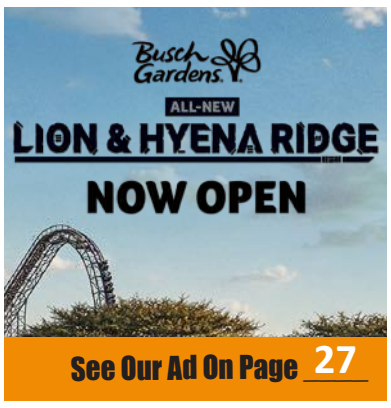


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FOUR SEA TURTLES RETURN TO WILD AFTER APOLLO BEACH REHAB

Staff Report





Four young sea turtles received a fresh start this week thanks to months of care at The Florida Aquarium's Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Center in Apollo Beach.

On August 11, Aquarium biologists carefully loaded four juvenile green sea turtles — Dark Blue Yellow, Pink, Black and Light Blue Pink — into a transport van at the Apollo Beach Conservation Campus. The turtles then began the journey across the state to their release site near Palm Coast, where they were returned to the Atlantic Ocean.

For the aquarium's animal care team, the release marked the successful conclusion of four very different rehabilitation journeys.

Dark Blue Yellow arrived on March 29 after being found stranded at Minerva Beach near Daytona Beach with a severe gash across the underside of its shell, known as the plastron. Aquarium officials said the injury was one of the most serious sea turtle wounds the team has successfully treated.

The turtle's recovery included a specialized topical ointment that created a waterproof barrier over the wound, along with ongoing wound care, veterinary treatment, nutritional support and close monitoring.

Pink, Black and Light Blue Pink were rescued along Florida's east coast after becoming cold-stunned. Exposure to cold water can leave sea turtles weak, lethargic and unable to swim.

After months of rehabilitation, all four turtles completed exit examinations during the two weeks prior to release and were declared healthy enough to return to the wild.

The release highlights the important conservation work taking place locally at the aquarium's Apollo Beach facility. Since 1999, The Florida Aquarium has rescued and rehabilitated sea turtles while also conducting research aimed at improving their chances of survival in the wild.

The 19,000-square-foot Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Center features 12 recovery pools, a veterinary hospital and a deep-dive pool where turtles can be evaluated and conditioned before release.

The aquarium has cared for 22 sea turtles this season. Four juvenile green sea turtles remain in rehabilitation and will continue receiving treatment until they are medically cleared for release.

For residents of Apollo Beach and the surrounding SouthShore community, the facility offers a firsthand look at the conservation efforts helping protect one of Florida's most iconic marine animals.

All rehabilitation work is conducted with approval from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission under authorized conservation activities.

SOUTHSHORE'S RETAIL BOOM: TARGET, SWIG, FIVE GUYS AND MORE ON THE WAY

By Brian Bokor

SouthShore's retail and restaurant landscape continues to expand, with 10 projects advancing across Apollo Beach, Riverview, Ruskin, Wimauma and Sun City Center. Some remain in permitting, while others are under construction or have already opened.



Sonny's BBQ

Construction plans have been filed for a 3,986-square-foot Sonny's BBQ restaurant with a drive-through near Riverview Drive and Mathog Road in Riverview. The project remains in the county permitting process, and construction has not been confirmed.

Buddy Brew in Sprouts Market

Buddy Brew Coffee is planning a cafe inside the Sprouts Farmers Market at 12960 S. U.S. 301 in Riverview. The Tampa-based specialty coffee company operates a similar cafe inside the Sprouts in Valrico. Opening details for the Riverview location have not been announced.

Newly submitted plans confirm that Target is planned for the LC Promenade development near Big Bend Road and Interstate 75 in Apollo Beach. The proposed 149,006-square-foot store would occupy approximately 12.5 acres and include 597 parking spaces, 18 designated Drive Up spaces and 16 cart corrals. Target would join the larger mixed-use development planned around the proposed Costco warehouse. Construction plans are under county review, and an opening date has not been announced.

Ford's Garage

Ford's Garage is under construction at 10475 Alder Green Dr. in Riverview. Recent county inspections show work progressing through framing and mechanical, electrical and plumbing roughins. The restaurant will bring the automotive-themed burger and craft beer concept to the Big Bend Road area. An opening date has not been announced.

Swig Beverage Chain

Swig, the drive-through beverage chain known for customizable 'dirty sodas,' has been confirmed for The Yard at Waterset in Apollo Beach. Swig is expected to be part of the development's second phase, currently targeted for de-

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Shoppers can browse handmade goods and artisan products from local vendors during Big Bend Market events. The markets will return to Ruskin Fresh Market on Sept. 6 and Lovelock Ranch in Wimauma on Sept. 20, giving SouthShore residents opportunities to shop local and support area makers. See full story on Page 6.





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UNITED METHODIST CHURCH TO HOST COMMUNITY 9/11 REMEMBRANCE

Staff Report

If you're looking for one of the most meaningful events in South Shore this September, you'll need a ticket—but it won't cost you a dime. The United Methodist Church of Sun City Center is inviting the community to a special ecumenical remembrance, "25 Years Later: Remembering, Healing, and Hope," on Friday, September 11, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. The event will be held at the church, located at 1971 Haverford Avenue, Sun City Center. Tickets are free, but seating is limited, so attendees are encouraged to stop by the church office to pick up their tickets well in advance of the event. The evening is offered by the church as a gift to the entire South Shore community.

Marking a quarter-century since the events of September 11, the program has been designed as an evening of remembrance, reflection, healing, and hope. Rather than focusing on politics or division, the event seeks to bring people together through shared memories and a renewed commitment to community. "This is an opportunity for neighbors to come together, regardless of faith tradition, to remember one of the defining moments in our nation's history," said event organizers Jeff Jordan and David Gwynne. "The evening is intended to honor courage, encourage healing, and remind us that hope continues to shine even in difficult times."

In addition to film, poetry, handbells, personal testimonies and audience participation, there will be a special massed choir comprised of singers from many of our local choral ensembles. The choir will be sharing portions of the well-known Fauré Requiem as well as selections from Joseph Martin's Of Faith and Freedom. It's not too late for interested singers to participate as there will be two rehearsals on Saturdays August 29th and September 5th at 10AM in the church sanctuary. Music will be provided. Please contact Jeff Jordan at (813) 260-0153 for more information about the choir.

The service is ecumenical, welcoming people of every faith tradition—as well as those with no church affiliation—to participate in a spirit of unity and respect. The evening's theme, "The Light Changes Everything," reflects the belief that compassion, understanding, and hope can illuminate even the darkest moments of history.

Those wishing to attend should pick up their [up to four] free tickets soon, as interest is expected to be high. For more information, please visit lovethelight.org or stop by the church office.

The United Methodist Church of Sun City Center is located at 1971 Haverford Avenue in Sun City Center. The United Methodist is a church with Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors that seeks to make Disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world. To learn more about the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center worship services, activities, and other events, please visit our website at www.lovethelight.org.

100 WHO CARE VALENCIA LAKES TURNS GIVING INTO LOCAL IMPACT

By Marie Gilmore



100 Who Care Valencia Lakesm chose the Senior Sunshine Series as the recipient of its 2026 1st quarter donation.

When a group of neighbors comes together with a shared commitment to helping others, a relatively small individual contribution can make a big difference.

That is the idea behind 100 Who Care Valencia Lakes Giving Circle, which has donated more than $160,000 to local nonprofits since its founding in 2021.

The organization recently selected Senior Sunshine Series as the recipient of its 2026 first-quarter donation, awarding the organization $6,600.

The check was presented June 11 at the Valencia Lakes Clubhouse to Senior Sunshine Series founder Jim Blackwell and his partners. Members of 100 Who Care Valencia Lakes gathered for the presentation and celebrated the impact their collective contribution will have on local residents in need.

Blackwell and the Senior Sunshine Series provide protein to local food banks and other nonprofits by donating large quantities of chickens. The organization also creates care packages for people experiencing homelessness.

Blackwell recently shared with the giving circle that its donation allowed Senior Sunshine Series to significantly increase its chicken purchases for local food banks and expand its care packages.

The giving circle was founded by Valencia Lakes resident Karen Corbin in April 2021 and has grown from 21 members to 69, with nearly 70 members currently involved.

The concept is simple. Members meet quarterly, hear presentations from three member-nominated nonprofits and vote to select the organization that will receive their collective donation. Members pledge $100 per quarter, or $400 annually.

With up to 100 members, the organization can provide as much as $10,000 to a local nonprofit each quarter. The Schulze Family Foundation matches 50% of the donation, up to $5,000 per quarter.

There are no board members, bank account, administrative fees or overhead expenses. Volunteers help coordinate the group, allowing 100% of members' donations to go directly to the selected nonprofit.

The giving circle recently celebrated its fifth year and selected Magnified Voices as its second-quarter recipient. The Wimauma organization will receive the group's next donation.

Valencia Lakes residents interested in joining can contact Corbin at kscorbin1@gmail.com or visit www.grapevine.org/giving-circle/KXMhmP/100-Who-Care-Valencia-Lakes.





CHAMBER CELEBRATES OPENING OF BULLFROG CREEK DENTAL CARE

Staff Report



The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce today welcomed Bullfrog Creek Dental Care to the community with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house at the practice's new location, 7052 Waterset Blvd. in Apollo Beach.

The celebration began at 9 a.m., with the official ribbon cutting held at 9:30 a.m. Chamber ambassadors, local business leaders and community members joined Dr. Ziad Shannis, DMD, and the Bullfrog Creek Dental Care team to mark the occasion.

Bullfrog Creek Dental Care offers comprehensive dental services focused on personalized, patient-centered care, including preventive, cosmetic and restorative treatments. The practice is committed to helping SouthShore residents achieve healthy, confident smiles.

"We are thrilled to celebrate this exciting milestone with Dr. Shannis and his team," said Bonnie Peacock, executive director of the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce. "Bullfrog Creek Dental Care is a wonderful addition to our growing business community, and we look forward to supporting their success as they serve Apollo Beach and the greater SouthShore area."

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce continues to support local businesses through ribbon cuttings, networking events and community advocacy that strengthen the region's economic vitality.

For more information about Bullfrog Creek Dental Care, visit https://bullfrogcreekdentalcare.com/ or call 813-856-1049.

About the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce serves businesses and residents across Ruskin, Apollo Beach, Sun City Center, Wimauma, Gibsonton, Balm and South Riverview. For more information, visit www.southshorechamberofcommerce.org or call 813-645-1366.

ROCK & ROLL COMEDY SHOW BENEFITS C.A.R.E. ANIMAL SHELTER

Staff Report



Rock, laugh and rescue! Jack Willhite brings his hilarious classic-rock parodies to the Firehouse Cultural Center in Ruskin on Sept. 20 for Rock & Roll for Rescue, benefiting C.A.R.E. (Critter Adoption & Rescue Effort). Proceeds will help provide food, medical care and shelter for animals awaiting forever homes.

Get ready for laughter, live music and a great cause! Firehouse Cultural Center (FCC), in conjunction with C.A.R.E. (Critter Adoption & Rescue Effort), presents Rock & Roll for Rescue, bringing together high-energy rock hits and hilarious comedy for an unforgettable evening of entertainment.

