion. Structural steel is scheduled to start to go vertical this summer."

Original Story Printed In January 2025.

Tampa International Airport (TPA) officials joined business and community leaders on December 18, 2024, to officially break ground on Airside D, the first new Airside terminal at TPA in nearly 20 years.

With flags marking the enormous space the future terminal will fill on TPA's airfield, guests at the momentous event were able to envision Airside D, which will accommodate the region's rapid growth and anticipated increase in passengers and flights.

"This state-of-the-art Airside will help us continue our tradition of staying ahead of trends by adding 16 gates for both domestic and international flights at TPA," Tampa International Airport CEO Joe Lopano said.



Photos courtesy of Tampa International Airport.



"It will also feature the latest technology for our passengers when it opens in 2028. We're going to do it the Tampa way."

Lopano was joined by several key officials involved with the project, including Florida Department of Transportation Secretary Jared Perdue; Tampa Mayor and Hillsborough County Aviation Authority (HCAA) board member Jane Castor; TPA Executive Vice President of Planning & Development and Maintenance Smitha

Radhakrishnan; and Hensel Phelps Regional Vice President for the Southeast Justin Starnes.

The new Airside D will feature two levels plus a mezzanine for two airline lounges, a bright and spacious international passenger arrival processing area on the first floor, glass boarding bridges to allow views of the airfield for travelers and new shopping and dining locations.

The facility is a centerpiece project of phase three of TPA's master plan, a blueprint for how the airport will deal with projected traveler growth. The Airside will help TPA, which currently serves an estimated 25 million passengers annually, serve up to 35 million annual passengers by 2037.

For more information, visit www.tampairport.com/business/airside-d.

COUNTY-SUPPORTED PROJECT BUILDS HOMES WITH 3D PRINTING

By Brad Stager

Achieving the goal of providing more affordable housing options to Hillsborough County residents got a boost in October 2025 when representatives from the county, construction industry and the Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa Inc. (CDC of Tampa)

broke ground on a new 18-home community that will include four that feature 3D printing construction methods.

"We will start the printing in a couple of weeks on the first home at 4426 Lurline Cir.," said Will Crawford, CDC's acquisitions and special projects manager, in an early January email.

Original Story Printed In October 2025.

The dream of homeownership met the concrete reality of technological progress at a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a neighborhood of 18 affordable homes, with four of them being built with the help of a cutting-edge 3D printer.

The groundwork for the construction was laid by the Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa (CDC of Tampa's), a local nonprofit promoting affordable housing, among other initiatives. The CDC used a \$500,000 grant from Hillsborough County to purchase a 3D printer that can construct walls of a house, followed by a \$2.4 million grant from the county for construction of the neighborhood's homes, located just north of Sligh Avenue in the East Lake-Orient Park



This empty stretch of land in the East Lake-Orient Park community will have 18 affordable homes built on it, with four of them using 3D-printing methods.

community.

Replacing the sounds of hammer-on-nail banging with the soft hum and hiss of mechanical machinery and using a digital blueprint, a large, robotic 3D printer precisely extrudes a concrete mixture layer by layer.

This automated process forms a house's walls, with the printer's computer-controlled movements ensuring the material is deposited according to the architectural design. According to proponents, this method significantly accelerates construction compared to traditional techniques, resulting in savings that can benefit homebuyers. Building with 3D-printing technology is also touted as more storm-resistant and energy-efficient.

The homes CDC of Tampa is building are 1,200-square-foot houses that will feature three bedrooms and two bathrooms and offer a genuine opportunity for families earning 80 percent or less of the area's median income who yearn for a roof of their own over their heads. According to U.S. Federal Reserve data, the median income for Hillsborough County is pegged at \$76,528 in the latest estimate, released last year.

Besides the CDC project, a commercial builder, Click Print Home 3D Home Printing Company (CPH3D), is also using 3D technology to build homes in the Tampa Bay area.

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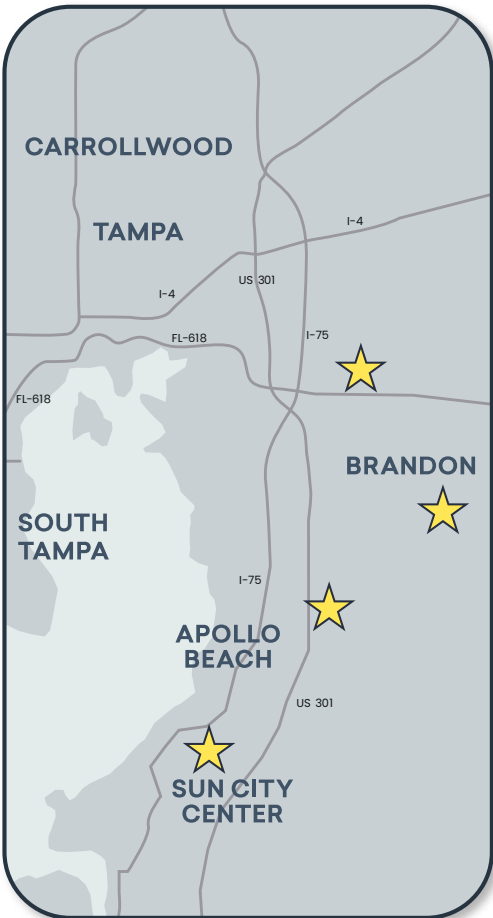
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Year In Review – Updates On Our Top Stories From 2025

IMPORTANT PUBLIC MEETINGS COMING FOR SOUTH COUNTY PIPELINE PROJECT

According to Brandon Moore, APR, public communications manager at Tampa Bay Water:

Construction for the South Hillsborough Pipeline started at FishHawk Creek and at the intersection of Kings and Bloomingdale avenues.

Construction will ramp up in 2026 and occur simultaneously in multiple locations over the next three years for the pipeline in service by 2028.

Seventeen tunneling locations will minimize traffic impacts, reduce utility conflicts and reduce environmental impacts.

Residents can receive project updates, by signing up for the email list at <https://southhillsboroughpipeline.com/>.

Original Story Printed In February 2025.

To meet long-term water needs, Tampa Bay Water is building a new South Hillsborough Pipeline that will deliver up to 65 million gallons per day of additional drinking water to the rapidly growing southern Hillsborough County service area.

The 26-mile pipeline will include pipes up to 60 inches in diameter and carries a total project cost of \$505.7 million, with up to \$84 million funded by Hillsborough County. Construction is expected to begin as early as fall 2025, with completion anticipated in spring 2029. The pipeline is expected to be placed into service by late 2028.

The pipeline will begin at Tampa Bay Water's Tampa Bay Regional Surface Water Treatment Plant in Brandon, connect to Hill-



By Brian Bokor

borough County's Lithia Water Treatment Plant, and end at the county's new connection point at Balm Riverview and Balm roads. Once completed, it will provide system redundancy between the Brandon and Lithia water treatment plants.

Tampa Bay Water is hosting several community meetings along the pipeline route to share information and answer questions. Residents are encouraged to review the project map and attend the meeting closest to their home or business. Those living along the route will receive invitation postcards indicating which meeting to attend.

Each meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. with an open house featuring maps and informational displays, followed by a formal presentation at 7 p.m. and a question-and-answer session.

Engineering consultants evaluated 10 possible routes using 13 selection criteria, including public inconvenience, safety, environmental impacts, permitting and cost, narrowing the options to three preferred routes.

Sam Flowers, construction manager of Garney Construction, said, "To expedite the project, crews are working Monday through Saturday, 7 a.m.-5 p.m.

Some night work is planned to reduce impacts on local businesses, with rolling three-block street closures used during construction.



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HABITAT BRING AFFORDABLES, HURRICANE-HARDENED HOMES TO BRANDON IN 2026

Staff Report

Original Story Published August 2025

In Hillsborough County's eastern suburbs, a new 23-home community called Windhorst Commons is quickly rising to serve families struggling to find safe, affordable housing.



Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough is on target to complete the new neighborhood of hurricane-strengthened homes — concrete block construction with storm-resistant shutters and roofs — by the end of 2026. All 11 homes currently in phase one are expected to be finished by June.

In December 2025, Florida Lt. Gov. Jay Collins toured the subdivision at 205 W. Windhorst Rd. in Brandon and visited the future home of U.S. Army veteran Brian Nakamura to highlight the urgent need for affordable and resilient housing across the state for working families and veterans.

"As a veteran, I understand how critical stable housing is to a family's success," said Collins. "Communities like Windhorst Commons show what's possible when we invest in resilient construction and partners like Habitat for Humanity who honor service members and help families stay safe, housed and prepared for the future."

Windhorst Commons will also include homes for eight families in the planned Pope Leo Village, a new multicity initia-

tive sponsored and inspired by an anonymous donor committed to Pope Leo's vision and commitment to serve others. The goal is to inspire and activate young people and people of any faith to volunteer and financially support the work of Habitat for Humanity.

"Building high-quality, affordable housing provides an exciting opportunity for us all, with a special appeal to young adults, to put Faith into Action with the Pope Leo Village initiative," said the anonymous donor. "As Pope Leo has said, 'In that service to others we may find that coming together in friendship, building up community, we, too, can find true meaning in our lives.'"

To make gifts go even further, the anonymous donor will match all donations up to \$100,000 toward building the Pope Leo Village.

Also, as its class project this year, Leadership Tampa will help design and build the Windhorst Commons Park, a neighborhood green space that will serve as a community gathering area.

"We want this neighborhood to address issues that so many working families struggle with — housing that's affordable and also disaster resilient," said Habitat for Humanity of Tampa Bay Hillsborough CEO Tina Forcier.

VOODOO BREWING CO. POURS MAGIC INTO A NEW MARKET, OPENS IN VALRICO

Staff Report

"The year went by so fast. We spent the first quarter really dialing in our policies and procedures so we could deliver an excellent experience for our guests — and it paid off," Chris Ciulla stated. "Throughout the year, I truly



Voodoo Brewing Co. in Valrico recently hosted a ribbon-cutting with the Valrico/Fishhawk Chamber.

felt we delivered a great experience. We brought a unique scratch kitchen to the Valrico area, elevating the local dining experience for the community."

"Looking ahead to 2026, we're focused on growing as a private event venue for fundraisers, family gatherings and corporate events. We've also launched Voodoo Catering, which allows us to bring our scratch kitchen to any event or adventure in the local area," he said.

Original Story Printed In January 2025.

Voodoo Brewing Co., the high-energy, less-than-traditional brewpub franchise, continues its rapid expansion with the opening of its fourth Florida location in Valrico. The new brewpub, located at 3432 S.R. 60, officially opened its doors in December 2024 under the ownership of Chris Ciulla, marking another milestone in this key growth market for the brand.

"This is just the next step in our growth plans," said Matteo Rachocki, chairman of the Voodoo Brewery Co. Board. "We are pumped to be growing in Valrico, and we know Chris will do a great job representing the brand and creating that communi-

ty-first brewpub feel we all know and love."

Ciulla, a former staffing business executive, is leading the brand's expansion in Valrico. A Florida native, he moved back to his home state from New York in 2023 and immediately be-

gan looking for a business opportunity that would provide the perfect mix of flexibility and local focus. He came across Voodoo Brewing Co. and knew the one-of-a-kind concept was the perfect fit.

"My hope is that we have a thriving, successful restaurant. We have a scratch kitchen with incredible food. We have a proper chef. Everything's made from scratch every day, including the french fries, including our dressings — everything is made on premise. My hope is that we have a lot of success together and that we continue to open up more restaurants in the area to serve our community."

Before opening, Ciulla activated young artists from Durant High School to design custom doors that are now hanging as artwork around the pub, yet another sign of his commitment to the community. In January, a ribbon-cutting with the Valrico/Fishhawk Chamber of Commerce further introduced the restaurant to the community.

Voodoo Brewing Co. in Valrico is located at 3432 S.R. 60. For more information, visit <https://valrico.voodoobrewery.com/>.

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CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON THE GALLERY AT SOUTH TAMPA, A PREMIER SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY IN VALRICO

Staff Report



To RSVP for the Open House, please scan the QR code to reserve a time.

The upcoming community, now named The Gallery Tampa, is a little over 50 percent done and is still projected to open in early 2027, according to Launa Moore, executive director at The Gallery Tampa, Experience Senior Living.

The community will be celebrating its Leasing Showroom Grand Opening on Thursday, January 29, with multiple time slots available between 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Original Story Printed In December 2024.

Senior Living (ESL) is excited to announce the beginning of construction on The Gallery at South Tampa, an artfully crafted senior living community located at 5049 Bell Shoals Rd. in Valrico. As ESL's eighth community in Florida and fifth on the Gulf Coast, this vibrant new addition to the ESL portfolio will redefine what retirement living can be in the Tampa area. The community is expected to open its doors by the spring of 2027, with a sales center opening in early 2025. To secure your priority deposit today, visit <https://gallerysriving.com/communities/the-gallery-at-south-tampa/>.

Designed to be as unique as the residents it serves, The Gallery at South Tampa will encompass 240,613 square feet of



artfully curated spaces, offering a diverse array of living options. The community will feature 202 homes, including 30 independent living cottages, 89 independent living apartment homes, 45 assisted living apartments and 38 memory care suites.

"We are thrilled to begin construction on

The Gallery at South Tampa, a community where residents will not just live — they will experience a life full of purpose, creativity and connection," said Phill Barklow, president of Experience Senior Living. "As with all of our Gallery communities, we have carefully crafted a space that emphasizes engagement, wellness and the joy of living, all within an environment that sparks the imagination and encourages a vibrant, artful lifestyle."

Situated on a picturesque 17-acre site, The Gallery at South Tampa will be designed to preserve the grandeur of its existing oak trees, with winding walking paths providing residents opportunities to connect with nature together. Curated courtyards and private gardens will offer spaces to relax and enjoy time with new friends.

For more information about The Gallery at South Tampa, please visit www.gallery-atsouthtampa.com.

SULLENBERGER CONTINUES TO SHINE ON ARCHERY WORLD STAGE

By Emily Harper

According to World Archery's website, Sydney Sullenberger competed at the Gwangju 2025 Hyundai World Archery Championships in September 5-12, 2025, earning 33rd place overall. Additionally, out of over 500 individuals, her world ranking in the 'Compound Women Individual' category as of January 12 was 77th.

Original Story Printed In August 2025.

Sydney Sullenberger, a Valrico native archer, has had an eventful summer competing. Sullenberger is part of the Columbia University Varsity Archery Team and is a member of the 2025 USA Archery World Championship team.

In 2014, at the young age of 10, Sullenberger started her archery journey at a local archery shop called Adventures Archery in Tampa. There her passion and skills developed, and she would later compete in her first competition, winning the national championship in 2016.

Sullenberger competed in Chula Vista, California, from June 19-23. There she competed in stage one through three of the U.S. World Championship Team Trials. The national qualifier event served as stage two of the trials, where Sullenberger qualified second and finished fifth. These events were held at the Olympic Training Center, where Sullenberger earned her spot on the 2025 World



Photo credit Jarrah Lemus
Sydney Sullenberger competing in Germany at the FISU World University Games.

Championship Team. This sent her to the world cup in Spain a month later and the world championship in South Korea this upcoming September.

"To be able to compete again this season after missing last year due to

multiple surgeries is super special for me. I knew I wouldn't be able to defend my 2023 World Youth Champion title since I aged out during my time recovering, but now I have the opportunity to bring home more medals for Team USA and show what I am made of," said Sullenberger.

