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# VFCC AWARDS $5,000 IN SCHOLARSHIPS TO OUTSTANDING LOCAL SENIORS

*By Marie Gilmore*



*Five high school seniors were awarded VFCC Scholarships this year.*

The Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce (VFCC) recently honored five exceptional high school seniors with $1,000 scholarships each, recognizing their academic achievements, leadership and commitment to community service.

"It was a wonderful experience working in the role of scholarship chair for the VFCC this year," said Michael Brand, awards and recognition chair. "I was so impressed with the quality of candidates we had apply. The independent judges had quite a time selecting the winners. Meeting the finalists and learning about their accomplishments was extremely inspiring. It's great to know we have such talented young adults ready to become leaders in our community."

Among the recipients is Durant High School senior Bailee Knighten, an accomplished student athlete and entrepreneur. Knighten has already published three books, operates two businesses and holds school records in the 100 and 400-meter hurdles. She plans to study sports medicine and pursue a career as an NFL athletic trainer at the University of Kentucky, while continuing her volunteer work at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital.

Also from Durant High School, Andrew O'Toole, ranked first in his class, earned recognition for both academic excellence and leadership. His honors include the West Point Society General Schwarzkopf Leadership Award and the AP Scholar with Distinction Award. O'Toole plans to study criminal justice and criminology at the University of Florida.

Avery Ranieri of Bell Creek Academy, ranked fifth in her class, has demonstrated a passion for civic engagement and communication. As student government president and a volunteer at Tampa General Hospital, she has advocated for organ donation legislation in Tallahassee. Ranieri, who also interned with the *Osprey Observer*, will attend the University of Georgia.

Newsome High School's Mary Grace Hyde was recognized for her exceptional leadership, having served as class president all four years of high school — a first for her school. A varsity golf team captain and active volunteer, she has contributed to organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life.

Durant High School senior Logan Glynn, ranked fifth in his class, plans to pursue civil and transportation engineering at the University of Florida. A lacrosse team captain and club founder, Glynn hopes to one day solve local traffic challenges that first sparked his interest as a child.

Together, these five students represent the VFCC's mission to invest in the next generation of community leaders. For more information on the chamber, visit www.valricofishhawk.org.

# HILLSBOROUGH SCHOOLS TEACHERS NAMED FLORIDA STATE CHAMPIONS IN PRESIDENTIAL AI CHALLENGE

*By Marie Gilmore*





*Randall teachers (above ) Dr. Lori Bradner, Stevie Hodkins and Lisa McGuin join HCPS math resource teacher Donna Kemp (left) in earning state recognition in the 2026 Presidential AI Challenge.*

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is celebrating an outstanding achievement of four teachers who have been named Florida state champions in the 2026 Presidential AI Challenge.

Randall Middle School's Stevie Hodgkins, Dr. Lori Bradner and Lisa McGuin earned the statewide honor for their innovative project, 'Stronger Minds, Stronger Bodies: AI-Enhanced Fitness for the Next Generation of Education,' which reimagines physical education and academics through responsible, student-centered uses of artificial intelligence. The project places students in the role of AI creators rather than consumers, integrating technology, physical fitness and critical thinking into a multidisciplinary learning experience. Built around the restored Presidential Fitness Test, the unit uses two AI-supported tools to deepen student engagement and learning.

Donna Kemp, one of HCPS' math district resource teachers, earned the statewide honor for her project, 'The Response Instruction Optimizer,' a standards-aligned, teacher-facing AI system that turns classroom data into a ready-to-teach next-lesson package, helping teachers respond to student needs faster and more effectively.

"This recognition reflects the incredible talent and innovation of our teachers and why our schools remain the number one choice for families," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "Their work is preparing students not just for today's classrooms, but for the future they will help shape."

The Presidential AI Challenge is a national initiative that encourages K-12 students and educators to develop AI-powered solutions to real-world challenges, with state-level winners advancing to regional and national recognition.

Learn more about the Presidential AI Challenge at https://orise.orau.gov/ai-challenge/index.html.

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# VOLUNTEERS BEAUTIFY FUTURE HOME OF SGT. 1ST CLASS AARON CORNELIUS

*By Brian Bokor*



Residents and community volunteers gathered in April to help transform the future home of U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Cornelius during a Volunteer Day organized by Homes For Our Troops (HFOT).

The event focused on landscaping the grounds of a specially adapted custom home on Fishhawk Heights Road designed to support the severely injured post-9/11 veteran. Volunteers spent the morning planting and completing outdoor improvements, with participants receiving commemorative T-shirts and lunch for their efforts.

Cornelius, known locally for his positive attitude and resilience, shared his outlook on staying active and encouraging others facing similar challenges.

"I just try to get out and help soldiers and ... show them that, hey, if I can do it, you know, get up and live life, because life's too short as it is," Cornelius said.

He also spoke about the importance of perspective in everyday life.

"If you pay attention to the news, you're going to be sad. ... Go out there and make a life," he added.

That mindset continues to shape his recovery and daily routine. Recently, Cornelius visited Montana and returned to skiing for the first time in more than 13 years.

"I did — it's been about 13, 14 years — I went skiing. I did the first two with some assistance to remember how to do it, and then I did three runs down the slope by myself," he said.

He earned his sailing certification in St. Petersburg and is continuing to stay active within the community.

"I got a tandem bike, so I'll try to get somebody to jump on with me so I can ride bikes too," Cornelius said.

Looking ahead, Cornelius is preparing for his first Boston 5K at the end of June, an event hosted by the Boston Red Sox that includes a visit to Fenway Park.

While the landscaping effort marked a major step forward, another milestone is quickly approaching. HFOT has scheduled the official Key Ceremony for Saturday, June 13, when Cornelius will receive the keys to his new home.

The community is invited to attend the outdoor ceremony. Check-in begins at 8:30 a.m., with the formal presentation scheduled from 9-11 a.m.

Those interested in attending can RSVP at www.hfotusa.org/cornelius.

# COUNTY INVITES COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO HELP SHAPE LOCAL DECISIONS ON ADVISORY BOARDS, COMMITTEES

*Staff Report*

Hillsborough County residents have an opportunity to play a more active role in local government as county commissioners seek volunteers to serve on a wide range of citizen advisory boards and committees.

The call for applicants invites registered voters who live in Hillsborough County to apply for unpaid positions that help shape decisions on issues ranging from housing and zoning to historic preservation and public health. While applicants may apply to multiple boards, individuals may only serve on one at a time unless specifically approved by the board of county commissioners.

To be considered, residents must submit a completed application/questionnaire along with a signed standards of conduct form at https://hcfl.gov/government/boards-and-committees/announcements-and-forms. Applications must be fully completed to be eligible, and any required background checks must be completed within 72 hours of notification. The deadline to apply is close of business Thursday, May 14, with appointments expected to be made in May or June.

Openings are available across numerous boards, offering opportunities for residents with a variety of professional backgrounds and interests. Among them, the Building Board of Adjustment, Appeals and Examiners is seeking an alternate member with expertise in technical building codes, while the Code Enforcement Board has vacancies for members and alternates representing professions such as architecture, engineering, construction and real estate.

The county is also looking to fill a position for a code enforcement special magistrate, who would hear cases involving violations of local ordinances, including zoning, housing standards and environmental regulations.

Financial expertise is in demand as well, with two openings on the County Internal Audit Committee for a certified public accountant and an individual with at least five years of auditing experience. The committee plays a key advisory role in monitoring county audit activities and promoting transparency.

Other vacancies include positions on the Health Care Advisory Board, which focuses on improving access to care for low-income residents; the Historic Resources Review Board, which helps protect archaeological and historical sites; and the Human Relations Board, which reviews discrimination cases and enforces the county's Human Rights Ordinance.