Best of all, proceeds will benefit C.A.R.E., helping provide food, medical care, shelter and loving support for animals in need as they wait for their forever homes.

Whether you're a music lover, comedy fan or animal advocate, this event offers the perfect opportunity to have fun while making a difference. Join us for a feel-good event where great entertainment helps give deserving pets a second chance.

Armed with a half-ton of guitars, amps, lighting, costumes, props and pure comedic energy, Jack Willhite delivers outrageous parodies of your favorite classic rock acts, from AC/DC and Guns N' Roses to ZZ Top, Prince, John Mellencamp, and more. It's part tribute concert, part stand-up show and all-out comedy chaos.

Laugh. Rock. Rescue. Every ticket helps support homeless animals in our community. Whether you're a die-hard classic rock fan or just looking for a wildly fun night out, this is the comedy show you didn't know you needed but absolutely don't want to miss.

The reservation fee is $25 per person. All reservations are in advance; call for tickets at 813-645-7651 or book online at https://firehouseculturalcenter.org/events/c-a-r-e-critter-adoption-rescue-effort/. Tickets are nonrefundable.

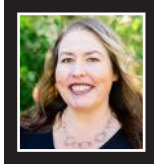
Become an FCC member and save at https://firehouseculturalcenter.org/join/.

Rock & Roll for Rescue will be held at Firehouse Cultural Center, located at 101 First Ave. NE, Ruskin, on Sunday, September 20, at 3 p.m.



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SOUTHSHORE CHARTER WELCOMES NEW STAFF MEMBERS

By Libby Hopkins

Southshore Charter Academy is a school deeply committed to student success and character development. What sets the school apart is its focus on educating the whole child through strong academics, meaningful relationships and a culture that emphasizes leadership, responsibility and personal growth.



Jorad Anda is the new principal of Southshore Charter Academy.

"Our dedicated teachers and staff consistently go above and beyond to provide engaging learning experiences and individualized support for students, said newly appointed assistant principal Bridget Burns. "We also value strong family partnerships and community involvement, which helps create a welcoming and supportive environment for everyone on campus. Our commitment to high expectations and student-centered learning gives our students an advantage both inside and outside the classroom."

In her role, she supports both the academic and operational success of the school by working closely with teachers, students and families.

"My responsibilities include supporting instructional excellence, helping maintain a positive school culture, overseeing student discipline and attendance initiatives, coordinating school programs and events and ensuring that every student has the support they need to succeed both academically and personally," Burns said.

In addition to Burns, the school has welcomed Jarod Anda as the new principal of Southshore Charter Academy and Shyrelle Felmine as the dean of curriculum.

"I am passionate about building strong school cultures where students, staff and families feel valued, supported and connected," Anda said. "As principal, my goal is to ensure we provide an exceptional educational experience while creating an environment where every student and staff member has the opportunity to reach their highest potential. My biggest priority is building a strong culture and sense of belonging. I want every student who walks through our doors to know they are valued, supported, challenged and capable of achieving great things."

Like Anda and Burns, Felmine wants to make an impact on all the students who attend Southshore Charter Academy.

"I love working with our students, families and staff and seeing how everyone comes together as a team to ensure our students are successful and achieving their goals," Felmine said.

If you would like to learn more about Southshore Charter Academy, you can visit the school website's at www.southshorecharter.org. The school is located at 11667 Big Bend Rd. in Riverview.

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MARKETS BRING LOCAL MAKERS TOGETHER IN RUSKIN AND WIMAUMA

Staff Report



Local shoppers will have two opportunities this fall to discover handmade goods, meet area makers and support small businesses as the owners of Ruskin Fresh Market expand their community market offerings.

The Big Bend Market, which organizes monthly vendor markets in partnership with Ruskin Fresh Market and other area locations, will host its next Ruskin Market on Sunday, September 6, from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. at Ruskin Fresh Market, located at 2619 14th Ave. SE in Ruskin. The indoor market will feature a curated selection of local vendors offering handmade products, artisan goods and other unique items.

The market organizers emphasize a carefully selected vendor lineup designed to provide shoppers with a diverse mix of products. Handmade items and products created by local makers and artists receive priority, while produce vendors, multilevel marketing businesses and direct-sales companies are not accepted.

Vendor space for the September Ruskin Market is currently full, with organizers maintaining a waitlist. Vendors are selected based on factors including product quality, presentation, social media engagement and their ability to help promote the event.

The market concept is part of a growing effort to create regular gathering places for local shoppers and small businesses throughout the SouthShore area.

The Big Bend Market also will bring its Wimauma Market to Lovelock Ranch, located at 17320 Carlton Lake Rd. in Wimauma, on Sunday, September 20, from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. The indoor vendor market will offer another opportunity for residents to shop from local entrepreneurs, artists and makers in a community-focused setting.

The events build on Ruskin Fresh Market's role as a local destination since opening in April 2024. Founded by Nicole and David Ferrera and their family, the market was created to provide the Ruskin community with convenient access to fresh produce and locally sourced products.

In addition to fruits and vegetables, Ruskin Fresh Market carries items such as Amish jams, pretzels and chips, local Ruskin honey, milk and cheese and locally sourced, grass-fed beef.

The Big Bend Market hosts monthly markets in Riverview, Ruskin and Gibsonton, along with collaborations in Tampa. Information about upcoming markets and vendor applications is available through Instagram at @thebigbendmarket.

EMERGENCY SQUAD HOSTS FALLS & DEPRESSION SYMPOSIUM FOR VETERANS

Staff Report



The Sun City Center Emergency Squad will host a Falls & Depression Symposium in September designed to provide veterans, their families and community members with information, resources and support surrounding two important health concerns.

The free symposium will be offered in two identical sessions. The first will take place on Thursday, September 10, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at the SCC Community Hall, located at 1910 S. Pebble Beach Blvd. in Sun City Center. The second will be on Monday, September 21, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Kings Point Veterans Theater, located at 1904 Clubhouse Dr. in Sun City Center. Lunch will be provided at both events.

The symposium is especially focused on Sun City Center's large veteran population and the challenges veterans and their families may face. Attendees will have the opportunity to learn practical strategies for preventing falls, recognize warning signs of depression and suicide risk and discover ways to cope with difficult circumstances.

The event also will feature panel discussions with mental health professionals, information about community support services, a question-and-answer session and a resource fair.

"This is a compassionate, veteran-friendly gathering designed to empower attendees with knowledge and hope," said Kirk Forbes of the Sun City Center Emergency Squad. "We want our veteran community to know that help is available and that no one must face these struggles alone."

The Sun City Center Emergency Squad has served the community since 1964, when a group of residents organized to provide first aid assistance to ill and injured neighbors. Today, the community-based organization has nearly 400 volunteers during its peak season, including approximately 120 ambulance crew volunteers.

The squad responds to nearly 5,000 emergency calls each year and serves approximately 20,000 residents during the peak season. It operates four Type I ambulances and a wheelchair van from its main station at 720 Ray Watson Dr. in Sun City Center, along with a training center at 124 S. Pebble Beach Blvd. in Sun City Center.

In addition to emergency response, the organization provides American Heart Association-certified CPR training and blood pressure checks.

For more information about the Sun City Center Emergency Squad and its community services, visit https://sccems.com/.



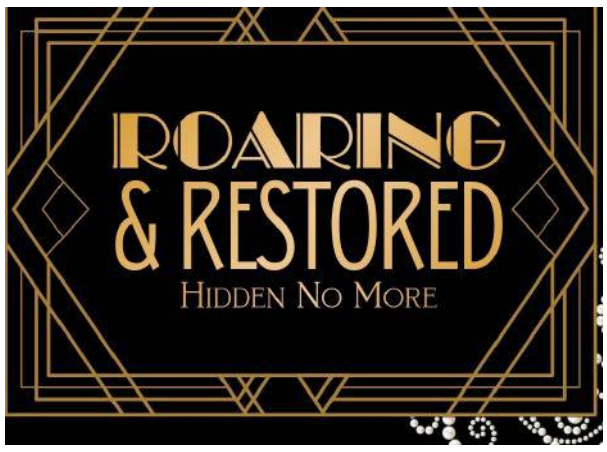




ANTI-SEX-TRAFFICKING GALA BRINGS HOPE, HEALING AND RESTORATION

Staff Report

Selah Freedom is bringing a message of courage, healing and collective action to Tampa with Roaring & Restored: Hidden No More, its annual fall gala. Scheduled for March 12, 2027, from 6-10 p.m. at Armature Works, located at 1910 N. Ola Ave. in Tampa, this semiformal event invites guests to embrace a Roaring Twenties-inspired flair while standing alongside survivors of sex trafficking.



Selah Freedom will bring a message of courage, healing and collective action to Tampa with its annual fall gala, Roaring & Restored: Hidden No More, on March 12, 2027, at Armature Works.

SELAHFREEDOM
Bringing Light into the Darkness of Sex Trafficking

The gala's title captures the evening's central conviction: exploitation often remains unseen, but survivors deserve to be recognized, supported and celebrated. Selah Freedom describes the gathering as an opportunity to break silence, step into the light and honor people who are "no longer hidden — but restored, resilient and roaring in freedom." The program is designed to unite community members around a shared resolve to confront trafficking and expand pathways toward lasting restoration.

Beyond a single evening, the event highlights the work at the heart of Selah Freedom's Florida-based, faith-centered nonprofit mission. The organization works to protect children, end sex trafficking and help exploited people find freedom through prevention, awareness, outreach, residential and consulting programs. Its residential services provide survivors with a safe setting and wraparound resources intended to support healing and a new beginning.

Tickets are priced at $200, with a $150 early-bird rate available, and sponsorship opportunities are also offered. For attendees, Roaring & Restored promises more than an elegant night out. It is a chance to turn concern into meaningful support — to listen, learn, give and affirm that freedom should never be hidden. In a community willing to speak up, survivors' stories can be met not with silence but with hope, dignity and the resources needed to move forward.

Those interested in attending can purchase tickets or explore sponsorships through Selah Freedom, helping sustain practical care, prevention education and public awareness for survivors and communities throughout Florida and beyond.

Email leanne.baker@selahfreedom.com for sponsorship opportunities, or visit https://selahfreedom.com/. For tickets to the Roaring & Restored: Hidden No More gala, visit https://onecau.se/_h8dyr1.

RICHARD J. MEADOWS SCHOLARSHIP HONORS LEGACY OF SERVICE

By David L. Miller



Left to right: Special Forces Association Chapter LX President Brian Wilson; Richard J. Meadows Memorial Scholarship recipients Ryland Zilka, Brittany Badertscher and Ethan D'India; and Congressman Gus M. Bilirakis.

Maj. Richard J. 'Dick' Meadows remains one of the most respected figures in U.S. Army Special Forces history. A pioneer of the Regiment, he served in Korea, volunteered for the newly formed Special Forces in 1953, later served with MACV-SOG during the Vietnam War, led the assault force during the Son Tay Prison Raid and helped establish 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta following his retirement. Chapter LX named its scholarship in his honor to inspire future generations to pursue lives of achievement, character and service.