Following the conclusion of U.S. World Championship Team Trials, Sullenberger represented Team USA in Madrid, Spain, from July 8-11 at the world cup. Sullenberger recorded her best individual senior world cup performance in her career, finishing 17th at the competition.

"Seeing my world ranking climb into the top 100 after my eventful summer just proves that my persistence and hard work is paying off," said Sullenberger in response to her resilience.

As September nears, Sullenberger is staying focused and training for the world championships in Gwangju, South Korea. Upon her return from South Korea, Sullenberger will transition into her senior season with Columbia University.

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STAND FEARLESS FOR CADDIE! BLOOMINGDALE AND DANCING FOR A DIFFERENCE HOST BENEFIT SHOW NOV. 5

Caddie Schelle has been doing great and making amazing progress in her healing, said a coordinator from Fearless for Caddie.

The benefit show raised over \$4,000. While a drop in the bucket for the medical bills the Schelle family is facing, it was a huge success.

"It was truly moving. The amount of work Sara effortlessly put into organizing this event was inspiring," said the coordinator.

The family is still in need of much support. Some upcoming events to help include:

Thursday, February 5 — JF Kicks will host Dueling Pianos by That Piano Entertainment.

Thursday, March 26 — Voodoo Brewing will host a benefit concert by Sidney O'Sullivan.

Sunday, April 26 — iSmash will host a private party benefit.

Original Story Printed In October 2025.

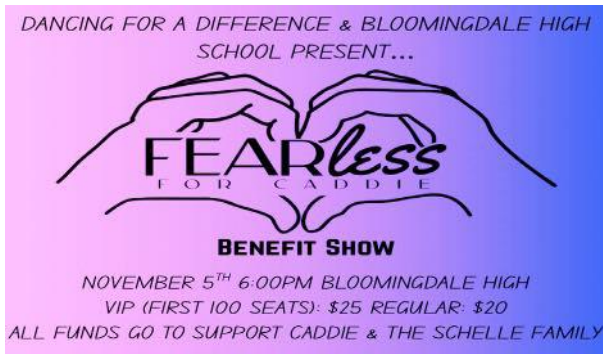
On August 12, Bloomingdale High School sophomore Caddie Schelle collapsed at school golf practice. Everyone thought it was likely summer dehydration. She was taken to HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, where it was determined Caddie had suffered a ruptured arteriovenous malformation (AVM), causing a massive brain bleed. She was airlifted to Tampa General Hospital and underwent emergency surgery to remove part of her skull to let her brain expand. The prognosis was not good. In a matter of 24 hours, a strong high school athlete was fighting for her life.

In the days and weeks that followed, Caddie underwent more surgeries. Through it all, her body did more than expected, and the Schelle family was embraced by community support.

Caddie is expected to come home from



The Fearless for Caddie Benefit Show will be held in the auditorium at Bloomingdale High School, located at 1700 E Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico, at 6 p.m. For tickets, visit <https://dancestudio-pro.com/tickets/d4d> or email office@dancing4adifference.com.



the hospital on Wednesday, October 15. It is nothing short of a miracle. The road to recovery is not over, however; follow-up physical therapy and hospital visits will be a regular part of the Schelle family routine.

Rob and Kilene Schelle, Caddie's parents, said their family has been blown away by the love they have received from the community.

"It's sounds cliché, but they say that it 'takes a village.' People say that all the time, but you don't really realize the village you've got until something like this happens and it goes into action. We are blessed to be part of this community," Rob said.

On Wednesday, November 5, Dancing for a Difference dance studio and Bloomingdale High School are hosting a benefit to assist the Schelle family with the cost of medical bills. Caddie is a 'Swiftie,' aka a dedicated fan of Taylor Swift. The Fearless for Caddie Benefit Show is a nod to Taylor Swift's Fearless album and Caddie's resilience. Caddie will be there.

Dancing for a Difference Director Sara Battaglia set up the event and is grateful to be able to support Caddie through her studio. The show includes performances from Dancing for a Difference and Bloomingdale Fine Arts students.

The Fearless for Caddie Benefit Show will be held in the auditorium at Bloomingdale High School, located at 1700 E Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico, at 6 p.m. For tickets, visit <https://dancestudio-pro.com/tickets/d4d> or email office@dancing4adifference.com.

To follow Caddie's recovery, join the 'Fearless for Caddie: Updates & Support' group on Facebook. To donate to her recovery, visit www.gofundme.com/f/support-caddies-fight-for-recovery.

By Jane Owen

LIFETIME MOVIE FILMS AT MOSELEY HOMESTEAD, TRUSTEES BUILD SUPPORT FOR RESTORATION

By Linda Chion

The upcoming film which used the Moseley Homestead as a filming location, now titled Don't Breathe a Word, is releasing this month.

In this Lifetime original movie, Meredith runs a Lamaze business and hires Eve, who becomes her best friend. After Eve starts getting harassed by a stalker, Meredith becomes determined to help her. However, as she investigates, Meredith discovers that Eve may be hiding a dark secret.

Be sure to catch Don't Breathe a Word as it premieres on Lifetime Movie Network at 8 p.m. on Friday, January 23.

Original Story Printed In May 2025.

Tucked away off State Road 60, just west of Lakewood Drive, sits an historic pioneer home that sheltered centenarian Julia Winifred Moseley for most of her life, built by her grandfather in the 1880s, which in May became a filming location for a Lifetime movie.

Years before her death, August 9 at age 101, Moseley, who never married, worked to establish the Timberly Trust, in part with the assistance of school namesakes Dick Stowers, who first owned a funeral home in Brandon, and Earl Lennard, a Brandon High graduate and former superintendent of schools. Its mission is to preserve the Moseley Homestead as testament to the pioneer ways of a town claimed by Limona settlers, next door to a town called New Hope, which today is known as the sprawling suburban Tampa Bay foothold of Brandon.

Members of the Timberly Trust Board of Trustees, chaired by Mark Proctor, aim to keep an aging woman's wishes alive, as Moseley herself attended trustee meetings, including for the occasion of her 100th birthday, March 21, 2019. Moseley sat quiet, yet attentive, in her wheelchair



Photos By Linda Chion
Filming underway for a Lifetime movie scene at a barn on the Moseley Homestead property in Brandon.

as trustees discussed their mission: to raise funds to maintain preservation of the homestead for generations to come, as a place where scouts, youth, bird watchers, environmentalists, historians and interested residents can get a taste for what life looked like, and smelled like, at the turn of the 20th century and beyond.

"Film crew members have assured us they are not moving anything, not disturbing anything, including the inner furnishings of the house, which includes wallpaper made out of palm frond fibers," Proctor said.

The working title is Just Breathe, and the movie, Proctor added, is a thriller.

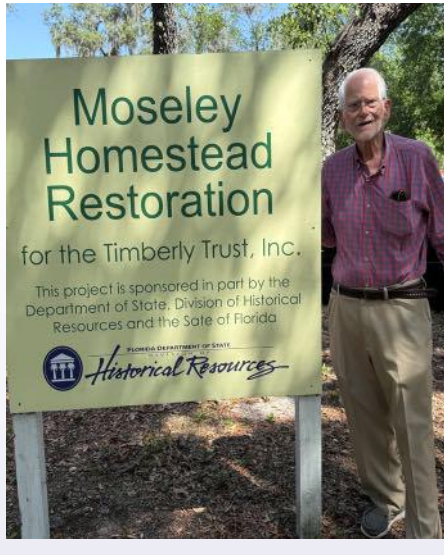
Behind the effort is David Yates, who as CEO of the Clearwater Aquarium, from 2006 to 2020, co-produced Dolphin Tale and ex-

ecutive produced Dolphin Tale 2, and who Proctor said vows to "make sure everything is kept true to prevent any damage to the Moseley Homestead."