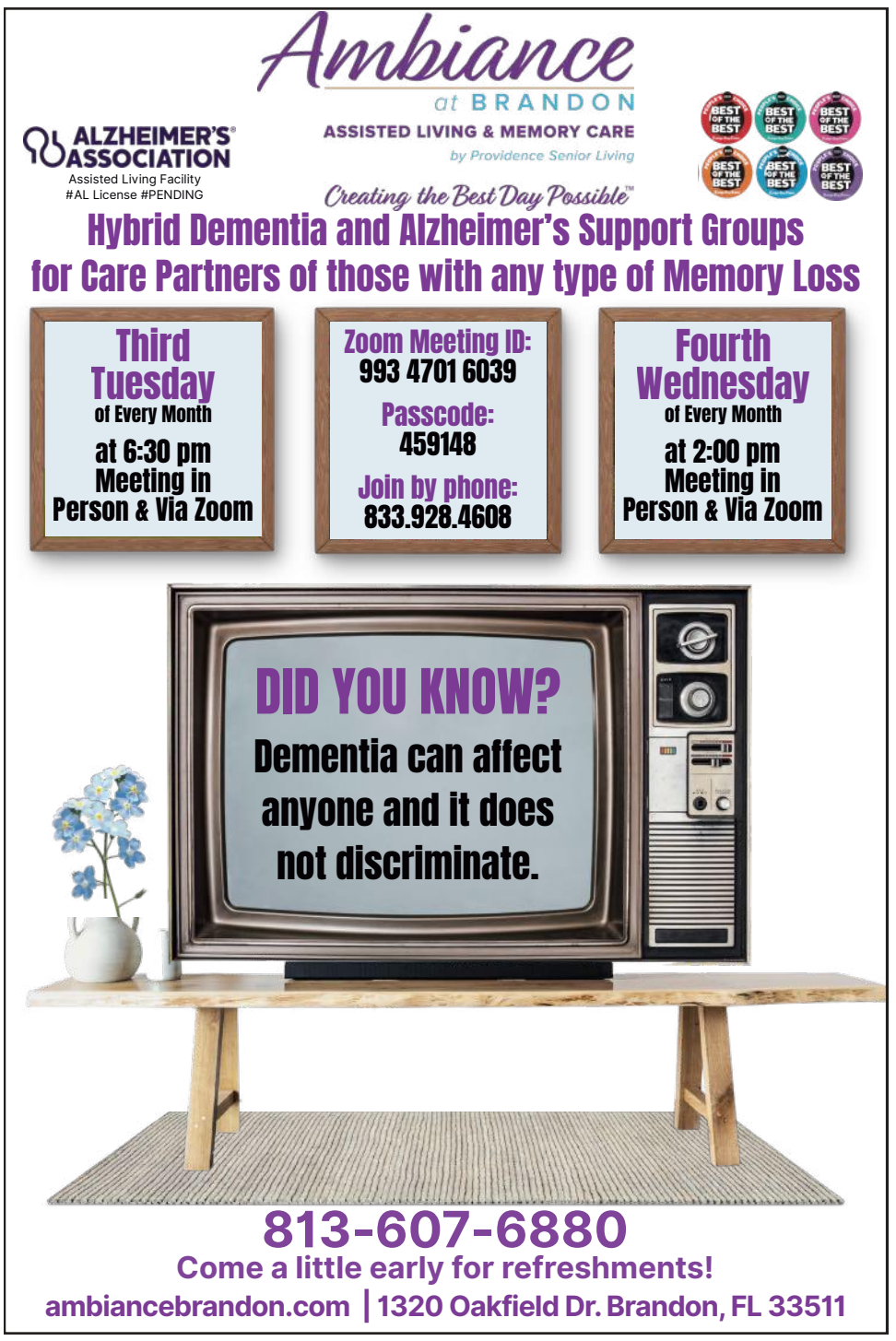
Additional opportunities exist on boards overseeing land-use appeals, mechanical systems, plumbing and gas standards and property tax disputes through the Value Adjustment Board.

Most boards require regular meeting attendance and some require members to live in unincorporated areas of the county or file annual financial disclosures.

Residents can submit applications online, by email, by mail or in person. Detailed information about each board and application materials are available on the county's Boards, Committees and Councils webpage at https://hcfl.gov/councils.







# HIGH 5 INC. TEAM MEMBERS SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

*By Emily Harper*



*High 5 Inc. chief operating officer Patrick Skidmore.*



*High 5 Inc. chief communications officer Jada Spano.*

High 5 Inc. is a multipurpose facility in Brandon where the community can come together. Recently, two individuals were recognized for their dedication to the organization by earning promotions: Patrick Skidmore and Jada Spano.

Skidmore was initially the director of development and has since been promoted to chief operating officer. In this new role, his main priority is "supporting our team to allow them to perform at a high level and provide superior programming to all participants in any of our programs."

Skidmore is a third-generation Tampa native who grew up going to the formerly known Brandon Swim and Tennis, now High 5 Inc. There, he attended his first swimming lesson. Prior to his career at High 5, he worked as a paramedic at Brandon Regional Hospital and is a second-generation president of the Rotary Club of Brandon, fostering his leadership skills.

On the other hand, Spano's previous title was the vice president of operations. She has now transitioned into her new role as chief communications officer. Spano's main focus is on "building a strong, consistent and recognizable brand that drives engagement and growth."

Growing up in the Brandon area, Spano has many early memories at this organization. She also learned to swim there and spent time playing tennis at the facilities. She now uses her childhood experiences and professional background to succeed in her role at High 5.

"That's what makes this role so meaningful to me, as it's truly a full-circle moment. I've gone from being a participant in these programs to now helping tell the story and bring awareness to the impact High 5 has on so many families in this amazing community," said Spano.

Both Skidmore and Spano are excited for the future of High 5 as they continue to grow and positively impact the community. "High 5 is more than just a place people come to participate but as a cornerstone organization that shapes lives and brings people together," said Spano.

For more, visit www.high5inc.org.

# MOCK TRIAL CAMP OFFERS HANDS-ON LEGAL EXPERIENCE

*By McKenzie Brown*



Bell Creek Academy is one of the few schools in Hillsborough County that offers a law academy program, and it has been thriving for nine years. At Bell Creek, the law academy features a variety of courses designed to help students interested in law prepare for their futures. These classes include Constitutional Law, Cambridge Law, Legal Systems and Analysis, Criminal Law and Procedure and Comprehensive Law.

One unique feature of the program is its classroom, which is designed to resemble a real courtroom, complete with space for a judge, a jury, a witness stand and attorneys. Another major benefit of the program is that seniors have the opportunity to participate in internships with local law firms and attorneys.

Bell Creek also provides several opportunities for students to practice their legal skills, including mock trials and moot courts. A mock trial is a competition in which students simulate a real trial, while a moot court focuses on arguing cases in an appellate setting. The Bell Creek mock trial team has been highly successful, winning the 13th Judicial Circuit competition for the past three years and advancing to Orlando to compete at the state level. Similarly, the moot court team has advanced to Tallahassee for the past three years, where the competition is sponsored by The Florida Bar.

The middle school mock trial team has also seen impressive success, advancing to the state semifinals and earning a spot among the top eight teams in Florida. They will compete for the state championship on Saturday, May 2. Bell Creek Academy is also a member of the Florida Law Honor Society of Secondary Schools. The middle and high school moot court teams are sponsored by the Justia Teacher's Center, and this past year the high school team received the Legal Professionalism Award. In addition, the moot court team had the honor of arguing in front of the Florida Supreme Court in each of the past two years.

Charles Leadingham, law director at Bell Creek Academy, said, "Students that go through the law academy will have as much or more knowledge and understanding of legal systems than a lot of prelaw college students."