Members of Special Forces Association Chapter LX gathered at Team House Tampa on August 1 for the annual Richard J. Meadows Memorial Scholarship Awards Banquet. Scholarship recipients, their families, chapter members and distinguished guests, including Congressman Gus M. Bilirakis, celebrated students whose accomplishments reflect the scholarship's emphasis on academic excellence, leadership, perseverance and service.

Following dinner, recipients were recognized during a formal presentation ceremony. This year's recipients represent three educational paths.

Ryland Zilka will attend the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he plans to study electrical engineering.

Brittany Badertscher will pursue a master's degree in special education at Florida Atlantic University as she prepares for a career serving students with special educational needs.

Ethan D'India will continue his education through the Project ACCESS Program at the College of the Florida Keys, where he will develop the academic, vocational and independent living skills needed to achieve his personal goals.

The evening's keynote speaker was Bilirakis, who has represented Florida's 12th Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives since 2007.

During his remarks, Bilirakis spoke of our nation's enduring debt of gratitude to its veterans, recognizing that the freedoms Americans enjoy today have been secured through the sacrifices of generations of men and women who answered the call to serve. He observed that veteran organizations such as Special Forces Association Chapter LX continue to honor that legacy by supporting veterans and their families and investing in the next generation through the Richard J. Meadows Memorial Scholarship Program. Congratulating the recipients, he encouraged them to pursue lives of excellence, leadership and service.

The annual banquet honors one of the regiment's legendary pioneers while providing educational opportunities for deserving students.

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ONE RIDE CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING FOR SOUTHSHORE SENIORS

Staff Report



For some older adults in South Hillsborough County, getting to a doctor's appointment can be much more complicated than simply getting behind the wheel.

When seniors no longer drive, live alone or have family members who live far away, something as routine as a medical appointment can become a major obstacle. Missed appointments, delayed treatment and increased isolation can be the result.

Seniors in Service is working to remove that barrier through its Companion Transportation Program, which provides free transportation and companionship to older adults in South Hillsborough County.

Through the program, volunteers age 55 and older provide rides to medical appointments and, when requested, can accompany seniors inside. Volunteers may take notes, help ask questions, pick up prescriptions or simply provide reassurance during what can be a stressful experience.

The program launched in 2025 and has already provided more than 500 rides, helping seniors get to surgeries, specialist appointments, treatments and routine medical care.

Support from AdventHealth and Community Foundation Tampa Bay makes the service available at no cost to participating seniors. A minivan donated by AdventHealth also allows volunteers to transport seniors throughout the Tampa Bay region.

For some participants, the service has been life-changing.

When one couple needed transportation to an early-morning heart surgery follow-up appointment, the patient's wife was experiencing severe anxiety and was unable to drive. After arriving safely, she told the volunteer, "We didn't know who to turn to. You saved us."

In another case, a veteran living alone needed transportation to surgery at Tampa General Hospital. Despite multiple schedule changes, a volunteer continued to show up, ensuring he was able to receive the medical care he needed.

Seniors in Service is now seeking additional volunteers age 55 and older to help meet the growing need.

The organization said volunteering can provide benefits beyond helping others, including opportunities to build connections, stay active and find a renewed sense of purpose in the community.

Those interested in volunteering as a Companion Transportation driver or seniors seeking transportation assistance can learn more through Seniors in Service's SouthShore program coordinator Michelle Mason.

Since 1984, Seniors in Service has mobilized older adults to serve children, seniors, veterans and families throughout Tampa Bay. Today, more than 1,900 volunteers contribute more than 360,000 hours of service annually.

Visit https://seniorsinservice.org/companion-services/south-shore-community/ or contact Mason at 813-492-8920.

CONSERVATION EFFORT GIVES FLORIDA SCRUB-JAYS A NEW CHANCE TO THRIVE

Staff Report



Forty-eight federally threatened Florida scrub-jays have a new home at Wingate Creek State Park in Manatee County following a first-of-its-kind effort to strengthen an isolated population.

The project brought together young scrub-jays from three Florida populations — Archbold Biological Station, Cape Canaveral Space Force Station and Duette Preserve — to increase genetic diversity and reduce the risks associated with inbreeding.

The effort involves The Mosaic Company, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Verdantas, the University of Central Florida and Archbold Biological Station. Manatee County, the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and regional land managers also helped prepare suitable habitat.

Found nowhere else on Earth, Florida scrub-jays depend entirely on Florida's shrinking scrub habitat. Development and habitat fragmentation continue to reduce and isolate suitable habitat, increasing risks for small populations.

Researchers focused on young birds entering their first breeding season, giving them an opportunity to establish territories, choose mates and integrate.

The translocation builds on more than 25 years of habitat restoration in Manatee County and decades of scrub-jay research. Researchers said the project is already showing encouraging signs.

All 48 birds survived the initial translocation period. The birds have established territories throughout Wingate Creek State Park and formed 11 family groups, with several pairs initiating nesting activity.

Several translocated birds have dispersed into surrounding scrub habitats and interacted with nearby populations, an early indication that new genetics may be integrated regionally.

"At Mosaic, environmental stewardship means taking a long-term view of the landscapes we manage and the species that depend on them," said Dr. Raoul Boughton. "The early success of this translocation reflects more than 25 years of studying and monitoring efforts to grow the regional Florida scrub-jay population. Insights from translocations conducted between 2003 and 2010 helped us refine our approach, while genetic diversity studies showed there was even more we could do to support the species' recovery."

Before the translocation, the regional population supported 56 breeding pairs. Researchers estimate the project could add up to 12 new breeding pairs at Wingate Creek State Park over the next three years. The goal is to reach more than 100 breeding pairs.

Scientists will continue monitoring survival, reproduction and genetic diversity to help guide future conservation strategies.



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MARY & MARTHA PLANS TWO FALL EVENTS TO SUPPORT MISSION

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Mary & Martha House, a South Hillsborough nonprofit providing shelter and comprehensive support for women and families fleeing domestic violence, is preparing for two major fall fundraisers to strengthen services for residents.

The first event, Musical Bingo Night, is set for Thursday, September 24, at 7 p.m. at Bullfrog Creek Brewing Co., located at 3632 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. Unlike traditional bingo, players match songs instead of numbers. Bill Chini, executive director for Mary & Martha House, described the fundraiser as "bingo meets Shazam."

"Instead of calling out letters and numbers, the host plays a song. Once you recognize the song, you look to see if you have that song on your bingo card, then boop, mark it down," said Chini. "If you don't recognize the song, you can use the Shazam app on your phone. Winners get gift cards to local restaurants."

Registration is not required, but Chini encourages attendees to arrive early.

"You do not need to register for this event, but be sure to get there early so you can secure a seat and have enough time to look at which of the awesome raffle prizes you want to bid on," said Chini.

The organization hopes to raise $3,000.

"These funds are crucial to allow us to continue serving our community and help our shelter residents break the cycle of abuse," said Chini.

The second fundraiser, Get Tee'd Off at Domestic Violence, will take place Thursday, October 15, from 5-7 p.m. at Topgolf, located at 10690 Palm River Rd. in Tampa. The event includes dinner, door prizes and raffles. A full bay is $499 and individual tickets are available.

"Each bay allows for six golfers. Each golfer gets delicious meal," said Chini. "We are hoping to see around 120 attendees. We have been very successful in the past and tickets sell fast for this event. Everyone has a great time!"

Sponsors include Anticus Engineering, Ryan Companies, Hillsborough College HCC Southshore, Chadwell Supply, Seacoast Bank and A&A Mortgage.

"We are always looking for other sponsors, and also raffle prize sponsors," he said.

Chini said the fundraisers help support the organization's growing programs.

"These events are so important to ensure we have the funds to support our shelter residents," said Chini. "Without the help and support of our community, we wouldn't be able to provide the services we currently provide. Over the past five years we have expanded our support services, most notably our program, Break The Cycle, which gives our shelter residents the tools and knowledge to achieve complete independence and thrive in our community."

More information is available at marymarthahouse.org or 813-560-1874.

SUNCOAST FOUNDATION PROVIDES $7,500 TO PEPIN ACADEMIES

Staff Report



As students return to the classroom for the first day of school today, Pepin Academies is celebrating a $7,500 gift from the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation that will help ensure students with learning disabilities have access to the specialized therapeutic services they need to succeed throughout the new school year.

The grant will support Pepin Academies' therapeutic educational model, which integrates mental health counseling, speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, behavioral support and skilled nursing into the school day at no cost to families. These individualized services help students overcome barriers to learning while building the confidence, skills and independence they need for lifelong success.

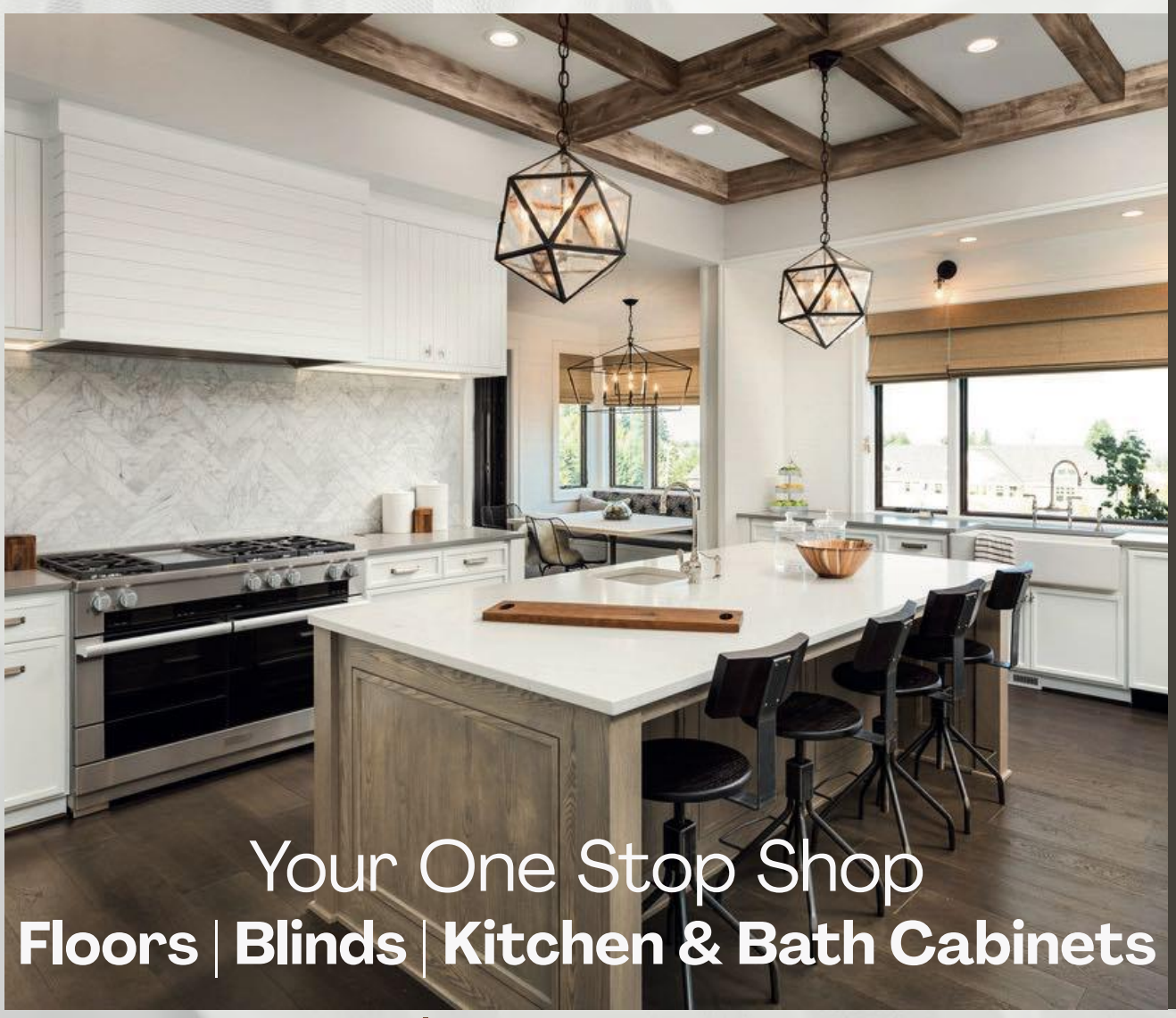
For more than 25 years, this whole-child approach has delivered life-changing results. Across its Tampa, Riverview and New Port Richey campuses, Pepin Academies has achieved a 93 percent graduation rate, in addition to a 0.8 percent dropout rate — well below state, county and national averages for students with disabilities. To meet growing student needs, the school has expanded its therapeutic services team from 29 to 35 specialists in the past year.