According to Proctor, trustees believe the movie can aid in the effort to get preservation funds from county officials and corporate, business and individual donors, as the Moseley Homestead preservation project is sponsored in part by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources.

"And maybe we will get to tell the back-story of how the movie was produced, and maybe even use the Moseley Homestead property for a documentary, about the history of Brandon itself," Proctor added.

In the meantime, Yates has a copy of Moseley's book, about her grandmother's pioneering days, "and he's reading it now," Proctor said. Published in 1998, the book is titled Come to My Sunland: Letters of Julia Daniels Moseley from the Florida Frontier, 1882-1886.



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MUSIC BINGO FUNDRAISER WILL SUPPORT EMERGENCY SUPPORT PROGRAMS THROUGH ECHO

Voodoo Brewing Co. is hosting a music bingo night fundraiser for a good cause: to help ECHO support the community.

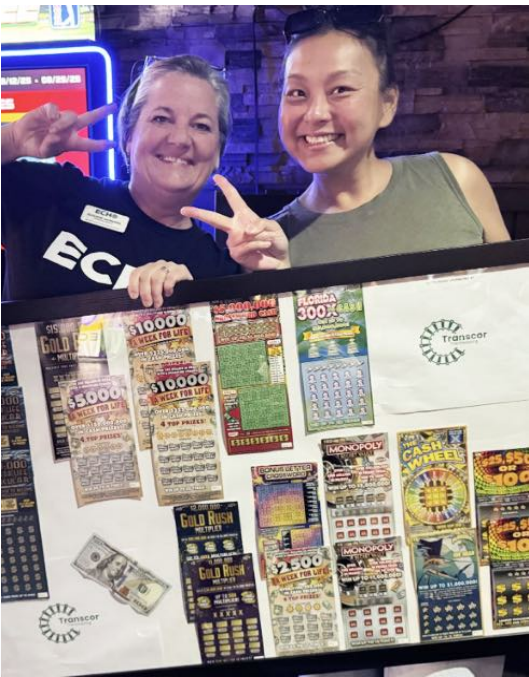
On February 10, the Valrico brewery will open its doors to customers, bingo fans and generous community members to help drum up support for the Emergency Care Help Organization, or ECHO.

ECHO, which was founded in 1987, helps neighbors going through food insecurity or those who need clothing or are looking for a new job. The organization is planning to open its third resource center in Thonotosassa at the end of 2026 or early 2027.

Kayla Vincent is the marketing coordinator with ECHO. She said the goal is to raise as much money as possible and get support from the community for the nonprofit's programs.

"[The money raised] will be distributed between our food, clothing and job coaches for our back to work program," Vincent said. "So it'll get distributed a little bit everywhere."

ECHO's food pantry and clothing rooms service the Brandon and Riverview areas. People who are in a crisis situation can get temporary help from the locations. The one-on-one job coaching is an-



By Lily Belcher

other opportunity for the community to access local resources, including assessing skills, resume help and learning interview skills.

All of ECHO's services are offered to members of the community who are in need for free and the group aims to reach people across Eastern Hillsborough County.

This is the organization's second time hosting a music bingo fundraiser at Voodoo Brewing Co. They had their first music bingo event in November 2025 and hope to host the fundraiser twice a year.

"We have a lot of need in our community and we need to rile the troops and help our neighbors in this time of need," Vincent said.

Music bingo will span across genres and decades and include some live tunes. Tickets can be bought in advance.

The doors will open at 6 pm for music bingo and the first game will start at 7 pm.

Voodoo Brewing Co. is located off Highway 60 in Valrico. For more information about ECHO or its music bingo fundraiser, call 813-856-7232.

KTBB INVITES RESIDENTS TO PROTECT PARKS, ROADS AND WATERWAYS

By Olivia Clark



Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful offers opportunities such as Adopt-A-Road, hosted cleanups and educational outreach to support local environmental stewardship.

Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful is a Tampa-based nonprofit that has worked since 1989 to reduce litter, improve public spaces and inspire environmental stewardship across Hillsborough County.

Founded by community members concerned about pollution and neighborhood cleanliness, the organization promotes a culture of environmental protection through volunteer service and education, offering residents opportunities to make a direct and lasting impact.

Throughout the year, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful organizes community cleanups and beautification projects across beaches, parks, roadways and waterways. Signature events include the After Gasparilla Cleanup, Great Port Cleanup, Hillsborough River Coastal Cleanup and World Oceans Day activities. In addition to large-scale events, individuals, families and small groups can plan self-led cleanups. Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful assists by coordinating locations, providing free cleanup supplies and managing trash disposal so volunteers can focus on service.

For those interested in a long-term commitment, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful administers the Adopt-A-Road Program for Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa.



The program allows individuals, businesses and community organizations to adopt roadways, parks, beaches or shorelines and maintain them through regular cleanups. Tree and bench dedication options are also available to honor loved ones while contributing to public spaces.

The organization supports greener neighborhoods through tree planting and landscaping initiatives that encourage sustainability and environmental awareness. Its education program offers free presentations and an age-appropriate curriculum for schools, community groups and businesses, covering topics such as litter prevention, conservation and responsible environmental practices. Students can earn service hours by volunteering and may qualify for leadership opportunities, internships and scholarships offered through the organization.

Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful is funded through community support, including individual donations, event sponsorships, partnerships and fundraising efforts. These resources allow the nonprofit to keep programs accessible while ensuring that support remains local and focused on Tampa Bay communities.

Residents interested in volunteering, sponsoring or learning more can visit online at www.keeptampabaybeautiful.org.

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ZOOTAMPA IS 'FUREVER' HOME FOR TWO RESCUED RED FOXES

Staff Report

ZooTampa at Lowry Park is a little fuzzier now as two rescued red foxes settle into their new forever home at the zoo.

The foxes, named Sadie and Seth, were among over 250 animals saved from deplorable conditions at the Grand River Fur Exchange in Ashtabula County, Ohio, earlier in 2025. The Humane Society of the United States led the rescue operation after the facility's owner passed away, leaving the animals in dire circumstances.

Upon arrival in November, Sadie and Seth underwent comprehensive health evaluations and a quarantine period under the supervision of the zoo's Animal Health and Animal Care teams. The zoo's Florida team spent time daily with the duo, establishing a relationship with both. Seth, the male, exhibits a classic reddish coat, while Sadie, the female, has a pearl-colored coat, giving her a striking black appearance.



Sadie



Seth

The playful pair have since been introduced to their new habitat in the Florida Wilds area of the zoo, adjacent to the Roaring Springs ride. They have been observed actively exploring their surroundings and engaging playfully with each other.

"Both Sadie and Seth are healthy and adjusting well to their new environment," said Chris Massaro, senior vice president and chief zoological officer at ZooTampa. "We are committed to providing a safe and enriching home for these animals, especially after the traumatic experiences they endured."

Red foxes are known for their acute hearing, capable of detecting high-frequency sounds even underground, which aids in hunting small prey, such as rabbits and rodents. They employ a hunting technique that involves crouching low to blend with their surroundings before leaping to capture their target.



AT LOWRY PARK

BRANDON RIVERVIEW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ANNOUNCES ANNUAL MEETING & INSTALLATION LUNCHEON

Staff Report

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce its annual meeting, to be held on Tuesday, January 27, at 11:30 a.m. at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview.

This signature luncheon brings together business leaders, community partners and chamber members to celebrate the successes of the past year, recognize outstanding contributions and share the vision for the year ahead.

During the event, attendees will enjoy an afternoon of connection and celebration, including:

- Reflections and highlights of 2025.
- Recognition of members and community partners.
- Installation of the 2026 chair and board of directors.
- An overview of the chamber's strategic priorities for 2026.