For the third year in a row, organizers Circuit Judge Christopher Nash, attorney Justin Fahringer, and Leadingham are proud to present the Judge Robert J. Simms 2026 Mock Trial Camp. The camp will take place from Monday through Friday, June 15-19, and is open to all high school students in the Tampa Bay area and surrounding counties.

The camp will be held at the Hillsborough County Courthouse, located at 800 E. Twiggs St. in Tampa. Sessions will run daily from 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Due to limited space, registration is capped. Registration is currently open and will close when the camp is full or by Sunday, May 31. More information and registration can be found at www.tinyurl.com/mocktrialcamp2026.






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*By Nitish Rele*



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With its sweeping roofline leading to an almost coupe-like appearance, it is arguably one of the sleekest compact all-electric luxury SUVs on the market. Sitting between the Q4 and Q8 e-trons, the 2025 Audi Q6 Sportback e-tron is quick off the mark, with plenty of punch to produce a graceful and energetic ride. Lest we forget, the renowned quattro all-wheel drive provides peace of mind in any road situation or weather condition.

A 100-kWh lithium-ion battery coupled with dual motors, front and rear, is capable of blasting off a healthy 456 horsepower. Translation? Zero to 60 is achievable in just 4.9 seconds, with a top speed of 130 mph. Getting power to the ground is a single-speed auto gearbox, which results in a quiet and smooth drivetrain. An electronically controlled, continuously adaptive air suspension at all four wheels delivers admirable poise and stability. Making the SUV effortless to place in corners is a direct and accurate rack-and-pinion electric power steering system. The potent brakes, which feature 13.8-inch ventilated discs, have a firm pedal feel. They operate inside 19-inch alloy wheels shod with 235/60 front and 255/55 rear tires. On a full charge, the cozy five-seater can cover up to 318 miles. Plug into a 240 volt and it will take about 14 hours, but a fast DC charge can juice up 80 percent in just 21 minutes. Towing and payload capacities are plentiful at 4,400 and 1,036 pounds, respectively.

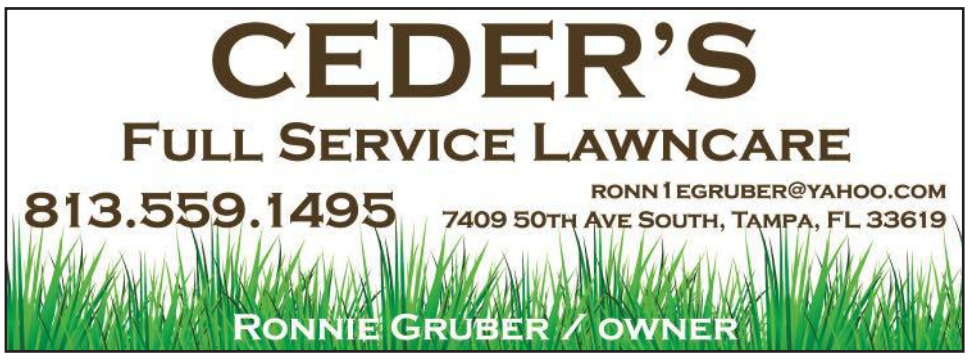
Thumbs up to the exterior appearance with its generous bit of black trim, showing off a massive single-frame and familiar four-ring grille surrounded by pinwheel-design LED headlights. The interior is cozy with plenty of top-notch luxury and style. The 14.5-inch MMI infotainment interface stands tall on the dashboard with the driver facing a curved 11.9-inch digital display screen. The driver and front passenger are pampered by rich-looking eight-way power heated leather seats. Opt for the $5,800 prestige package, which fetches you a Bang & Olufsen sound system with 3D sound, animated head and taillights, seven digital DRL signatures, a top-view camera, a 10.9-inch passenger display screen, etc. Thoughtful touches include a three-spoke power tilt/telescopic steering column, a moonroof and liftgate, a wireless phone charger, a 40/20/40 fold rear bench, three-zone auto AC and an Audi drive select so dynamic, comfort, balanced, efficiency and offroad modes are available.

Eight airbags; four-wheel antilock brakes with brake assist; electronic stability/traction control; a rearview camera; blind-spot, lane departure and rear cross-traffic warnings; front/rear parking sensors and park assist plus; Audi pre-sense (detects an emergency maneuver and prepares the vehicle and its occupants); adaptive cruise control; a tire pressure monitoring system; and daytime running lights are standard.

With gas nearly $4 a gallon as summer brings an even bigger hit at the pump, the Q6 e-tron is a no-brainer. On that note, Audi will skip this year's model and reintroduce the Q6 e-tron in the second quarter of 2027 with several appealing upgrades.










# BRACELETS BRING HOPE AND SECOND CHANCES TO MENTAL HEALTH COURT

*By State Attorney Suzy Lopez*



*A stack of colorful, handmade friendship bracelets sits inside courtroom 52A in Hillsborough County, where Assistant State Attorneys Skyler Jackle and April Pent use the small tokens to encourage participants in mental health court—offering symbols of hope, progress and second chances along the path to stability.*

When you see colorful beaded jewelry on someone's wrist, you might think of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour and the friendship bracelets that became a cultural moment. But inside courtroom 52A in Hillsborough County, the friendship bracelets you'll find inside tell a much deeper story.

They tell a story of second chances, and two Hillsborough prosecutors who decided to do something small that's making a big impact.

Assistant state attorneys Skyler Jackle and April Pent wanted to find a simple way to bring encouragement to the people who are entering mental health court. They create their own handmade friendship bracelets that participants receive as incentives which symbolize progress and hope.

Housed in courtroom 52A, our county's mental health treatment court is designed to help individuals living with mental illness move away from the traditional cycle of incarceration toward treatment and stability. It's a path that often carries setbacks. Pent and Jackle know that consistent positive reinforcement is a critical part of the journey.

Prosecutors are not traditionally seen offering encouragement to defendants in the courtroom. But attorneys like Jackle and Pent in our office's problem-solving courts reflect a broader role that supports rehabilitation and long-term public safety.

Jackle began making friendship bracelets to relieve stress while taking the bar exam. Now, the handmade tokens offer mental health court participants something tangible to hold onto as a reminder that they are not alone in what can be a difficult process.

These two attorneys set out to simply show a small gesture of encouragement. But these symbols of hope will be something these participants carry with them long after they leave the courtroom. Because sometimes the difference between giving up and moving forward is knowing someone believes in you.

*The State Attorney's Office of the 13th Judicial circuit encompasses all of Hillsborough County, including the cities of Tampa, Temple Terrace and Plant City. The office staff consists of approximately 320 dedicated public servants including 130 prosecutors, as well as investigators, victim advocates and support staff. The office handles approximately 50,000 cases every year. To learn more about the organization or apply to become part of the team, visit www.sao13th.com.*

# BRCC ANNOUNCES COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLNESS FAIR

*Staff Report*




The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is proud to announce its Community Health & Wellness Fair, taking place Saturday, May 16, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Gardenville Park & Recreation Center, located at 6219 Symmes Rd. in Gibsonton.

This free, family-friendly event is designed to connect residents with valuable health, wellness and medical resources while creating a fun and engaging experience for all ages. The fair will feature local health and wellness businesses, medical providers and community organizations, along with interactive activities, on-site health screenings, food trucks, sports demonstrations and live entertainment.

"Our Community Health & Wellness Fair is all about bringing people together and empowering our community with access to resources that support healthier, happier lives," said the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce President Amber Aaron. "From preventative care and fitness to nutrition and mental wellness, this event offers something for everyone."

The fair also provides an excellent opportunity for health and wellness businesses to showcase their services directly to families, individuals and decision-makers in the Brandon-Riverview area. Participating businesses can build brand awareness, share expertise and form meaningful connections while supporting community well-being.