"Behind every diploma is a student who refused to give up, and a team of people committed to helping them succeed," said Jeff Skowronek, executive director of Pepin Academies. "We're incredibly grateful to the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation for believing in our students and helping us continue this important work. Together, we're giving students the support they need to graduate, pursue meaningful careers and build independent lives."

Suncoast Credit Union, Florida's largest credit union, founded the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation to promote the education, health and emotional well-being of children in the communities it serves. Each time a Suncoast member uses a Suncoast debit or credit card, the credit union contributes 4 cents to the foundation, helping fund local nonprofit initiatives. Since its founding in 1990, the foundation has donated more than $63 million to organizations that improve the lives of children and families across Florida.

"At Suncoast Credit Union, we have helped the students in our communities for decades," said Jeff Kunberger, executive director of Suncoast Credit Union Foundations. "We take great pride in knowing our donation will assist students in overcoming barriers to learning and unlock opportunities for success." Pepin Academies has campuses in Tampa, Riverview and New Port Richey. For more information, visit https://pepinacademies.com/.

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

By Jane Owen

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



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

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

Each restaurant will offer a special restaurant week menu, with some featuring prix fixe options that include an appetizer, main entree and dessert for a set price. Others will offer items available only during the week.

Acropolis has been in Winthrop the longest, at 17 years. The newest is Longshots Sports Bar, which just opened.

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

"Restaurant week is a special occasion to highlight the restaurants at Winthrop. We're particularly proud that we have so many family-run and locally run businesses and restaurants, which is not the case everywhere in the Brandon suburbs," Xiong said.

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

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

The community growth from the event is already happening through connections between the restaurants.

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

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

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

During Winthrop Restaurant Week, restaurants will also give away thousands of dollars in gift cards and other promotions. Sign up for the Winthrop newsletter at WinthropFL.com and follow @WinthropFL on social media for giveaways before and during Restaurant Week. Visit WinthropFL.com/RestaurantWeek for more information.

COUNTY TO HOST PATRIOT DAY 9/11 EVENT ON SEPTEMBER 11

Staff Report



A quarter century has passed since the attacks of 9/11 instigated our nation's longest war and challenged conventions of global security.

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue (HCFR), Veteran Community Services and the Veterans Council of Hillsborough County will host Patriot Day 9/11: Remembering the Fallen 25 Years Later at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, September 11, at Veterans Memorial Park & Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins, Jr. Veterans Museum, located at 3602 N. U.S. 301 in Tampa.

While honoring the lives lost, Americans commemorate September 11 as a National Day of Service and Remembrance. Local first responders, active-duty military, veterans and civic leaders aim to inspire a generation too young to recall the historic events of 2001. Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) and HCFR cadets will lead the annual Patriot Day ceremony featuring:

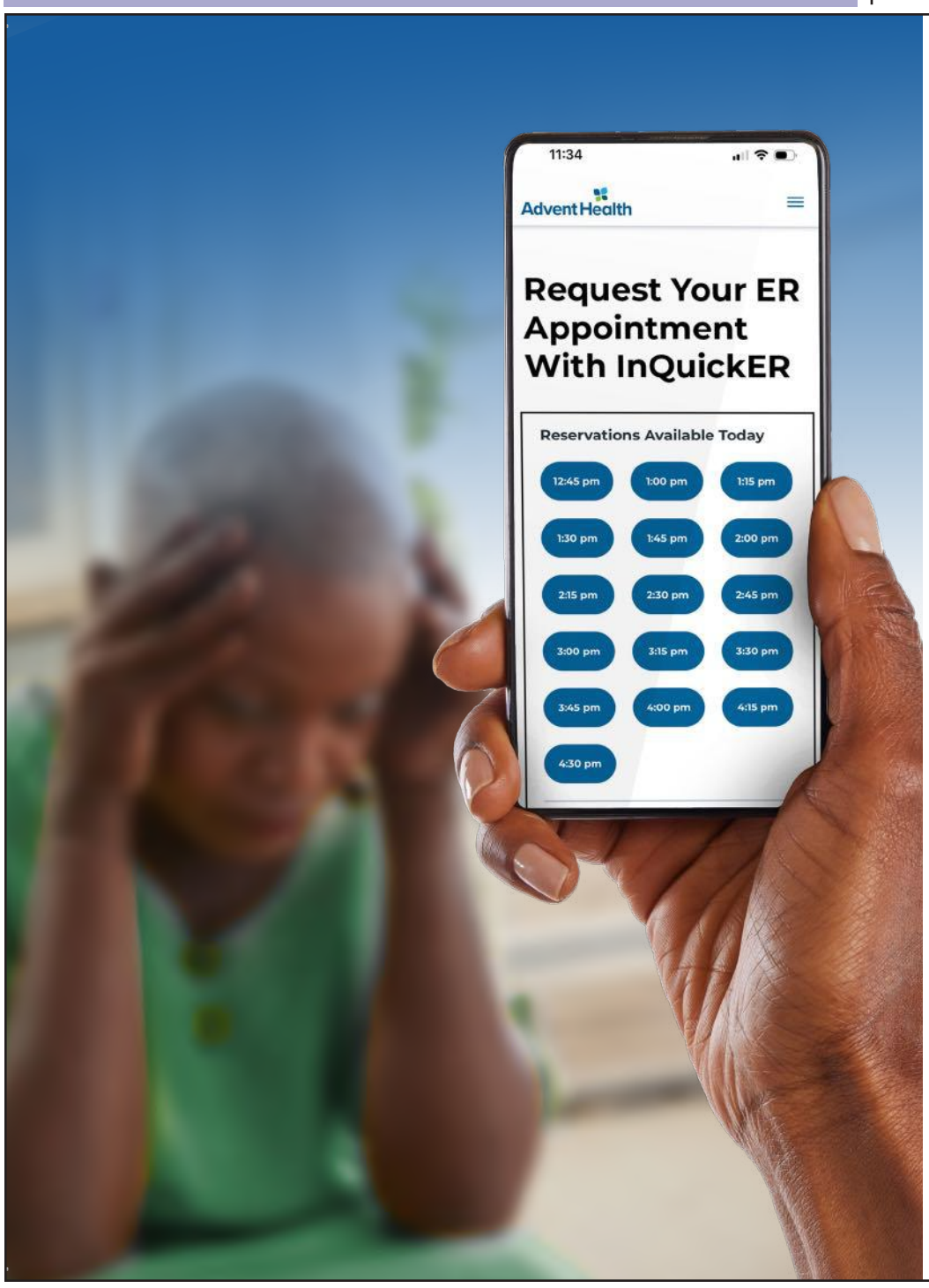
- A color guard, rifle salute and taps.
- A solemn escort of the beam: a solid 135-pound section of steel salvaged from New York's Twin Towers that resides at Veterans Memorial Park, representing the supreme sacrifices on 9/11.
- A traditional fire service ringing of the bell.
- Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Chief Jason Dougherty, Temple Terrace Fire Chief Ian Kemp and Plant City Fire Rescue Chief David Dittman.

After the ceremony, students and attendees can engage with service professionals for photos and interactive demonstrations including:

- Hillsborough County Fire Rescue.
- Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office Drone Response and Underwater Recovery Teams.
- MacDill Air Force Base Military Working Dogs (MWD), 6th Security Forces Squadron.
- U.S. Coast Guard St. Petersburg Station.
- U.S. Marine Corps 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion.
- U.S. Naval Reserve Center Tampa.

The 25th Anniversary Patriot Day 9/11 event is free and open to the public at Veterans Memorial Park's outdoor amphitheater. Attendees are invited to enjoy the park's many memorials.

For more information about Veterans Memorial Park & Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins, Jr. Veterans Museum, call Veteran Community Services at (813) 635-8316 or visit https://hcfl.gov/veterans.



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

By Brian Bokor



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

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

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

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

That approach became obvious once I stepped into the water.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Julie sees that reaction regularly. Once riders begin figuring it out, she said, "They get addicted. They want to do it."

Visit www.heroesparadise.com.

BUFFALO SOLDIERS MONUMENT TO BE UNVEILED AT VETERANS PARK

Staff Report



Photo Courtesy of Hillsborough County
With The Regulars at Port Tampa - Ninth United States Calvary skirmishing through the pines - drawn by Frederic Remington.

The community is invited to take part in a historic and meaningful event as Veteran Community Services and Hillsborough County leaders dedicate the new Buffalo Soldiers Monument on Saturday, August 29, at 10 a.m. at Veterans Memorial Park & Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins, Jr. Veterans Museum, located at 3602 N. U.S. 301 in Tampa.

The ceremony will begin in the park's outdoor amphitheater and will be followed by the official unveiling of a large bronze monument honoring the legacy and service of the Buffalo Soldiers. The event is free and open to the public. Attendees will enjoy a memorable program featuring the National Association of Buffalo Soldiers & Troopers Motorcycle Club, Tampa Chapter; the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard and Mounted Patrol; and keynote remarks from retired Army Brig. Gen. Remo Butler. Following the unveiling, guests are invited to stay for light refreshments and fellowship. The park and its monuments will remain open until 5 p.m.

The Buffalo Soldiers trace their origins to 1866, when Congress authorized the creation of all-Black segregated units in the U.S. Army following the Civil War. Native American tribes are believed to have given these courageous troops the name 'Buffalo Soldiers' in recognition of their bravery and resilience. The soldiers played a vital role in protecting mail routes, building roads and other infrastructure, guarding national parks, providing border security and serving in numerous military campaigns.