The annual meeting serves as both a celebration and a launchpad — honoring the achievements that strengthened the Brandon and Riverview business community in 2025 while outlining the initiatives that will drive growth, advocacy and collabora-

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Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce its annual meeting, to be held on Tuesday, January 27, at 11:30 a.m. at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview.

Members, guests and community leaders are invited to join this important gathering as the chamber steps confidently into a new year of progress and partnership.

For more information or to register, please contact the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce at info@brandonriverviewchamber.net or 813-234-5944.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to strengthening the regional economy, supporting local businesses and fostering a thriving community through leadership, advocacy and collaboration.

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HIGH 5 HOLIDAY TALENT SHOW CELEBRATES CREATIVITY AND INCLUSION

The High 5 Holiday Talent Show took place this December, offering an evening focused on creativity, confidence, and community.

The event provided members in the TRIDENT special needs program and clients from Livingstone Academies Transition Program the opportunity to showcase their talents in a supportive and inclusive setting.

This year marked the first time the talent show was held offsite at The Regent. Hosting the event at a public venue allowed for a larger audience and a stage setting for participants to perform in front of family, friends, and community members.

"This was the first year for the High 5 Holiday Talent Show, and it was also our first time hosting it offsite," Patrick Skidmore says.

The event was not structured as a competition, and no official winners were named. Instead, the focus remained on participation and celebration, emphasizing the talents and individuality of each performer.

Participants dressed in outfits inspired by various decades, adding a creative element to the evening. Performances included singing and stage acts that highlighted personal



expression and confidence.

Guests also had the opportunity to browse crafts and handmade items created by program participants.

Although the event was not intended as a fundraiser, a few hundred dollars were raised through craft sales and donations. The proceeds will help support future activities and programming.

Organizers said

the success of the inaugural event has set the foundation for future talent shows. The High 5 Holiday Talent Show is planned to take place annually each December, and the details regarding next year's event.

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FLORIDA STATE FAIR TO MARK AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY WITH PATRIOTIC 2026 THEME

Staff Report

The Florida State Fair is preparing to shine brighter than ever in 2026 as it celebrates America's 250th birthday with a patriotic theme, festive entertainment and a limited-time advance ticket deal.

Fair officials announced this week that the 2026 Florida State Fair will be themed "America's Sunniest Celebration," a tribute to 250 years of American history infused with Florida flair. The annual 12-day event will take place Feb. 5-16, 2026, at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa, running through Presidents Day.

Billed as part of the nationwide America250 celebration, the 2026 fair is being promoted as a milestone event filled with classic fair traditions, deep-fried favorites, dazzling fireworks, live entertainment and agricultural showcases, alongside special nods to the nation's past.

"Celebrating 250 years of America is something truly special, and we're excited to mark the occasion with a fair that honors both our nation's history and Florida's unique roots," said Cheryl Flood, chief executive officer of the Florida State Fair. "'America's Sunniest Celebration' is more than just a theme, it's a chance to bring people together, shine a light on our state's rich



Crowds enjoy the sights and attractions at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa. The 2026 Florida State Fair will run Feb. 5-16 and feature the patriotic theme "America's Sunniest Celebration" in honor of the nation's 250th birthday.

agricultural traditions and create new memories with family and friends. We can't wait to welcome everyone back to the fairgrounds for a celebration that's as bright as Florida itself."

In addition to unveiling the theme, fair officials announced a one-day-only advance ticket flash sale scheduled for Oct. 1.

During the sale, admission tickets will be available for \$5 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., or while supplies last, with no additional fees. Officials say the discounted tickets represent the lowest admission price available for the 2026 fair and offer savings of up to \$11 compared to gate prices.

Parking will also be offered at a flash sale price of \$5, limited to one per transaction.

Looking ahead, officials said the 2026 fair will feature agricultural events and exhibits, a journey through time at the fair's living history museum, and a mix of classic and new fan-favorite foods.

Tickets can only be purchased online through the Florida State Fair website www.floridastatefair.com.

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BRANDON PARADE OF LIGHTS CAPS SECOND YEAR WITH AWARDS, COMMUNITY GIVING AND 10,000 SPECTATORS

By Brian Bokor



The Brandon Parade of Lights wrapped up its second year with a celebration and awards ceremony at The Regent.



The Brandon Parade of Lights wrapped up its second year with a celebration and awards ceremony held on December 18, 2025 at The Regent in Riverview, recognizing parade participants, volunteers and community partners following another successful holiday event.

The annual parade drew an estimated 10,000 spectators along its route and featured 2,861 participants representing 115 floats, underscoring the rapid growth of the event in just its second year.

Melissa Canfield, parade chairperson, used the ceremony to put those numbers into perspective.

"2,861. What is that? That is the amount of participants that we had this year in the parade," Canfield said. "What does that consist of? 115 floats."

"Those entries included the parade's grand marshal, 10 Tampa Bay News anchor Caitlin Lockerbie, along with five local high school marching bands, five local Gasparilla krewes, 38 local businesses and 24 local nonprofit organizations. Participation also extended to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, Hillsborough County Fire Department, county commissioners, school board members — including the superintendent — as well as local officials, beauty queens, dance studios and youth teams. The parade also featured

holiday favorites, including, of course, Santa and Mrs. Claus," she said.

Reflecting on the scope of the event, Canfield added, "It's absolutely amazing how many people were involved in this."

Led by grand marshal Lockerbie, the parade traveled from South Lakewood Drive along Oakfield Drive, crossing Kings Avenue and ending at Vonderburg Drive. High school marching bands from Armwood, Bloomingdale, Brandon, Newsome and Riverview helped set the tone, while thousands of spectators lined the route to watch floats from businesses, nonprofits, performance groups and community organizations.

Awards were a major focus of the evening, recognizing creativity and community spirit among parade participants.

"So, the first category we will present is the most festive floats," said award presenter Dawn Myers. "We considered how unique of a theme this group had, and how wonderfully and beautifully lighting their float was."

Amani Med Spa received the Most Festive award.

The Most Original award was presented to Krewe of Girls and Pearls. In presenting the honor, Myers praised the group's creativity and execution.

"We felt like we had never really even thought about this theme being a Christmas

parade, or a Parade of Lights parade. The outfits that their people wore were on point and on theme. And they had almost what looked like a live volcano on their float. So, the most original goes to the Krewe of the Girls 'n Pearls," Myers said.

The Crowd Choice award was presented to the Krewe of the Rising Phoenix.

In announcing the winner, Myers said, "The judges were all very, very impressed with not only the costumes but also the music."

Dance Quest earned the Judges' Choice award.

"This group had a fantastic float. It was beautifully decorated. They had amazing costumes. And they had a fantastic performance," Myers said. "Because they checked all the boxes, we had to give this to the Judges' Choice for Dance Quest."

Additional award winners included DeSoto Masonic Lodge for Most Community Spirit, Newsome High School for Best Band and TC Drums for Best Performance.

Charitable giving was also a central focus of the evening. Organizers presented \$5,000 checks to Hope for Her and PCAT (Parents and Children Advancing Together Literacy Ministries), recognizing both organizations as beneficiaries of this year's parade proceeds.

The charities were selected in partnership with the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce and the newly merged Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce, continuing the Brandon Parade of Lights' commitment to supporting local nonprofits alongside celebrating the holiday season.

Canfield thanked the many volunteers, sponsors and participants who made both the event and its charitable impact possible. She noted that an estimated 50 volunteers helped support parade operations, adding, "Thank you for allowing me to be a small part of this parade."

The celebration also marked a transition in leadership, as Canfield formally passed the Brandon Parade of Lights chairperson duties to Erica Jourdain of Flower Me Tampa, who was announced as the parade chairperson. Organizers thanked Canfield for her leadership during the parade's second year and welcomed Jourdain as planning begins for the next chapter of the event to be held on Saturday, December 12, 2026.