Businesses specializing in healthcare, fitness, nutrition, mental wellness, preventative care and holistic services are encouraged to participate.

Community members are invited to attend at no cost, and businesses interested in showcasing their services can register online at https://web.centralhillsboroughchamber.com/events/Community-Health-Wellness-Fair-63706/details.

Join the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce for a high-energy, impactful event that educates, inspires and strengthens a healthier community.

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**About the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce**

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce empowers businesses through opportunities for brand exposure, education and advocacy while fostering meaningful connections that strengthen the community and promote collaboration and growth.






# TAX COLLECTOR NANCY MILLAN HOSTS ANNUAL KIDS TAG ART CEREMONY

*Staff Report*

The Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office rang in the spring season with a night of celebration, art and community, hosting the Kids Tag Art Awards Ceremony on April 15 at the Brandon Tax Collector's Office. Students, families, teachers and community supporters gathered to honor the young Hillsborough County artists whose original designs were selected as the award-winning artwork of this year's program.



*Melina Fenton, a student at Apollo Beach K-8 received the Tax Collector's Choice Award for her license plate design.*



*Anabelle Webster is presented with a Sponsor's Choice Award for the Kids Tag Art program.*

The ceremony marked a milestone moment for the program celebrating its fifth year. This program was brought to Hillsborough County by the Tax Collector Nancy Millan and her innovative partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) and the Hillsborough Education Foundation. At the ceremony, each student winner was recognized individually, receiving applause from a room filled with proud families, supportive educators, and community members who came to witness the next generation of Florida artists take their well-deserved spotlight.

"What makes Kids Tag Art so special is that it gives young artists something most programs can't — the chance to see their work live beyond a classroom wall," said Millan. "When someone chooses to put a student's design on a license plate, a mug or a keychain they carry every day, that's a powerful message to a young person about the value of their creativity. We want our students to know that Hillsborough County doesn't just celebrate the arts, we invest in the artists."

The Kids Tag Art program is also a meaningful community fundraiser. Proceeds from the sale of Kids Tag Art vanity license plates benefit arts education in Hillsborough County. Since its inception in 2021, the program has raised over $143,000 for local students. A final fundraising total for the program this year will be formally presented to the community and the Hillsborough County School Board in the coming weeks.

Community members who want to show their support for Hillsborough County's young artists can still purchase a Kids Tag Art specialty license plate through the tax collector's online store at www.hillstaxfl.gov/shop/. Every purchase directly supports arts education in our schools and puts a student's creative vision on display across Florida.


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# CARDINAL ROOFING CO-OWNER BECOMES AN INDUSTRY PIONEER

*By Madeline Gardner*

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# HONORARY MAYOR CANDIDATES READY MONTH OF FUN EVENTS

*Staff Report*

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



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



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

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

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

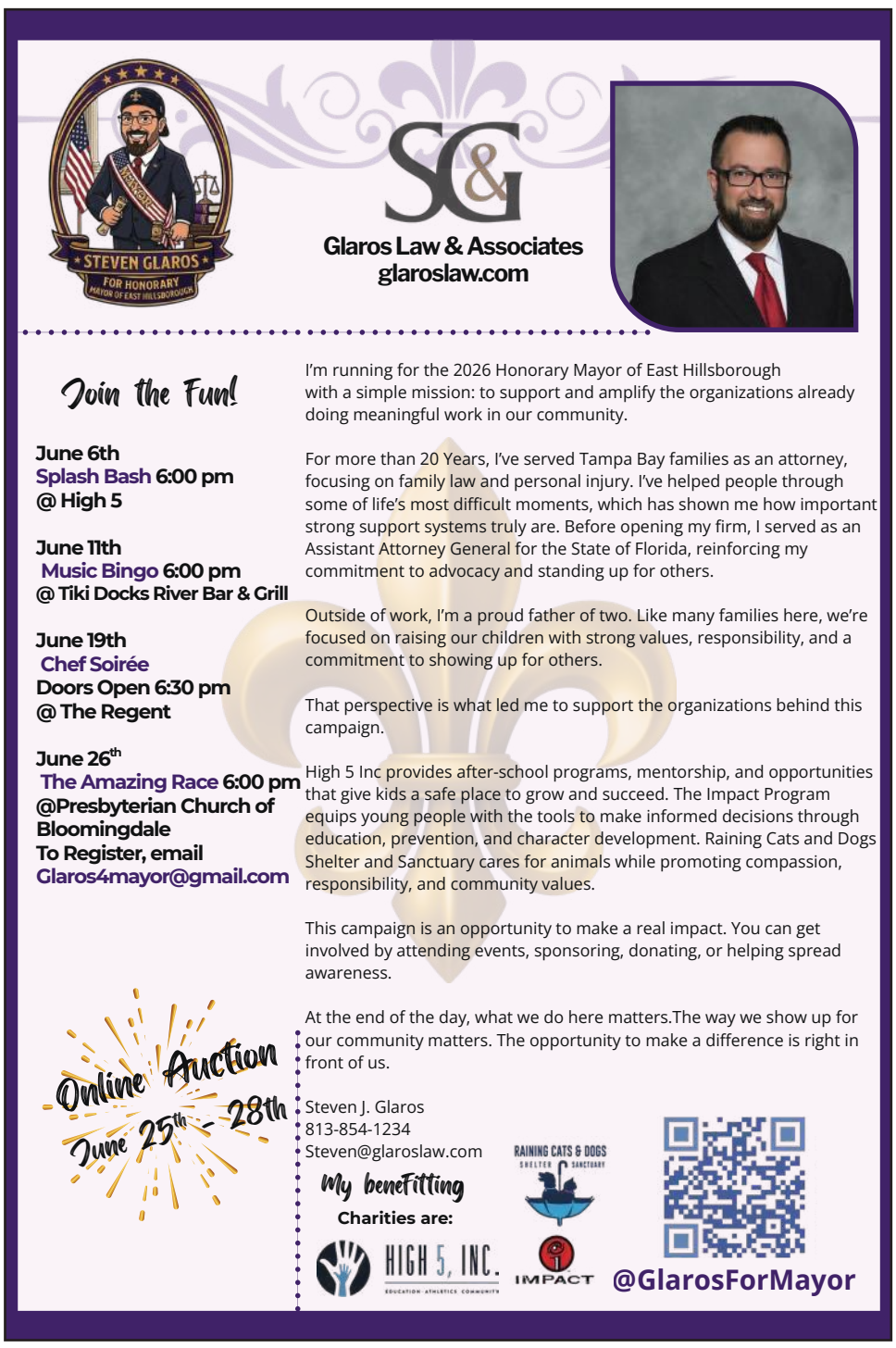
Two participants are leading the way this year, and both are focused on helping others.

Steve Glaros is supporting High 5 Inc., Raining Cats and Dogs Shelter and Sanctuary and Impact Program Inc. His events include a Mayor's Summer Splash Bash, Music Bingo, a Chef Soiree and Online Auction and even an 'Amazing Race.' Each event is meant to bring people together while helping youth, families and animals in need. Glaros said he joined the race to "strengthen the community and make a difference."

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

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

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




# SCOUT INSPIRES GIRLS IN STEM WITH "PRETTY SMART" PROJECT

*Staff Report*




A local high school junior is being recognized for tackling a global issue with a creative, community-driven solution.

Sierra Farrell, a 15-year-old Ambassador Girl Scout from Troop 33018 and an 11th grade student at Newsome High School, has earned the Girl Scout Gold Award — the organization's highest honor — while also completing the prestigious Girl Scout Trifecta Award. The rare distinction recognizes girls who earn the Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards, an accomplishment achieved by only a small percentage of participants nationwide.