The Buffalo Soldiers also have a unique connection to the Tampa Bay area. In 1898, members of these regiments camped on the outskirts of Tampa Heights while preparing for deployment to Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Although the final Buffalo Soldier units were disbanded in the 1950s following the desegregation of the U.S. military under President Harry S. Truman, their legacy continues to inspire generations. In 1992, President George H.W. Bush proclaimed the first National Buffalo Soldiers Day in recognition of their outstanding service and sacrifice.

Community members are encouraged to attend this special dedication and help celebrate the enduring legacy of these American heroes.

For more information, call Hillsborough County Veteran Community Services at 813-635-8316 or visit https://hcfl.gov/veterans.

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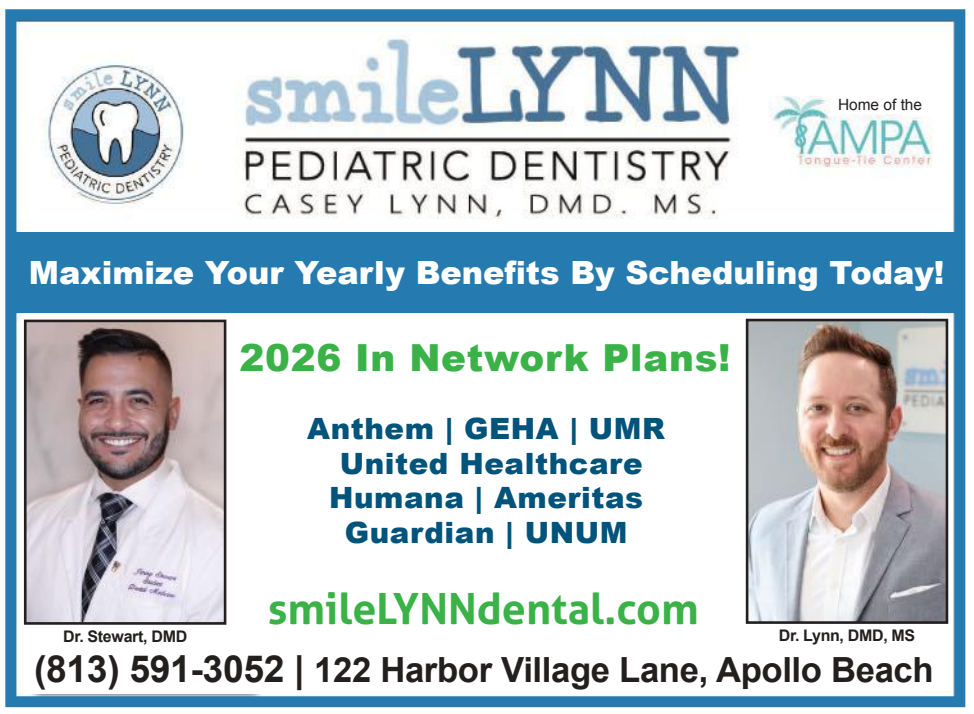
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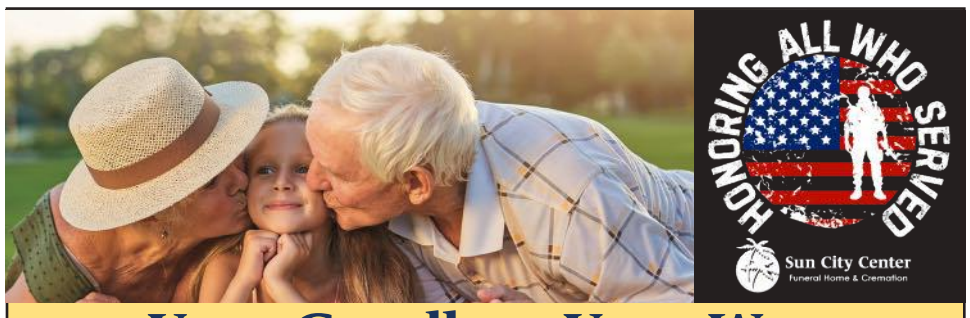
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CALL 811 BEFORE DIGGING: A SIMPLE STEP CAN PREVENT SERIOUS DAMAGE

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BUSCH GARDENS BIER FEST RETURNS WITH NEW FLAVORS

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Guests must be 21 or older to consume alcoholic beverages.





TRADING CARDS, COMICS AND COSPLAY COMING TO TAMPA EVENT

By Marie Gilmore



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COLLECTIVE EDIT BRINGS UPSCALE CONSIGNMENT EVENT TO WINTHROP

By Marie Gilmore



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

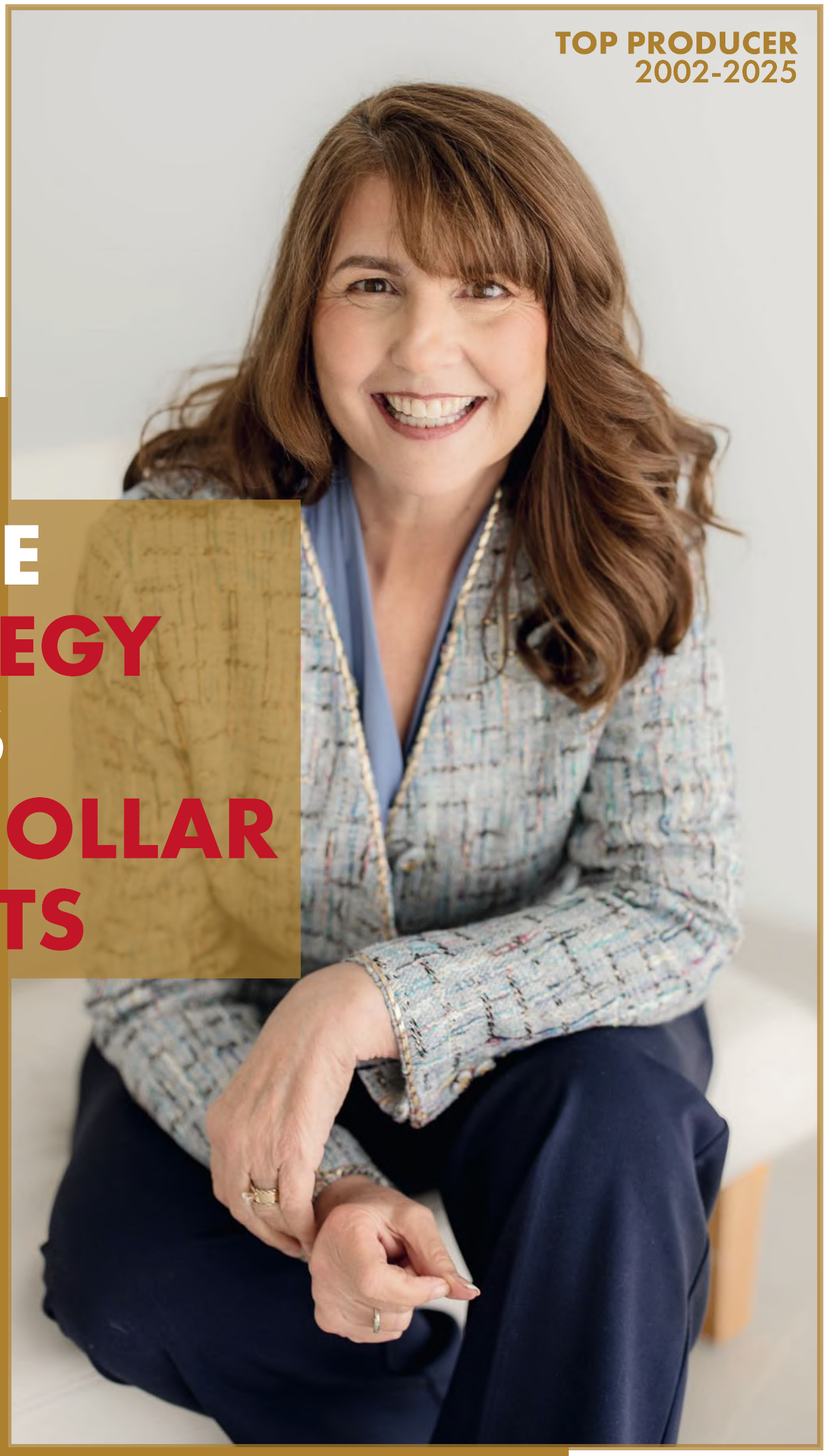
The Collective Edit continues that tradition with an event built around fashion, value and connection.

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

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



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Annual Black Cat 5K, Homeschool Day, Genealogy Meeting & More....

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting

The September South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting will be held at the South Hillsborough Elks Lodge No. 2672, located at 1630 S. U.S. 41 in Ruskin, on Tuesday, September 15. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., there will be an optional roundtable discussion, followed by a sit-down luncheon at 12 Noon. Following the luncheon at 1 p.m., the guest speaker will be Drew Smith, a favorite of everyone! Smith's presentation will be 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Genealogy.' The cost is $18 per person, which includes the meal and presentation. For reservations and meal choice, please call Vicki at 360-608-1647.



Annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run Benefitting A Kitten Place

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

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

This year's event has an exciting new focus: fundraising through teams and individual participants. Organizers hope to expand the event's impact by encouraging supporters to create fundraising teams, invite friends and family to donate, and compete for fun prizes along the way. Registration is now open, and early-bird pricing is available through Sunday, August 23. For registration, fundraising information, sponsorship opportunities or more information about A Kitten Place, visit https://akittenplace.org/events/.

Beth Israel Sisterhood Learn About Self-care Techniques and Meditation

On Tuesday, September 1, at 1 p.m., Beth Israel's Sisterhood will present a program on selfcare and meditation in its social hall, located at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. The presenter, Jeanne Shanin, is an expert in holistic wellness, senior health care and chair yoga, as well as meditation. Refreshments will be served. For information on this informative and beneficial event or to join Sisterhood, contact Donna at sisterhood@jcscc.org. Joining Sisterhood is a great way to meet other women and share fun times while watching, and participating in, interesting programs.

Gowns For Girls Pop-up Boutique

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

Pioneers and Cowhunters Homeschool Day

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

HOLIDAY FAVORITES TAKE CENTER STAGE IN ORCHESTRA'S SEASON

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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EUGENIA GUTIERREZ MARKS 100 REMARKABLE YEARS

Staff Report



Eugenia Gutierrez, a Riverview resident who recently celebrated her 100th birthday, is pictured with her granddaughter, Lisa Meadows, and great-granddaughter.

In 1926, U.S. Route 66 was officially established, A.A. Milne introduced the world to Winnie-the-Pooh and students took the very first Scholastic Aptitude Test. That same year, on July 26, a woman named Eugenia Gutierrez was born in San José, Costa Rica.

Now a Riverview resident, Gutierrez recently celebrated her 100th birthday surrounded by family, friends and the staff who have become an extension of her family at Hillsborough County Adult Day Services. The Wimauma Senior Center hosted a festive Roaring Twenties-themed celebration with music, dancing and a fashion show featuring staff and members dressed in 1920s attire.

"Not in her dreams did she imagine that her birthday was going to be this type of event," said her daughter, Dora Huerta. "The Wimauma Senior Center has become her second home. She comes every day. She's very happy, and I'm very grateful."