Now entering its third year, the Brandon Parade of Lights continues to establish itself as a signature holiday tradition — celebrating creativity, community spirit and meaningful local impact while bringing families, businesses and neighbors together during the holiday season.

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ARTIST BRINGS CANVASES TO LIFE
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Riverview-based artist Alexis King has built a name for herself by turning blank canvases into works of art in real time. Specializing in realism, King is known for live painting at charity events and community fundraisers, where her finished pieces are often auctioned to benefit nonprofit organizations. She also offers live painting services for weddings, creating commissioned keepsakes for couples and clients.

King describes herself as an artist drawn to people and animals, using realism and detail to tell a story through her work.

"I enjoy capturing the essence of a subject," said King, owner of Alexis King Artworks. "My work is very detailed. My work is as color-accurate as possible."

King did not grow up believing art was a natural talent she possessed. Her journey began in 2014 while homeschooling her children.

"My kids and I got into this mindset that 'I can teach myself anything,'" King said. "My kids asked me to search drawing tutorials, and something just clicked. Once someone explains it in a way you can understand, your brain connects the dots."

Primarily self-taught, King learned through online portrait classes and YouTube tutorials, practicing consistently while raising her children. She credits the



Riverview artist Alexis King holds an owl painting, showcasing her realism style and attention to fine detail.

By Olivia Clark

experience with shaping her career and showing her children the value of pursuing passions.

"I think it was great for my kids to see that you can pick up something new," King said. "If they see that Mommy can do it, they can do whatever they put their mind to."

King's interest in live painting grew as audiences responded to watching her

creative process on social media. She later began offering live painting services for weddings and charity events, combining her love of art with community involvement.

"To see something I created bring joy to people and then be auctioned to support a cause is such an honor," King said. "It's a very humbling experience."

Her work has been featured on HGTV and at red-carpet fundraising events, including the Lions Eye Institute annual gala. She is expanding into large-scale murals across Tampa and St. Petersburg, while four of her original paintings were recently selected for display in Hudson's Furniture locations.

Visit <https://alexiskingartworks.pro/> or follow Alexis King Artworks on Facebook and Instagram.



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Christian Voice



Grace Notes Word for the Year *By Debora Coty*

Each January, many people choose a word for the upcoming year—a single word that symbolizes their New Year’s quest. A focus. An aspiration. A goal. You might even say a resolution encased within a fistful of alphabet letters.

An easily post-able, portable, proverbial reminder of what we deem most important to personally achieve during the next 365 days.

I decided to choose a word this year too. So I asked Papa God for wisdom about my focal word. Several flitted through my mind, but none seemed quite right. Then I looked up. My eyes focused on the contrail of an airplane slashing the blue morning sky with a straight, white line disappearing into cloud cover, its final destination hidden from view.

Acknowledge, a still, small voice whispered to my heart. And a familiar Scripture flashed before my mind’s eye: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways a c k n owl e d g e him, and he will make your paths straight,” (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV).



I could sure use a straight path. But in order to find one, the Word of God says I need to do three things: Trust in the Lord with all my heart. Stop

leaning on my own understanding, which is based on my personal experiences and perceptions and colored by my pain.

Acknowledge Him in all my ways. Know God first (the root of ‘knowledge’). Then take action based on that knowledge.

Action + knowledge = acknowledge. Of course. That’s my word. And my quest for this year: To actively lean on His understanding, not mine, by delving deeper into His Word, which will allow me to discern His will; to base my actions on that knowledge and trust Him with my whole heart.

This will result in a straight path. Even though I can’t see where the path ends, it’s the trail I want to be on. Like that contrail. So how about you, my friend?

Are you up for the challenge of choosing your life focal word for the upcoming year? New year. New adventures. New blessings. After all, the sky’s the limit!

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

HOLIDAY DECORATIONS: ORNAMENTAL OR SACRAMENTAL?

This column may be born on Christmas, but it works for the new year too. I will start with a quiz. Ready? Looking at this photograph, what is the most compelling decorative element?

The handmade quilt? Or the beautiful tree in the corner? Is it the collection of lace snowflakes? Maybe the poinsettias in the hearth?

They are all good answers, but the response I’m thinking of is our dog, Max! An artfully placed golden retriever enhances any holiday scene. Actually, he just plopped down after walking through. When I photographed our last house for sale, someone asked why I put Max in so many pictures. I didn’t; he just shows up, and he’s pretty stealth about it.

But, other than being decorative, Max is real — and I think that is the most compelling thing. Holiday decorations — other than the occasional ‘live’ tree — are only real to the extent the symbolism they carry points to truth rather than make-believe.

Symbolism is fine, but it only holds life if it is rooted in life. Absent spiritual truth and our connection to the heart of God, a manger scene and a heavenly host are about as real as the plastic Santa on the front lawn — maybe less so because at least Santa oils the wheels of commerce.



I believe that the emptiness that is so pervasive in our world is amplified to the extent that the manger scene, the baby Jesus, the lights on the house and the Christmas symbols we display have no meaningful connection to that Holy Night, the Living God, a personal Jesus and the very real introduction of hope and promise and redemption into this world.

Nostalgia alone does not cannot answer the deep yearning people have for a restored relationship with the Creator and for spiritual healing.

If the only holiday decoration that seems real to you is the golden retriever, then understand this: Because of Jesus — Wonderful Counselor, Beautiful Savior, Prince of Peace — the decorations are no longer merely ornamental, they will become sacramental.

May it be so. — DEREK



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



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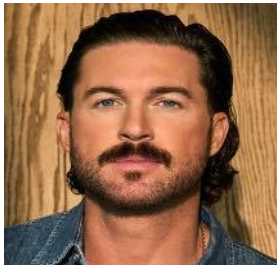
***if medically appropriate for those 18 years of age or older*

Learn more about all of Tobacco Free Florida’s tools and services at TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/QuitYourWay.



ALABAMA, JOAN JETT & MORE HEADLINE 2026 FLORIDA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

Staff Report

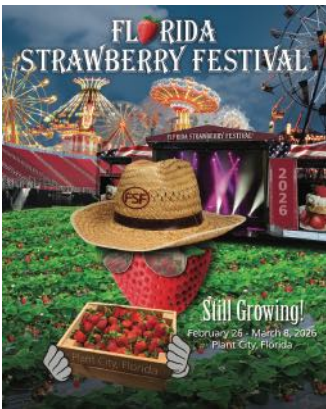


The Florida Strawberry Festival® is turning up the volume for its 91st year, unveiling a star-studded entertainment lineup that reflects the event's 2026 theme, "Still Growing." From country legends and rock icons to chart-topping Christian artists and R&B superstars, BerryFest26 promises one of the most dynamic musical offerings in Festival history.

Headlining the Wish Farms Soundstage are major crowd favorites including Alabama, Dierks Bentley, Brantley Gilbert, Riley Green, The Offspring, Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, and the powerhouse R&B collaboration Legends of Love featuring Brian McKnight, Ginuwine and Ruben Studdard. These popular acts highlight how the Festival continues to grow in scale, reach and entertainment appeal while staying rooted in its deep agricultural and community traditions.

The theme "Still Growing" reflects the Festival's ongoing evolution — from record-setting attendance and expanding attractions to continued celebration of Plant City's iconic strawberry industry. That growth is evident in both the diversity and caliber of this year's performers, offering something for every generation of Festival-goers.

"As we unveil our headline entertainment for BerryFest26, I am beyond excited to say this year's theme perfectly captures the energy and anticipation surrounding our in-



credible lineup," said Florida Strawberry Festival® President Kyle Robinson. Among the most anticipated performances is Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, who will deliver the Festival's closing-night concert on March 8, 2026. Known for timeless hits including "I Love Rock 'n' Roll," "Bad Reputation," and "Crimson and Clover,"

Jett will cap off BerryFest26 with a high-energy finale.