For her Gold Award project, titled 'Pretty Smart,' Farrell focused on a challenge she first noticed in her own classrooms: the declining number of girls participating in technology, advanced math and science courses.

"Where did all the girls go?" she wondered — a question that led her to research the broader issue of female under-representation in STEM fields. Her findings pointed to persistent barriers, including limited exposure, social stereotypes and a lack of relatable role models. Studies show these perceptions can begin as early as elementary school, with many girls feeling pressure to choose between being 'pretty' or 'smart.'

Determined to change that narrative, Farrell developed and led a free workshop program called 'Beauty & STEM Go Together.' The program connects science concepts to topics that resonate with girls, such as cosmetics, jewelry, fashion and food, helping participants see STEM as both relevant and accessible.

Farrell partnered with organizations like Girls With Confidence and hosted workshops at community events including STEMAPALOOZA and Girl Fest. She also collaborated with a female-owned small business to create a companion patch program and launched a Facebook page to expand awareness beyond the local community.

To ensure broader accessibility, Farrell translated the program into Spanish and donated more than 50 workshop kits to organizations serving girls from under-represented backgrounds.

Her efforts have reached more than1,000 participants so far, with overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Farrell, who completed her Bronze Award in 2019 and Silver Award in 2021, will be honored in June by Girl Scouts of West Central Florida for both her Gold Award and Trifecta achievement. Looking ahead, she plans to pursue a degree in biomedical engineering and continue encouraging girls to see that they can be both confident and capable.

"I want girls to know they don't have to choose," she said. "They can be pretty and smart."

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# EXPRESS OIL CHANGE & TIRE ENGINEERS OPENS NEW LOCATION

*By Olivia Clark*






*Express Oil Change owner Jeremy Persinger.*

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

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

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

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

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

The opening also represents a broader impact beyond automotive services. Persinger emphasized that the new location brings job opportunities to the area while contributing positively to the local economy.

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

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

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

Express Oil Change & Tire Engineers is located at 13131 U.S. 301 S. in Riverview. For more information, call 813-677-4000 or visit www.expressoil.com.

# FRESH COAT PAINTERS TRANSFORMS FUTURE HOUSE FOR AT-RISK WOMEN

*By Jane Owen*





*Fresh Coat Painter owner Maninder Mundh, Forgotten Angels David Tyler and Cindy Tilley at the Adderly House.*

Forgotten Angels, a Valrico nonprofit that helps teenagers who have aged out of foster care and at-risk young adults, is working to open its first transitional home dedicated to young women. Forgotten Angels operates a Valrico on-site housing program for men and already helps at-risk women find housing.

In February, Fresh Coat Painters of Brandon and Valrico painted the exterior of the 3,700-square-foot house at no cost.

Fresh Coat Painters owner Maninder Mundh believes they played a small role in something meaningful.

"Every brushstroke was done with intention — not just to refresh the building but to reflect the strength, courage and new beginnings happening inside. A home should feel welcoming. It should feel like a fresh start. And that's exactly what these young ladies deserve," Mundh said.

Cindy Tilley founded Forgotten Angels, knowing firsthand how hard it is to age out of the foster program. She and her husband, David Tyler, painted the interior of the house. Tilley is grateful for Fresh Coat Painters painting the exterior.

"They were amazing to come along side of us to help. We appreciate them giving their time and resources for us," Tilley said.

The new transitional home will be named the Adderly House to honor Keria Adderly, a young woman who was murdered in 2020. Tilley said Adderly was the kind of person who would help anyone. The Adderly House will be a huge help to at-risk women. It will be more than a house; it will be a home. It will provide a safe, secure home with the added benefits of on-site mentorship, counseling services, job placement assistance and legal assistance.

There is work to be done inside and outside of the house before the Adderly House can open.

"Community support is beautiful. The biggest thing for us is to make sure that financially we can do everything we need to help the kids," Tilley said.

Forgotten Angels changes lives by giving life skills and love to everyone who comes through the program. Tilley and Tyler provide forever support; everyone they assist through Forgotten Angels is family.

To learn more about Forgotten Angels and how to support it, visit www.forgottenangelsflorida.org.

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# JROTC RAIDER TEAM WINS SECOND STRAIGHT NATIONAL TITLE

*By Viyaleta Chesnakova*



*Newsome High School JROTC Mixed Raider Team captured its second straight national title in April in Fort Knox, Kentucky*

Dominating one of the nation's toughest high school competitions, the Newsome High School JROTC Mixed Raider Team captured its second straight national title in April, winning the Masters Division at the National Raider Competition (NRC) at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

The accomplishment follows last year's first-place finish in the Challenge Division, when Newsome was one of more than 300 teams competing. That competition included a 5K run over steep terrain, a cross-country rescue, a physical team test, a rope bridge and the 'gauntlet' obstacle course. All events were completed in a single day.

This year, Newsome moved up to the more advanced Masters Division, competing over three days against the top-performing teams from across the country. Teams in the Masters Division faced two additional events: the Battle Fit Challenge and the Ultimate Raider. The Battle Fit Challenge tested cadets through timed push-ups, sit-ups and a 1-mile run. The Ultimate Raider featured a 4.2-mile course, more than 100 pounds of equipment and four obstacles that required teamwork and critical thinking.

The 14 cadets also had to contend with cold, wet weather and steep terrain, far different from what they typically train on in Florida. Senior Hunter Wilk, who led the team during the 5K, said that the NRC was an unforgettable experience.

Describing the grueling terrain, he said, "We were crossing hills so steep that I was on all fours to get to the top."

Despite the harsh conditions, the team still finished on top.

The team was led by Raider team captain Blake Jacobus, who oversaw tryouts, training schedules and practices before and after school throughout the year. Jacobus said the NRC "was a rewarding experience that pushed us all to work together under stress and persevere through many difficult obstacles."

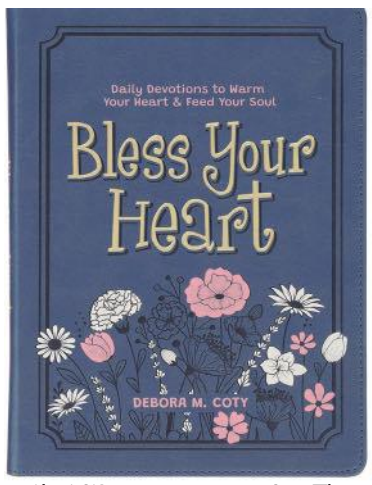
The team placed first in four of the seven events. Sophomore Grace Diny said the team succeeded because they "kept going no matter how much it hurt, because it is much better to not only meet a goal, but to surpass it." With back-to-back national titles, the Newsome Raider Team has established itself as one of the top JROTC programs in the country.

# TOO BLESSED TO BE STRESSED AUTHOR LAUNCHES NEW DEVOTIONAL SERIES

*By Olivia Clark*



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




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

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

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

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

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

"The gal who encouraged others to look for the funny couldn't see any funny anywhere," she said.

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

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

Coty continues her long-running Grace Notes column, with pieces scheduled for February, March and April.






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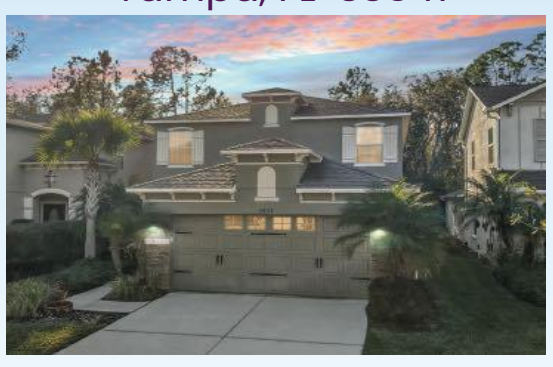


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# DAVID WEEKLEY HOMES MARKS 30 YEARS OF BUILDING COMMUNITIES

*Staff Report*



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

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

Over the company's 30 years in Tampa and surrounding areas, the builder has enjoyed several notable milestones. Since opening in 1996, the company has closed more than 6,900 homes in the Tampa area. The company has built in many communities throughout Tampa, including Encore at FishHawk Ranch, Waterset, Barrington Preserve, Hidden Lakes and Magnolia Creek. David Weekley Homes has earned more than 150 Tampa-area awards, including more than 120 for product design.