Gutierrez's century-long journey has been defined by service to others. After studying nursing in Costa Rica, she became a registered nurse and obstetrics nurse, dedicating her career to caring for others. She immigrated to the United States in 1981, settling in Reno, Nevada, where she continued serving her community through a home health agency until retirement.

Five years ago, she moved to Riverview to be closer to Huerta, but her active lifestyle has never slowed.

A woman of deep Christian faith, Gutierrez has always believed in helping those less fortunate.

She also embraced healthy living, routinely taking two-hour walks and remaining a regular at the gym throughout her 60s, 70s and 80s. Her adventurous spirit took her throughout Central America and to Mexico, Colombia, Canada and many parts of the United States before she eventually made Florida her home.

Family has always been at the center of Gutierrez's life. She is the proud mother of six children and has helped raise generations of her family. Today, her legacy includes 16 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren and seven great-great-grandchildren.

"It's an honor and a blessing to have her as a grandmother," said granddaughter Lisa Meadows. "It's a big milestone. One hundred is a big deal."

The celebration also highlighted Hillsborough County Adult Day Services, which provides comprehensive health, social, supportive and therapeutic services for functionally impaired seniors in community-based settings. Centers are located in Tampa, Brandon, Plant City and Wimauma.

For Gutierrez, the celebration honored more than reaching 100. It celebrated a lifetime devoted to faith, family, compassion and caring for others.

ST. JOSEPH'S THERAPY CAT HONORED BY THE FLORIDA BAR

Staff Report



From left to right, at the Animal Law Section's event: Devon Polo, St. Joseph's Hospitals volunteer resources director; Kathy Hofstad, Bentley's owner and handler, holding Bentley; and Kim Wallace, St. Joseph's Hospital-South's volunteer manager.

Bentley, St. Joseph's Hospital-South's pet therapy cat since spring 2025, was honored by the Florida Bar's Animal Law Section during an event in Orlando. Bentley received the 2026 Rikki Mitchell Memorial Animal Achievement Award.

Since 2017, the section has chosen one animal annually to receive the award for providing exemplary service. Bentley is a hospital volunteer who provides pet therapy to patients, their loved ones, visitors, medical staff and team members at St. Joseph's Hospital-South in Riverview and the BayCare Outpatient Center near the hospital's campus.

The Florida Bar's Animal Law Section has been in existence for 10 years and works to improve laws relating to animals. According to the section's website, the organization promotes the study and understanding of laws, regulations and court decisions involving animals while educating and advocating around animal issues. The group also introduces animal-focused bills during Florida legislative sessions, including measures involving animal cruelty, veterinary medicine, animal handling and cosmetic testing.

Bentley's award is named for Rikki, a therapy dog that in 2011 helped pass the nation's first law allowing therapy dogs to accompany child victims of sexual violence into criminal courtrooms to help them testify.

Bentley, a male Chinchilla Persian who recently celebrated his 14th birthday, was featured in the Animal Law Section's newsletter.

"We were so thrilled, pleased and honored that Bentley was selected to win the Florida Bar award," said Riverview's Kathy Hofstad, Bentley's owner and handler. "It's a great testament to the importance of pet therapy and the value it adds to so many people."

Kim Wallace, St. Joseph's Hospital-South's volunteer manager, said the Animal Law Section learned about Bentley through social media posts and online articles from St. Joseph's Hospital-South.

Bentley's recognition highlights the growing role of animal-assisted therapy in health care and the comfort pets can provide to patients, families and hospital staff.







RESTORATION 1 OF TAMPA BAY CELEBRATES 10 YEARS IN COMMUNITY

By Jane Owen



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COMMUNITY INVITED TO HEIFER LIVING GIFT MARKET

Staff Report



Families looking for a meaningful way to give back while enjoying a fun community event are invited to attend the Heifer Living Gift Market at First Presbyterian Church of Brandon on Sunday, September 20.

The free event will take place from 10:40 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the church's Fellowship Hall, located at 121 Carver Ave. in Brandon. Worship will be held beforehand at 9:30 a.m. in the sanctuary, and everyone is welcome to attend.

The morning begins with a family-style brunch featuring casseroles, biscuits, jams and jelly. During the meal, guests will hear brief presentations about how Heifer International helps families around the world become self-reliant through gifts of livestock, education and training. A love offering to help offset the cost of the meal is welcome but not required.

Following brunch, visitors can browse interactive booths highlighting various giving opportunities, shop for handcrafted items created by church members, participate in live and silent auctions, bid on gift baskets and enjoy activities for children. All proceeds benefit Heifer International's worldwide programs.

Unlike traditional charitable donations, the Heifer Living Gift Market allows donors to "purchase" animals or shares of animals—including cows, goats, sheep, pigs, flocks of chicks, bees and water buffalo—that are provided to families in need. Donations also support programs such as Send a Girl to School, helping children receive an education while strengthening communities.

Each gift includes training and education so recipients can build sustainable sources of food and income. Through Heifer International's unique "Passing on the Gift" model, families share the first offspring of their animal, along with the knowledge of how to care for it, with another family in need. This creates a ripple effect that helps entire communities grow stronger and more self-sufficient.

The Living Gift Market also offers a unique alternative for holiday, birthday or special occasion giving. Donors receive a beautifully designed honor card that can be presented to a loved one, letting them know a life-changing gift was made in their name.

Whether attending for the delicious brunch, fellowship, auctions or the opportunity to make a lasting difference, organizers hope the community will come together to support families striving for a brighter future.

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





CFA CELEBRATES NEWEST S. COUNTY STORE WITH FOOD BANK DONATION

Staff Report





A new Chick-fil-A restaurant is now serving! Chick-fil-A Inc. selected Lorena Kurtjian Hernandez as the local owner-operator of Chick-fil-A Balm Road.

To celebrate, Kurtjian Hernandez and the team recently invited the community to show their spots at a Moove-In Party on opening day! Whether in a full cow suit or donning a simple cow-spotted accessory, guests of all ages were invited to join the fun.

Located at 14310 S. U.S. 301, Chick-fil-A Balm Road will serve guests Monday through Saturday from 6 a.m.-10 p.m., offering dine-in, drive-through, carry-out, third-partydelivery and Mobile Thru.

"Opening a Chick-fil-A restaurant is the fulfillment of a dream that began when myfamily moved to the United States from Argentina," said Kurtjian Hernandez. "I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve the Riverview community and my goal is to create a place where people feel cared for, team members can thrive and everyone feels like they belong."

Born in Argentina, Kurtjian Hernandez moved to the United States with her family at the age of 10, an experience that shaped her appreciation for opportunity and community.

Years later, she was introduced to Chick-fil-A and inspired by the brand's unwavering commitment to hospitality and caring for others. Drawn to Chick-fil-A's mission to serve people first, Kurtjian Hernandez knew she wanted to be part of an organization that invests in its guests, team members and local communities. Today, as the local owner-operator of Chick-fil-A Balm Road, she is fulfilling her dream of owning a business by creating a restaurant where people feel valued, team members are empowered to grow and every guest experiences genuine hospitality.

Lorena is committed to giving back to The Riverview community by: Celebrating the opening with a $25,000 donation from Chick-fil-A Inc. to support local hunger relief efforts of Feeding Tampa Bay, a Feeding America partner food bank, in honor of the new restaurant and creating approximately 120 jobs.

To learn more about careers at Chick-fil-A Balm Road, visit www.chick-fil-a.com/locations/fl/balm-road. For the latest news and updates on Chick-fil-A Balm Road, visit the restaurant's Facebook page and follow along on Instagram.

KIDS TAG ART PROGRAM TOPS $181,000 RAISED FOR ART EDUCATION

Staff Report



Tax Collector Nancy Millan presents the Tax Collector's Choice Award to Melina Fenton from Apollo Beach K-8.

The Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office is proud to release its 2025-26 Kids Tag Art Summary Report, announcing that this year's program raised $38,632 for local schools — the largest single-year total in program history. A total of 66 Hillsborough County elementary schools participated this year, with each school receiving $585 to support its art programs.

Since Hillsborough County Tax Collector Nancy Millan brought the Kids Tag Art Program to Hillsborough County in 2021, it has raised more than $181,813 for art education across the county. This year's program also generated $5,043 in direct Kids Tag Art merchandise sales, with proceeds from every plate, key chain and mug sold going straight back to participating schools.

"These numbers tell the story of a community that believes in investing in its young artists," said Millan. "A total of 66 participating schools, more than $181,000 raised since we started this program and thousands of students who got to see their own artwork come to life — that's what Kids Tag Art is all about. We're proud to share this year's results and even prouder of what they mean for arts education in Hillsborough County."

The tax collector's office formally presented the year's fundraising results to the Hillsborough County School Board in May, recognizing the program's continued growth and impact districtwide.

Locally, this year, the Tax Collector's Choice Award was given to Melina Fenton from Apollo Beach K-8 School.

The top winners from all 66 participating schools were individually recognized at the program's awards ceremony this spring. A full list of this year's winning students and schools is available in the 2025-26 Kids Tag Art Summary Report.

The Kids Tag Art Program would not be possible without the generosity of this year's sponsors: Suncoast Credit Union (title sponsor), Dealer Tag Agency, Derrick Brooks Charities, Lauren's Kids, Florida West Coast Credit Union, J.P. Morgan Chase, Keith N. Fakhoury, Tampa Electric Company and The Florida Aquarium. The program is also made possible through the tax collector's office's continued partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools and the Hillsborough Education Foundation.

Community members can continue to support Hillsborough County's young artists by purchasing a Kids Tag Art specialty license plate, key chain or mug through the tax collector's online store at www.hillstaxfl.gov/shop/. Schools interested in joining next year's program can email communityrelations@hillstaxfl.gov or call 813-635-5264.



TAMPA BAY SUN FC ANNOUNCES EXCITING 2026 FALL SCHEDULE

Staff Report

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Single-game tickets for the 2026 fall season, including the September 12 home opener, are now on sale. For more information and the complete schedule, visit the website at www.tampabaysunfc.com.

FAMILY FUN, BBQ AND HISTORY BENEFIT FOR BRANDON LANDMARK

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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







FOR KING + COUNTRY BRINGS A DRUMMER BOY CHRISTMAS TO TAMPA

Staff Report



Four-time Grammy Award-winning duo FOR KING + COUNTRY is bringing its beloved *A Drummer Boy Christmas* tour to Benchmark International Arena on Sunday, November 29, delivering an unforgettable evening of music, storytelling and celebration. Following the release of the band's brand-new Christmas album and theatrical film, Drummer Boy, brothers Joel and Luke Smallbone will once again invite audiences to experience one of the season's most cherished holiday traditions.

For fans who have made the tour an annual tradition, and those experiencing it for the very first time, A Drummer Boy Christmas offers an immersive holiday experience unlike any other. Combining breathtaking production, intimate storytelling and powerful performances, the evening celebrates the hope, joy and true meaning of Christmas through music that has become synonymous with the season.

"The most wonderful time of our year is always the one spent with you," shared Joel and Luke. "To celebrate the miracle of all miracles, God coming to earth and offering redemption and to experience that together with audiences across America makes this our favorite tour of the year. We can't wait to celebrate Christmas with you again."