Another standout is Legends of Love, bringing together the smooth vocals and chart-topping careers of Brian McKnight, Ginuwine and Ruben Studdard for a soulful R&B showcase that adds fresh range and star power to the lineup.

"Announcing both Legends of Love and Joan Jett is truly special for us," said Florida Strawberry Festival President Kyle Robinson. We're thrilled to welcome them both to BerryFest26."

Advance tickets for gate admission and headline entertainment are available online, through the Festival's mobile app, by phone at 813-754-1996, or in person at the Am-scot Main Ticket Office located at 2209 W. Oak Avenue in Plant City. Tickets can also be purchased at www.flstrawberryfestival.com

The 2026 Florida Strawberry Festival will take place February 26 through March 8 in Plant City.

CARDINAL ROOFING ANNOUNCES 12TH ANNUAL CHARITY CLAY SHOOT IN LITHIA

By Olivia Clark

Cardinal Roofing will host its 12th annual Cardinal Roofing Charity Clay Shoot on Friday, February 13, at FishHawk Sporting Clays, located at 13505 Hobson Simmons Rd. in Lithia. Sign-in begins at 11:30 a.m. for a day of sporting clays, food and fundraising in support of charitable causes tied to veterans and missing persons.

The annual sporting clays event has been a signature fundraiser for Cardinal Roofing for more than a decade. For many years, proceeds from the event supported Honor Flights, reflecting the company's long-standing commitment to honoring veterans. In recent years, the focus has shifted to benefit 'We Are The Essentials For The Missing.'

We Are The Essentials For The Missing is a non-profit organization made up of former law enforcement officers and military service members who conduct search and recovery investigations for missing persons. The organization recently became an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit, allowing donations and rewards for solved cases to help offset the costs associated with investigations and specialized equipment. The group's mission is to provide answers and closure to families searching for missing loved ones.

This year's charity clay shoot has a fundraising goal of \$20,000. Participants may register as individual shoot-



Shooters participate in a previous Cardinal Roofing Charity Clay Shoot at FishHawk Sporting Clays in Lithia.



ers for \$250 or as a four-person team for \$800. Sponsorship opportunities are also available, including an Essential Sponsor level for \$2,000, station sponsor-

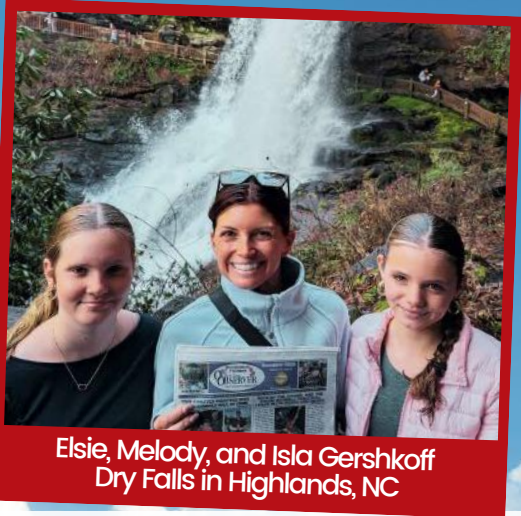
ships for \$100 and vendor-only or add-on options for \$225.

Cardinal Roofing is a third-generation, family-owned roofing contractor that has served the community for decades. Founded in 1995, the locally owned company remains actively involved in the areas where its owners and employees live and work, supporting a variety of charitable initiatives throughout the year.

Bridget Jenkins Wilson, president of Cardinal Roofing, plays a leading role in the company's philanthropic efforts. Wilson chairs and organizes the annual charity clay shoot and works alongside co-owners Roger Jenkins and Chad Curchin to continue the family-owned business and its commitment to community involvement.

To register or learn more about the event, visit www.girlroofer.com. Additional information about Cardinal Roofing is available at www.cardinalroofingfl.com or by calling 813-689-7663 (ROOF).

Where In The World



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NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD ANDREA ROMINE BEGINS REAL ESTATE CAREER AT KELLER WILLIAMS VALRICO

Staff Report

Andrea Romine, a 19-year-old real estate professional with Keller Williams, is proud to announce the launch of her real estate career in the local market after relocating from Ohio to Florida. New to the area but driven by ambition and a strong support system, Romine is building her business around two core missions: serving as a trusted Ohio-to-Florida relocation connector and inspiring young people to start their real estate careers early — without the need for a traditional four-year degree.



whelming,” said Romine. “My goal is to be the connector — someone who understands both markets and can guide clients through every step, whether they’re heading to Florida or moving back home to Ohio.”

Starting Early: A Message to Future Real Estate Professionals

Romine’s second focus is encouraging high school students and young adults who are interested in real estate to start now. She is passionate about showing

that a successful career in real estate does not require a college or trade school degree — only discipline, strong work ethic and clear goals.

“Real estate is one of the few careers where you can get licensed right after high school and immediately start building your future,” Romine said. “If you have big goals later in life, you might as well start now.”

Through Keller Williams, Romine has access to industry-leading training, coaching and mentorship, including classroom-style learning and team-based support. She credits Keller Williams for providing the education and guidance that allows new agents — especially young professionals — to grow with confidence and professionalism.

Romine is with The Ans Group- Keller Williams Suburban Tampa located at 2350 E. SR 60 in Valrico. Call (740) 974-8837. or visit www.theansgroup.kw.com.



ROTARY SPOTLIGHT: ACTIVITIES, MEETINGS & MORE

Staff Report

34th Annual Bill Harper Classic Golf Tournament

The Rotary Club of Brandon is kicking off 2026 with two major fundraising events aimed at supporting local charities and providing scholarships for college-bound students.

The first event, the 34th annual Bill Harper Classic Golf Tournament, is scheduled for Thursday, January 15, at Buckhorn Springs Golf and Country Club. Those interested in participating or learning more can contact Brett Briggs at 813-240-5380.

2026 Wild Game Dinner

Next on the calendar is the 2026 Wild Game Dinner, set for Friday, February 27, at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds. Attendees will enjoy an all-you-can-eat wild game feast, an open bar, a wall-of-guns raffle, a corn-hole tournament and a 50/50 drawing.

Tickets, sponsorship details and additional information are available at <https://brandonwildgame.com/>, or by reaching out to any Rotary Club of Brandon member.

If you are interested in finding out more about Rotary or how to join this



amazing club, text Debbie Meegan at 813-601-2315 or join the club for lunch on Tuesdays at 12 Noon at the Rivard Simmons Rotary Event Center, located at 3007 S. Kings Ave. in Brandon.

Brandon January Speakers For FishHawk/Riverview Rotary Club

The FishHawk/Riverview Rotary Club continues its

community programming with several meetings and events planned through December and January. January programs include Liz Anderson, director of development for the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, on Monday, January 5; Hillsborough County Chief Deputy Joe Mauier on Monday, January 12; and a Honduras Trip recap highlighting recent international service work on Monday, January 26.

You can also join the club on Mondays from 12 Noon-1 p.m. at Gasparilla Pizzeria & Growlers, located at 1028 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico, or on Thursdays from 5-6:30 p.m. at the Shrimp Boat, located at 1020 Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico. For more information, contact Betty Huth at betty@hbphoto.com.



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GET THE DIRT: SPICE UP YOUR HOLIDAYS

BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT

More holidays are upon us. Some favorite spices include rosemary, sage and marjoram.

Rosemary is a fragrant herb that is easy to grow and works well in your landscape and kitchen. It can be used fresh or dried in recipes containing meats, breads and vegetables. Rosemary adds great flavor to a skewer for the barbecue. It's attractive in the landscape and is drought-tolerant, thriving on well-drained soil and at least six hours of sun. Don't water too often — less is better than more.