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

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

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

# SURVIVOR LEADS LOCAL EFFORT FOR BLOOD CANCER UNITED

*Staff Report*

For Riverview resident Craig Beckinger, life is measured in two chapters: before cancer and after. Now a survivor, Beckinger is turning his personal journey into purpose as he campaigns for Blood Cancer United's 2026 Visionary of the Year, raising critical funds to support local families battling blood cancers.



*Beckinger is the founder and CEO of ABC Event Planning.*

Beckinger, representing Tampa Bay and North Florida as an All-Star Visionary candidate, said his diagnosis reshaped everything.

"Priorities became clear. Time felt fragile. And survival became deeply personal," he shared. "Surviving didn't just give me a second chance — it gave me a responsibility to help others facing the same fight."

His campaign carries an added layer of meaning this year. Beckinger is dedicating his efforts to the memory of Jill Jofko, his 2023 campaign manager, who passed away from cancer on February 3. He described her as selfless and deeply committed to helping others, saying her legacy continues to inspire the work.

Through Blood Cancer United, funds raised stay within the local community, providing treatment assistance, transportation to chemotherapy, emergency financial support, support groups and patient resources, as well as funding for lifesaving research and advocacy.

In 2023, Beckinger's campaign raised more than $150,000 — a milestone he hopes to build upon this year with the help of community support and a series of upcoming fundraising events.

One of the highlights is the fifth annual 'Runway for a Cause' fashion show, scheduled for Saturday, April 25, from 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. at Aloft Midtown, located at 3650 Midtown Dr. in Tampa. The event will feature spring and summer fashions provided by Dillard's, along with appearances by local personalities, including Babs and Meredith from Wild 94.1, Miss Tampa Halle Burton and Mrs. Universe USA Ambassador Amber Uhler. The brunch and silent auction fundraiser is expected to draw strong community participation.

Additional fundraising efforts include raffle opportunities, such as a $1,000 lottery board featuring scratch-off tickets and a Powerball drawing, as well as a premium 4.5-liter bottle of Jameson Irish whiskey imported from Dublin, Ireland. Winners will be announced during a Facebook Live drawing in mid-May.

The campaign will culminate with a grand finale event at the Motor Enclave, located at 6500 Motor Enclave Way in Tampa, on Friday, May 15, at 7 p.m.

"Every dollar represents hope for a family walking through one of the hardest seasons of their lives," he said.

Beckinger is the founder and CEO of ABC Event Planning. Contact him at 561-876-6845 or email cab92807@gmail.com.

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# HCA URGENT ER BREAKS GROUND ON BOYETTE ROAD IN RIVERVIEW

*By Brian Bokor*



HCA Florida Brandon Hospital has broken ground on a new freestanding emergency department at 12910 Boyette Rd. in Riverview, expanding emergency care in one of the fastest-growing areas of southeastern Hillsborough County.

The site, formerly home to the Ace Golf driving range, sits along the busy Boyette Road corridor connecting Riverview to Lithia and FishHawk, an area experiencing steady residential growth.

Hospital leaders, first responders and community members gathered for the April 1 ceremony, underscoring the increasing demand for emergency services across South County.

"This is more than just a 13,000-square-foot building. It's more than a $19 million investment. It represents the commitment to meeting the needs of the community," said Tripp Owings, CEO of HCA Florida Brandon Hospital.

The project builds on the hospital's legacy of serving the community since 1977 and is part of HCA Florida Healthcare's broader statewide network.

When complete, the 13,000-square-foot facility will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with 11 treatment rooms and full-service emergency care, including on-site laboratory services, X-ray and CT imaging.

Rescue Chief Todd Carnell of Hillsborough County Fire Rescue said the new location will improve emergency response.

"They have everything you need in the first few minutes or hours of your emergency. Then they have the ability to transfer you to the hospital by their own ambulance, leaving us available once again," Carnell said. "They bring community medicine back into the community."

Manager of Emergency Services Anna Hendrix, a U.S. Navy veteran and former emergency room nurse, said the project also carries personal significance.

"I live just minutes from here. As a mother, knowing there will be a trusted emergency department nearby gives me peace of mind — the kind every parent hopes for when their child needs help quickly," Hendrix said.

Vice President of Emergency Services Nealy Kinnison emphasized the broader impact.

"These expanded emergency services will save lives in the community by being closer to home for the tens of thousands of residents," Kinnison said.

Freestanding emergency departments provide full-service care, allowing patients to be evaluated and stabilized locally before transfer to a hospital if additional treatment is required.

During the ceremony, Lt. Levic Allen was recognized on his retirement after 34 years with Hillsborough County Fire Rescue.

The new ER adds needed capacity in a rapidly growing area where demand for emergency services continues to rise.

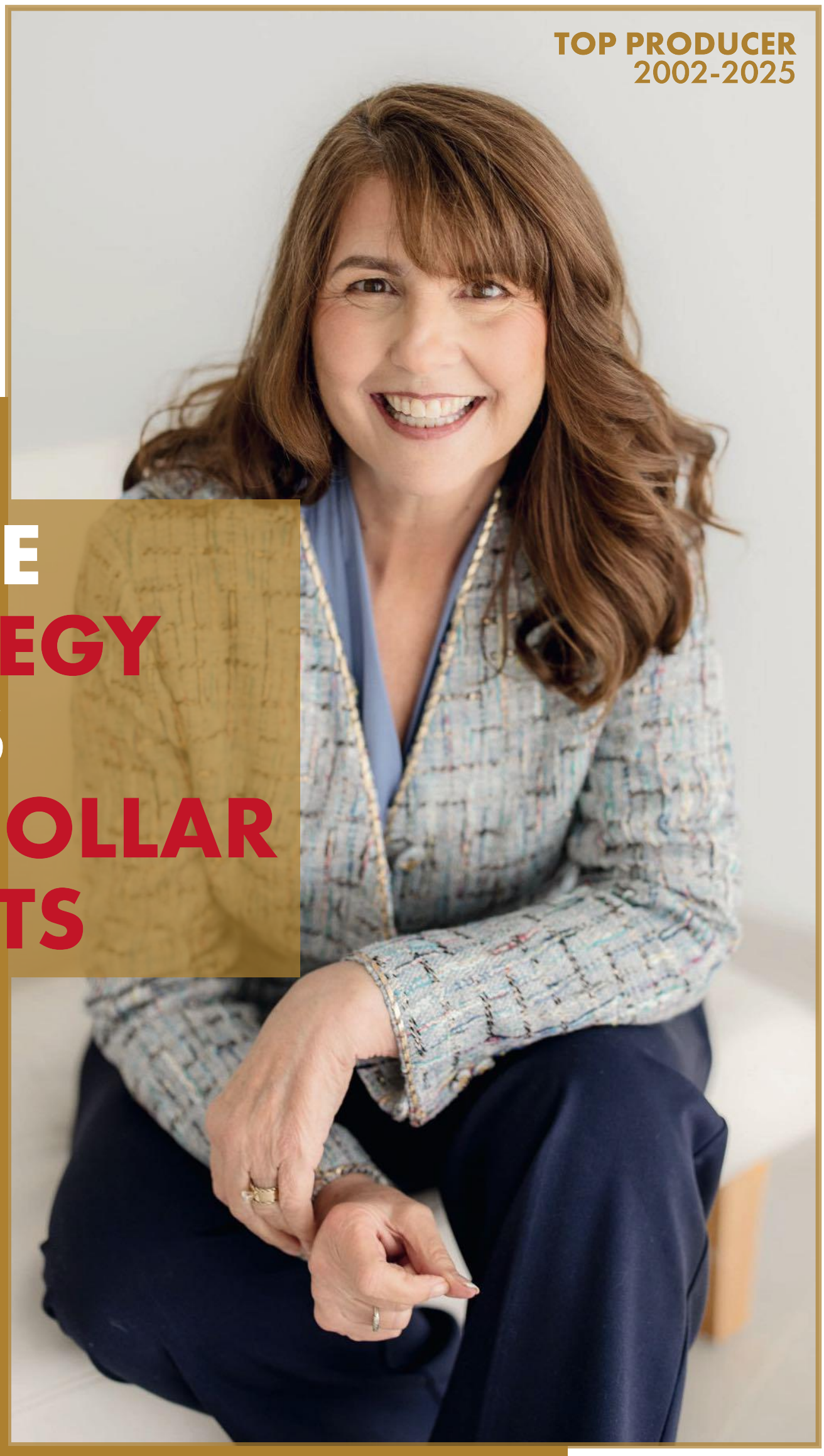
HCA Florida Healthcare operates more than 650 affiliated sites of care statewide, including hospital campuses, freestanding emergency rooms, urgent care centers and physician practices.