Audiences can expect soaring performances of beloved Christmas favorites, including "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and "Little Drummer Boy," alongside original holiday music and fan favorites from throughout the duo's celebrated career. The evening will also feature exclusive moments inspired by the band's new theatrical film, Drummer Boy, creating an even more immersive and memorable Christmas celebration.

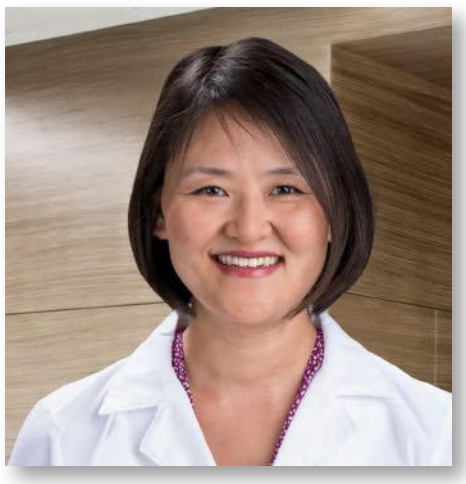
Known for its cinematic production, heartfelt storytelling and world-class musicianship, A Drummer Boy Christmas has become one of the season's premier live events, drawing families and fans together for an evening centered on the hope and wonder of Christmas.

FOR KING + COUNTRY is one of the music industry's most respected and decorated duos. Brothers Joel and Luke have earned four Grammy Awards, 13 No. 1 hits and more than 3 billion career streams. Known for their dynamic live shows and global reach, the platinum-selling act has performed to sold-out crowds across the U.S., Australia and Europe. Their latest album, *What Are We Waiting For?*, debuted in the top 10 on the Billboard 200, following the success of Burn the Ships. What Are We Waiting For? showcases their signature blend of cinematic pop, soaring anthems, and messages of hope.

They will also return to the big screen when the Drummer Boy movie, a new holiday film from Angel Studios inspired by the beloved Christmas classic, opens in theaters nationwide on Friday, November 6. Learn more at www.forkingandcountry.com.

ORANGE BLOSSOM ORAL SURGERY WELCOMES NEW SURGEON

By Christen Malice



Orange Blossom Oral Surgery is continuing its growth with the addition of Dr. Esther Oh, DDS, M.D., who joins the practice as it builds its long-standing commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care. Following the practice's expansion to two locations in 2024, Dr. Oh will serve patients at the Brandon office, located at 1402 Oakfield Dr., while Dr. Arina Doroshenko, DDS, M.D., owner of Orange Blossom Oral Surgery, will continue seeing patients at the Gibsonton location at 13127 Kings Lake Dr., Ste. 102, which opened in 2022.

Bringing more than 20 years of experience in oral and maxillofacial surgery, Dr. Oh is known for her calm, compassionate approach and dedication to helping patients feel informed, comfortable and confident throughout every stage of treatment. She provides the full scope of oral surgery services, including wisdom teeth removal, dental implants, bone grafting, extractions and oral pathology.

"We're excited to welcome Dr. Oh to our team," said Dr. Doroshenko. "Every member of our team is chosen not only for their expertise but because they share the values that define Orange Blossom Oral Surgery. We believe the best outcomes begin by listening to our patients, understanding what matters most to them and helping them feel confident every step of the way. Dr. Oh embodies those values, and we're thrilled to have her on our team."

"I am honored to join a practice that has earned such a strong reputation for both clinical excellence and compassionate patient care," said Dr. Oh. "Oral surgery can feel overwhelming for many people, and I believe taking the time to listen, answer questions and help patients feel at ease is just as important as the procedure itself.."

Dr. Oh joins Dr. Arina Doroshenko, creating an all-female oral and maxillofacial surgery team. In a specialty where women make up only an estimated 10-12 percent of practicing oral and maxillofacial surgeons in the United States, the practice is proud to be part of a growing generation of female surgeons helping shape the future of the profession through exceptional care, leadership and compassion.

As the practice looks ahead, it also honors the legacy of Dr. Felix Jimenez, who founded Brandon Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery and spent decades providing compassionate care to generations of patients in the Brandon community. Today, under the leadership of Dr. Arina Doroshenko, Orange Blossom Oral Surgery continues to build on that legacy, providing the same trusted care, clinical excellence, and personalized experience patients have come to expect at both its Brandon and Gibsonton locations.

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MEET THE 2026 TEAM OF *OSPREY OBSERVER* INTERNS

By Jamie Lu

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















Ella Baroni

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

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

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

Chloe Wagner

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

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

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

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

Abigail Dumas

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

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

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

Jamie Lu

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

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

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

Srishti Tripathi

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

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

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

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

Zofia Osterman

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

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

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

Brooke Wilson

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

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

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BACK-TO-SCHOOL SUCCESS: KEEP IT SIMPLE



For many autism families, the first few weeks after school starts can be the hardest. New teachers, new classrooms, different expectations, unfamiliar routines and changing schedules can bring excitement, but they can also bring anxiety, challenging behaviors and plenty of questions.

But let's not forget that back-to-school season isn't just for young children. Many teens are starting high school, transition programs, vocational training or life skills classes, while many adults are beginning new day programs, employment opportunities or community activities. No matter your loved one's age, change can be hard, and every transition takes time.

The good news is this: The first few weeks don't define the entire school year.

Now is the perfect time to pause and reflect. What's working? What's not? Sometimes the smallest adjustments can make the biggest difference.

Here are a few tips that have helped our family:

• Keep the lines of communication open. Check in with your child's teacher or program staff and share what's working at home.

• Set one or two simple goals. Focus on progress, not perfection. Small, achievable goals build confidence for everyone.

• Speak up early. If something doesn't feel right, ask questions and work together to find solutions. You know your child better than anyone.

• Give everyone grace. Transitions take time, for your loved one, your family and the educators and staff supporting them.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned as a special needs mom is that flexibility is just as important as planning. Some days will be amazing, and some days may feel like you're taking two steps backward. That's okay.

Remember, progress isn't measured by perfection; it's measured by moving forward.

Keep your goals simple, celebrate every victory and don't be afraid to ask for help along the way.

PARADE OF LIGHTS PARTICIPANTS WILL BENEFIT TWO LOCAL NONPROFITS

Staff Report



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LOCAL SWISHER3X'S WALMART DANCE VIDEOS TURN LOCAL MOMENTS INTO A 1.4 MILLION-FOLLOWER MOVEMENT

By Libby Hopkins






Most people head to Walmart with a shopping list. Swisher3x walks in with a mission.

The Tampa-based content creator, musician and dancer has become a viral sensation by transforming ordinary shopping trips into unforgettable moments of joy. Known for his energetic dance videos filmed in Walmart stores across the Tampa Bay area, Swisher3x invites shoppers and employees alike to join him in spontaneous dance routines that celebrate positivity, connection and community.

Born Paa-Gyesi Ansah, Swisher3x comes from a proud Ghanaian family and credits his heritage with helping shape his love of music, dance and bringing people together. While his family is from Ghana, he has made the Tampa Bay area his home, where he continues to grow both his music career and his online following.

His signature 'Vibe Movement' began in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when isolation and uncertainty had become part of everyday life, Swisher3x started dancing in New York City's Times Square with one goal in mind — reminding people that joy is contagious.

"My inspiration for music and dance is wanting to see the world in complete unity because division is taking over," he said.

That vision has remained at the heart of everything he creates.

Millions have now viewed his 'Walmart Vibes' videos, which capture authentic reactions from strangers who often go from surprised observers to enthusiastic dance partners. The videos have become a refreshing reminder that happiness can be found in the most unexpected places.

"What's special about dancing in the Walmarts is just the aspect of being able to see people from all walks of life meet up at one place to enjoy unity, enjoy positivity, enjoy love and feel like they're together," Swisher3x said. "Walmart was the perfect place to bring a lot of loving energy to. I hope to accomplish world peace globally."

Whether he's dancing down store aisles, greeting customers in parking lots or creating content at local events, Swisher3x encourages people to put away their worries, even if only for a few moments, and simply enjoy life.

His influence extends well beyond social media. An independent artist, Swisher3x blends Afrocentric, Caribbean pop, R&B, soul, hip-hop and rap into his music. He has released more than a dozen songs, including "Control Yourself" and "Lush and Lavish," and recently introduced his latest album, Swisher Note. He has also shared plans to continue developing his musical talents through education at Full Sail University in Orlando.

His growing career includes performing as a dancer during the Super Bowl LV halftime show, appearances on FOX 13 Tampa Bay and performances at community events and college campuses, such as Jacksonville State University.

Outside of music and content creation, Swisher3x is also a barber and producer, wearing many creative hats while remaining focused on his larger purpose.

He said his platform isn't just about creating viral videos; it's about changing lives through kindness, confidence and human connection.

In a world that often feels divided, Swisher3x hopes every dance, every smile and every shared moment can inspire people to see one another with a little more compassion.

Swisher3x has amassed an online audience of more than 1.8 million followers and subscribers across his social media platforms, with more than 1.4 million followers on TikTok alone and nearly 460,000 subscribers on YouTube.

To learn more about Swisher3x and follow his latest videos and music, visit his Facebook page at www.facebook.com/offthaboat.

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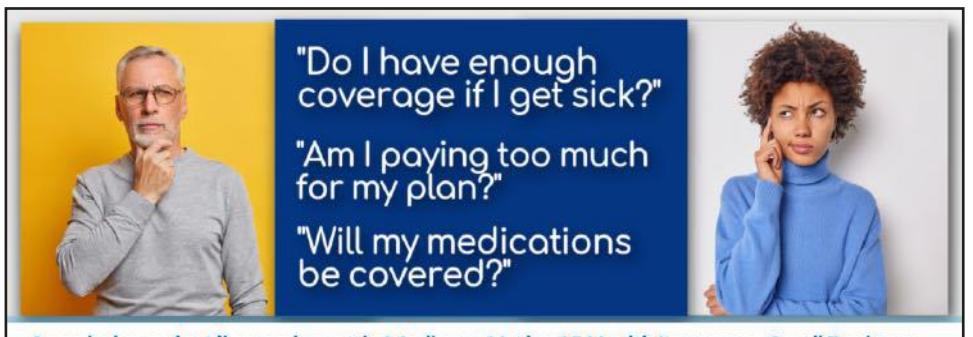


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ROTARY CLUB OF BRANDON WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT RYAN REED

By Libby Hopkins

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SS DEVELOPMENT CON'T.....FROM PAGE 1

By Brian Bokor



livery in late 2026.

Publix at Wolf Creek

Publix opened its new Wolf Creek Commons store on August 13 at 3050 19th Ave. NE in Ruskin. The supermarket includes a pharmacy and drive-through and anchors a growing commercial development that also includes approximately 11,700 square feet of additional retail space and future outparcels.

Five Guys

Five Guys is moving forward with its planned restaurant at 3728 Sun City Center Blvd., Ste. 101, inside Cypress Village Plaza near Home Depot. The restaurant will occupy the vacant western endcap beside Charles Schwab. Sign permits have been filed, although the status of interior construction has not been confirmed.