Sage thrives in full sun and well-drained soil. It is drought-tolerant once established but can't tolerate wet or poorly drained soils, which may lead to root rot. This perennial herb is a low-maintenance plant that can be pruned to maintain shape and encour-



age bushier growth. Salvia officinalis, or common sage, is used to flavor meats (pork, poultry), stuffings for turkey, sauces and soups. It can be fried until crispy or infused into butter for pasta, potatoes and squash.

Marjoram has a delicate, sweet and slightly piney flavor. Most people use it to enhance poultry, pork, fish and delicate vegetables, like green beans, carrots and squash. This spice compliments tomato sauces, soups and salads. Many people add fresh marjoram at the end of cooking

to preserve the subtle flavor. Contact Lynn Barber at labarber@ufl.edu.

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Edited by:
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EYE ON BUSINESS

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

Local Assistant Helps Seniors Stay Independent

Kathy Bass, owner of Helping Hands Assistant LLC, is a personal assistant dedicated to helping individuals and businesses stay organized, efficient and stress-free. With years of experience in supporting private clients and companies of all sizes, she has built a reputation as the 'go-to gal' for making life run a little smoother.

Her specialty is supporting seniors, providing the extra set of hands they need to maintain independence and peace of mind. Whether it's accompanying clients to appointments, running errands, organizing their homes or assisting with day-to-day tasks that have become challenging, she offers dependable, personalized help with a warm, patient approach.

For more information or to schedule assistance, please contact Bass at 863-409-9890 or kathy75cole05@verizon.net.



Kathy Bass is an assistant dedicated to helping individuals and businesses stay organized. pad, a fitness deck, a jogging trail, pickleball courts, nature trails, a lake with a dock and canoe launch, a lakeside pavilion and bar, a social lounge, a fire pit, a lake house, sports fields, a playground and a dog park. The community is also convenient to downtown Tampa, Sarasota and St. Petersburg. Students attend School District of Manatee County schools.

For more information about David Weekley Homes in Coastera, contact 941-306-4384 or visit the company's website at www.davidweekleyhomes.com.

David Weekley Homes

David Weekley Opens New Model Home In Coastera Community

David Weekley Homes, one of the largest privately held national home builders, has opened a new model home, The Gilbert, in the Palmetto community of Coastera. The 1-story model home showcases 3,031 square feet with four bedrooms, three full baths, a three-car garage, a study, a TV room and a super shower in the owner's retreat bath. Located at 7747 Ocean Spray Trail, the model home is open daily for tours.

Homeowners in Coastera can enjoy access to an amenity center bordering the 60-acre lake, a resort-style pool, a cabana and splash



tion dedicated to strengthening, unifying and advocating for independent notaries across the United States. Founded by Tye Brown, founder and CEO, the coalition aims to elevate professional standards, promote ethical practices and provide a unified voice for notaries in an evolving regulatory environment. The NNC's launch is supported by a strategic partnership with Keeler Notary & Fingerprinting, a veteran-owned small business based in Valrico, illustrating how local leadership can drive national impact within the notary profession.

"The notary profession is essential to public trust and fraud prevention, yet independent notaries have lacked cohesive representation," Brown said. "The National Notary Coalition was created to address that gap and support notaries nationwide."

More information on Keeler Notary & Fingerprinting can be found on its website at www.tampabaysigning.com or by calling 816-372-5220.

Brandon Family Physician Receives Honorary Degree from National Medical Association

The Florida Academy of Family Physicians announced that Bruni-Ida Nazario, MD, FAAFP of Brandon, achieved the Degree of Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), the national medical association representing nearly 127,600 family physicians, residents and medical students.

Established in 1971, the AAFP Degree of Fellow recognizes family physicians who have distinguished themselves through service to family medicine and ongoing professional development.

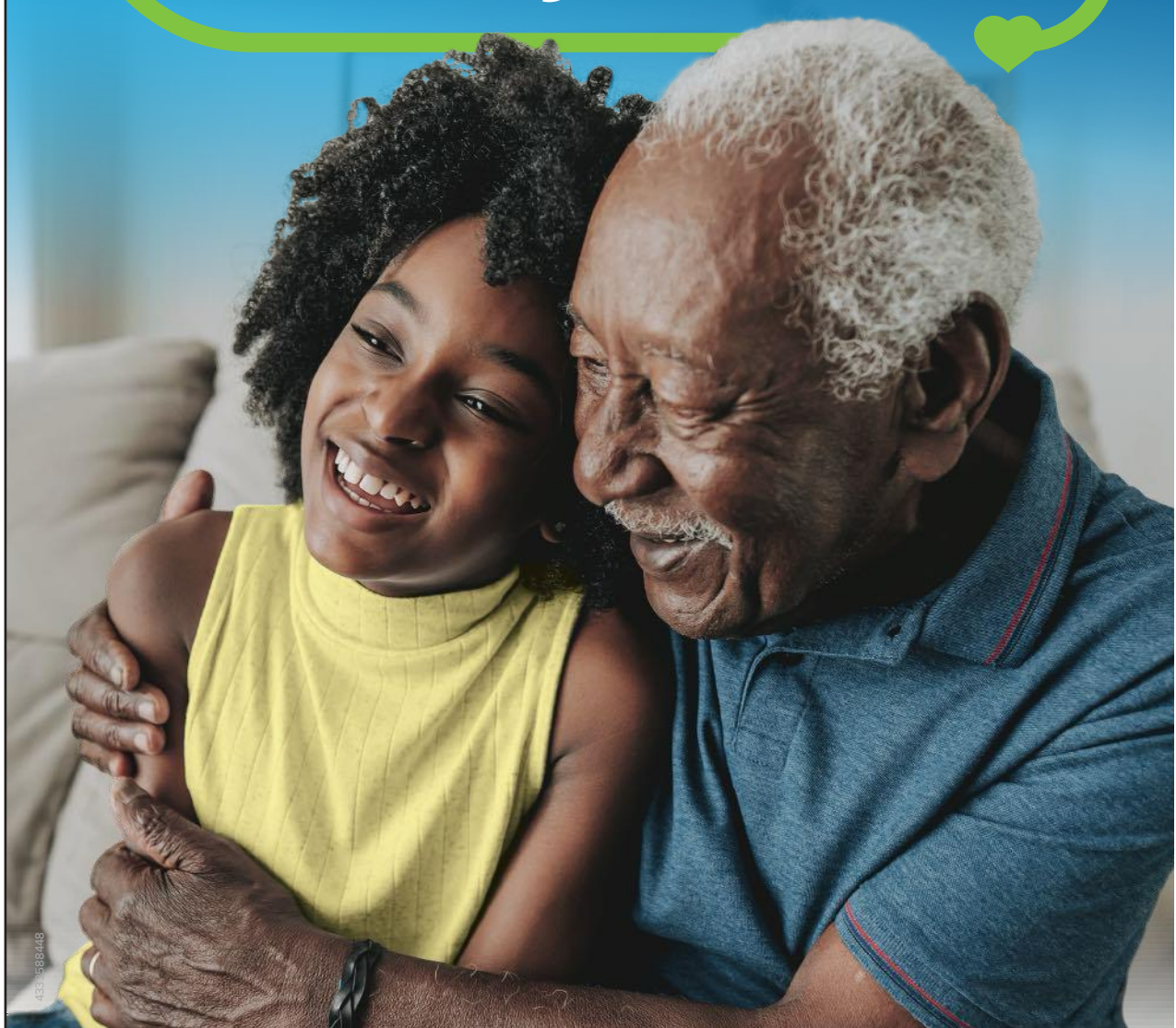
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New Hope Church is located at 213 N. Knights Ave. in Brandon. Register at <https://delightwomensconference.rsvpify.com/>.

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