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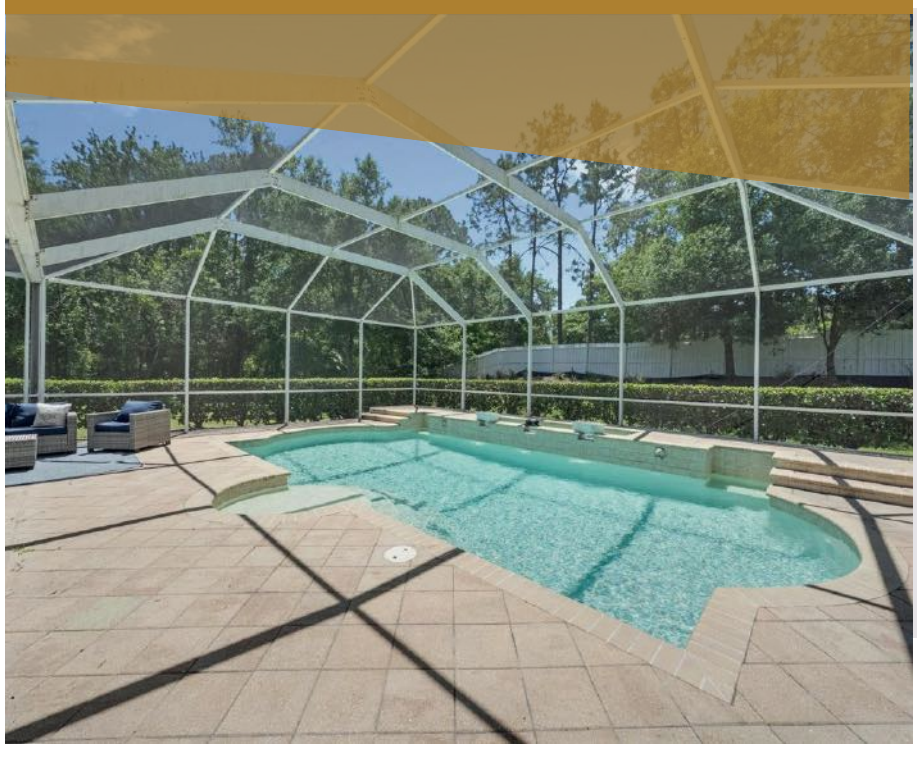
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# SENATOR MOODY HONORS HCA BRANDON NURSE WITH FLORIDA'S FINEST AWARD

*Staff Report*




*Sharon Gibbs, director of critical care at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, (center) stands with Jeff Pollier after being honored with the Florida's Finest Award by Sen. Ashley Moody due to Gibbs' quick actions during a heart attack.*

What began as a life-or-death moment in a community garden has become a powerful story of survival, teamwork and recognition at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital. Recently, Florida Senator Ashley Moody honored Sharon Gibbs, director of critical care at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, with the Florida's Finest Award for her heroic actions that helped save the life of Jeff Pollier.

Jeff Pollier and his wife, Robin Pollier, were present for the surprise presentation, making the moment even more meaningful.

Just months earlier, Jeff Pollier collapsed from a heart attack while gardening with Robin Pollier at their plot in the community garden in Sun City Center. By chance, Gibbs was nearby and immediately sprang into action. She began CPR while others retrieved an automated external defibrillator, or AED, delivering the critical care needed to restore his heartbeat.

Emergency responders transported Jeff Pollier to HCA Florida South Shore Hospital, where physicians identified severe blockages in three major coronary arteries. He was then transferred to HCA Florida Brandon Hospital for advanced cardiac care, where a multidisciplinary team performed a lifesaving quadruple bypass surgery.

During the award presentation, Moody recognized Gibbs not only for her quick thinking and clinical expertise but also for embodying the compassion and readiness that define health care professionals across Florida. Her actions serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of CPR training and access to AEDs and the impact of being prepared to act in an emergency.

Stories like Jeff Pollier's highlight the critical role of teamwork across HCA Florida Healthcare facilities. From the immediate response in the community to advanced cardiac care in the hospital, every step played a part in giving him a second chance at life.

Now reunited and thriving, Jeff and Robin Pollier stood alongside Gibbs during the ceremony, a full circle moment that underscored the lifesaving difference one person and one team can make. For Jeff Pollier, that difference means more time with his wife, his family and the life they have built together.

Jeff Pollier described his recovery in simple terms: "I'm living on bonus time now."

For the team at Brandon Hospital and South Shore Hospital, it is a reminder of their shared mission: to care for and improve human life.

# HILLSBOROUGH CELEBRATES STANDOUT JROTC CADETS, NAMES CADET OF YEAR

*Staff Report*





*C/CDR Andrew Papp from Riverview High School.*

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) announced its JROTC Cadet of the Year at a special event held at the University of South Florida. The district announced the top 10 cadets, along with the overall winner at the year-end awards program. C/Lt Col Vidyarth Sathya from Middleton High School took home the top honors for Cadet of the Year.



*C/LTC Isabelle Rivera from Newsome High.*

HCPS has 28 Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) programs and over 5,000 cadets this school year. Currently, there are 11 Army JROTC programs, nine Navy programs, seven Air Force programs and one Marine Corps program. Each cadet that was nominated from the programs went through a rigorous board selection process to be considered for the top awards.

"The competition for Cadet of the Year is highly competitive, making this recognition a significant accomplishment," said Van Ayres, superintendent of schools. "Congratulations to each of these outstanding cadets on being named among the very best — your hard work and dedication truly set you apart."