Cold Stone Creamery

Construction is underway on the Cold Stone Creamery coming to the former Elite Donuts space at 3824 Sun City Center Blvd. Recent photographs show crews installing the shop's water lines beneath the concrete floor as part of the interior buildout. Cold Stone lists the location as 'coming soon,' but no opening date has been announced.

RaceTrac

RaceTrac is planning a convenience store and gas station on the vacant property at the northwest corner of Sun City Center Boulevard and Cortaro Drive. The site has been cleared, but building construction has not been confirmed and no opening schedule has been announced.

Circle K

Circle K is planned for the northeast corner of U.S. 301 and Berry Grove Boulevard in Wimauma, across from the Berry Bay community. Plans show access from Berry Grove Boulevard and the future Dune Shores Way, with no direct driveway onto U.S. 301. Construction-related plans are under review, but site or building work has not been confirmed.









OSPREY OBSERVER SOUTHSHORE EDITION AUGUST 2026 Vol. 1, Iss. 8

Sponsored by: Osprey Observer — Your Community Newspaper



Edited by: Jenny Bennett

EYE ON BUSINESS

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

Align Right Realty Rebrands To Elevated Realty – Raising The Standard

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



ELEVATED REALTY
RAISING THE STANDARD

Apollo Beach Resident Opens New Exercise Coach Studio



Apollo Beach resident Patrick Cunningham will open a new The Exercise Coach® studio on Sept. 9 at 3612 S. Dale Mabry Hwy., Ste. C, Tampa. The studio will offer the company's signature 20-minute, twice-weekly strength workouts along with its expanded Strength Plus™ healthspan training services.

Strength Plus combines personalized strength training, coach-assisted stretching, balance development and cognitive fitness. The studio uses Exerbotics® technology to adjust resistance based on each client's strength output, while coaches supervise every session.

Unlike traditional gyms, The Exercise Coach operates by appointment, with semi-private sessions limited to four clients per coach. Cunningham, 35, spent more than 10 years in accounting, primarily in the technology industry, before pursuing his new fitness venture.



Back-to-School Safety: Slow Down

Hillsborough County students headed back to school on August 10, which means our roads are once again filled with school buses, parents, and children traveling to and from school.

As drivers, we all have an important role in keeping our students safe. When a school bus stops and its red lights are flashing and stop arm is extended, stop and remain stopped. Children may be entering or exiting the bus and can be difficult to see. Never attempt to pass a stopped school bus.

Please also pay close attention in school zones. When the yellow beacon is flashing, slow down, stay alert, and watch carefully for students crossing the road, walking near traffic, or riding bicycles.

With school back in session, traffic will be heavier, especially during morning drop-off and afternoon pickup. Give yourself extra time, avoid distractions, and be patient. A few extra minutes on your commute is a small price to pay for keeping a child safe.

Let's make this school year a safe one for everyone. Slow down, stay alert, and remember that getting there safely is more important than getting there quickly.

Retire With Confidence

Learn how to maximize your retirement with tax-efficient strategies at the Payant Wealth weekly seminar. The seminar is held every Tuesday at 10 a.m. and covers a variety of strategies, including how Roth conversions and tax-efficient investing may help reduce taxes over time, creating a sustainable retirement cash flow plan and what the number one threat to retirement security is and an approach to help address it. The seminar is held at the Payant Financial Center, located at 1653 Sun City Center Plaza in Sun City Center. Please call 813-633-7333 to reserve your spot, as seating is limited.

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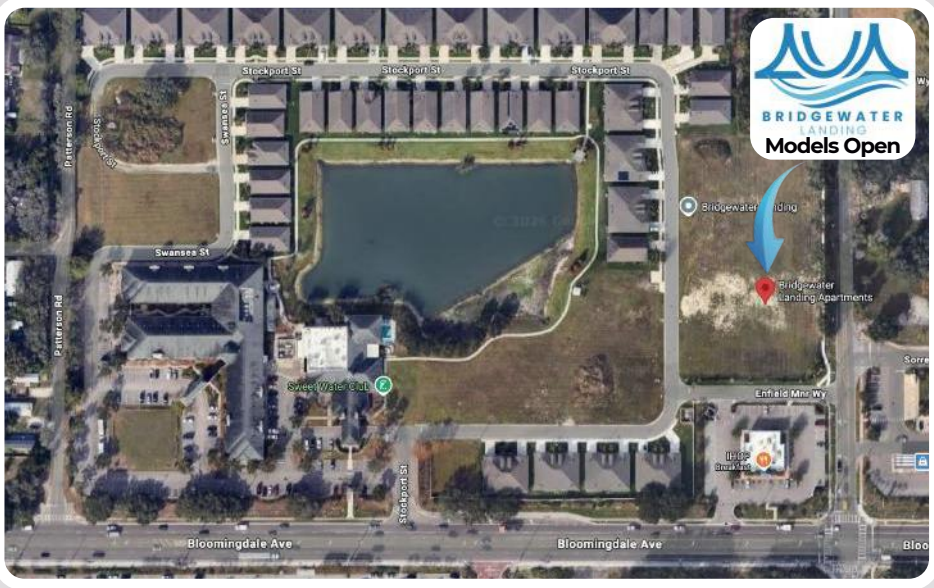
osaic Advisors

Cooley Law School Announces Faculty Changes

Cooley Law School has announced faculty promotions and new appointments at its Tampa Bay campus. Joseline Hardrick and Matt Marin have been promoted to professors of law, with Marin continuing as director of academic support services. Professors Stevie Swanson and Carly McLaughlin also return to the Tampa Bay faculty, bringing extensive legal education and bar preparation experience.







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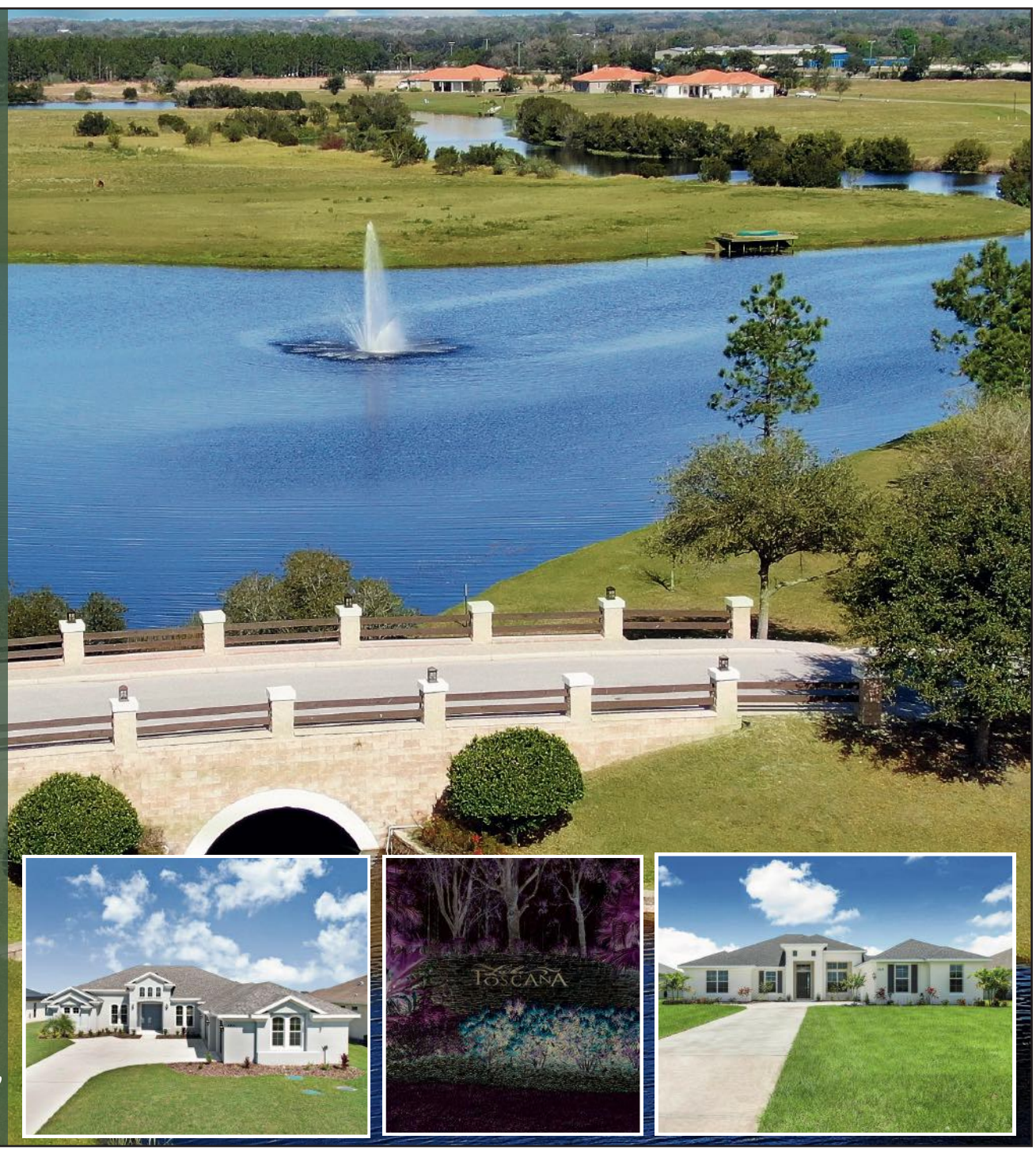
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STRAIGHT FROM THE SHORE

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SHAWNA'S MONTHLY MARKET UPDATE

Good news to share this month: SouthShore inventory sits at 1,599 homes, with Apollo Beach holding steady at 362 — 122 of them true waterfront. And here's the part that made me smile — Hillsborough County closed sales actually rose year over year in July, real proof buyers kept showing up all summer. Rates are holding around 6.69%. With school back in session, expect the usual fall pause through October–December, so if you've been thinking about a move, now's a great window.

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4 Bed | 2 Bath | 2,340 Sq. Ft.



1013 EMERALD DUNES DR
SUN CITY CENTER, FL 33573
List Price: $308,000 SOLD
3 Bed | 2 Bath | 1,970 Sq Ft



2002 E VIEW DR
SUN CITY CENTER, FL 33573
List Price: $465,000 SOLD
3 Bed | 2 Bath | 2,037 Sq Ft | Lake View



13007 OAKMONT WOOD CT
RIVERVIEW, FL 33579
List Price: $555,000 SOLD
5 Bed | 3.5 Bath | 3,720 Sq Ft



635 JAMAICA CIR E
APOLLO BEACH, FL 33572
List Price: $365,000 SOLD
3 Bed | 2 Bath | 1,433 Sq Ft | Pool Home



17316 SCUBA CREST ST
WIMAUMA, FL 33598
List Price: $415,000 SOLD
2 Bed | 2.5 Bath | 2,328 Sq Ft | 55+



AGENT SPOTLIGHT

Adriana Gonzalez is a REALTOR®, licensed Mortgage Loan Originator, and an integral part of 27North Realty and The Calvert Home Team, bringing nearly 30 years of combined experience in real estate and mortgage lending. Working closely with Shawna Calvert, she oversees marketing, business development, office events, community engagement, and growth initiatives for both the brokerage and the team. Adriana loves turning ideas into action and finding creative ways to elevate the business, support its agents, and enhance the client experience.

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