This year's winners are:

Top winner: C/Lt Col Vidyarth Sathya from Middleton High

C/LTC Marielis Pena from Brandon High

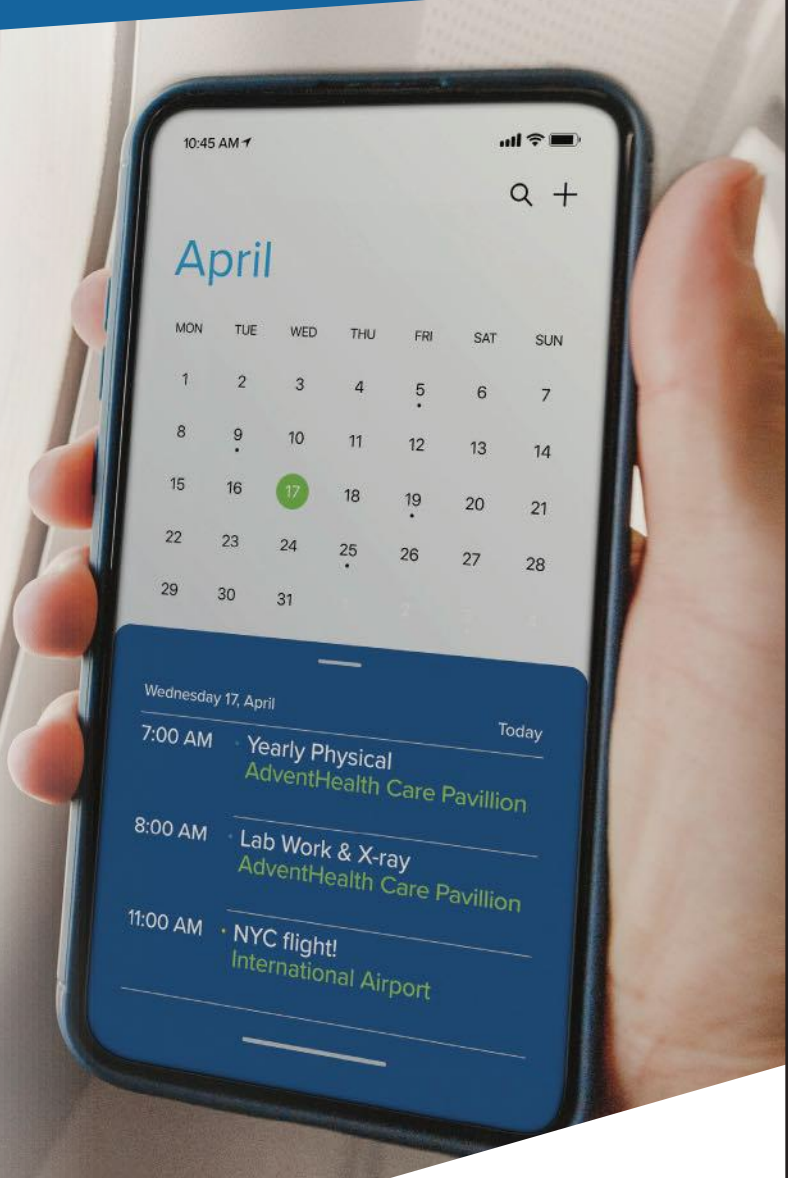
C/Col Charlotte Belloso from Durant High

C/LTC Isabelle Rivera from Newsome High.

C/CDR Andrew Papp from Riverview High

For more information about the JROTC programs at HCPS, visit the district website at www.hillsboroughschools.org.


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# PERSONAL CARE AT THE HEART OF SUN CITY CENTER FUNERAL HOME

*By Olivia Clark*



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

Sun City Center Funeral Home has built its reputation on providing compassionate care and personalized services for families during some of life's most difficult moments. Since becoming part of Foundation Partners Group in January 2017, the funeral home has maintained its family-oriented atmosphere while continuing to serve the community with dignity and respect.

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

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

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

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

Sun City Center Funeral Home offers a full range of services, including traditional funerals, memorial services, cremation options and celebration of life gatherings. Personalization plays a central role, allowing families to incorporate meaningful elements such as music, hobbies, cultural traditions and special tributes.

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

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

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

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

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

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


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# THE NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES ARE COMING TO TAMPA AND ARE WELCOMING VOLUNTEERS

*By Emily Harper*

This year's National Veterans Golden Age Games will be held in Tampa from Saturday, June 27, to Thursday, July 2. This is the first time the games have been brought to Tampa, and they will bring over 1,400 veterans along with their families to the city.



*Photo credit: The US Department of Veterans Affairs. Photos from the 2025 National Veterans Golden Age Games.*



The Golden Age Games began in 1985 to support veterans ages 55 and older to stay active through sports. Now going into their 40th year, the games have grown into one of the Department of Veterans Affairs' premier adaptive sports programs, focused on healthy aging and rehabilitation.

These games highlight the importance of health, wellness and honoring those who served. Veterans will have the opportunity to choose from 21 different sports, including swimming, golf, pickleball and track and field, to compete in over the span of the week.

In preparation, veterans are able to benefit from year-round rehabilitation and fitness programs at their local Department of Veterans Affairs facilities. This allows them to engage in physical activity while gaining confidence in their abilities.

"What makes the Golden Age Games special is that it's not just about competition. At its core, it is about connection, community, recovery and showing veterans that it's never too late to stay active and rediscover purpose," stated Brittany Hook, director of the games.

Volunteers contribute significantly to the success of this event. They assist with operations, help guide participants, support competitions, manage check-in and ensure that the veterans have a safe and positive experience for the duration of the games.

The games invite anyone who wants to support their veterans to volunteer. For students who volunteer, the organization supports the verification of their time for their extracurricular requirements. However, the games encourage students to check with their school or organization for confirmation in the activity.

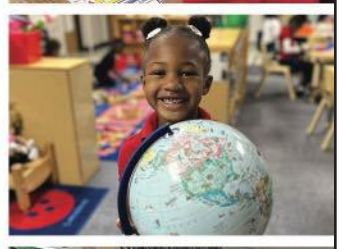
To sign up, individuals can go to their website, https://40goldenagegames.mytrs.com/ and complete the volunteer registration form.


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# COUNTY HOSTS MEETINGS TO HELP SOUTH COUNTY HOMEOWNERS APPLY FOR REPAIR ASSISTANCE

*Staff Report*



Hillsborough County is holding a series of community meetings throughout the county over the next few weeks to help residents apply for assistance to repair their homes under Affordable Housing Services' Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Program.

The first five of the eight community meetings were held in April, and the remaining three will be held in May. Hillsborough County Affordable Housing Services staff will be at each of the meetings to help residents complete and submit their application.

The Hillsborough County Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Program is designed to ensure low, very low and moderate-income Hillsborough County families have the opportunity to live in safe, decent and sanitary homes. This is not a home remodeling program but rather a program aimed at assisting the community with immediate needs for rehabilitation due to the condition of the home. The countywide initiative utilizes the State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) program to rehabilitate the homes of residents who live in unincorporated Hillsborough County, Plant City and Temple Terrace. The City of Tampa has its own rehabilitation program.

The program provides financial assistance to homeowners who cannot afford to bring their homes into compliance with the Florida Building Code or make other necessary repairs affecting life, health, safety and accessibility. There are income restrictions, and the program focuses on single-family homes that have been homesteaded as a primary residence for at least two years.

Application forms will be available at all the meetings and are also available online at https://hcfl.gov/oor. Residents who cannot attend the meetings and do not have access to a computer can call 813-635-1810 to have an application mailed to them. The meetings will be held on the following dates and times:

• Friday, May 1, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., at Town 'N Country Library Community Room, located at 7606 Paula Dr. in Tampa.

• Thursday, May 14, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., at Gardenville Recreation Center, located at 6219 Symmes Rd. in Gibsonton.

•Wednesday, May 20: 10 a.m.-2 p.m., at Balm Park and Community Center, located at 14747 Balm Wimauma Rd. in Wimauma.

Eligible funding may be used for:

• Roof repair or replacement.

• Failure of electrical, plumbing or HVAC systems.

• Failure of structural systems, such as floors and structural walls.

• Exterior/interior deterioration (walls, foundation, porches, siding, etc.).

• Water heater replacement.

• Accessibility improvement (ramp, widening doorways, countertops, bathroom and kitchen modifications, etc.).

• Lead-based paint remediation or other environmental issues.

• Weatherization activities (doors, windows, air conditioning, roofs, insulation and energy-efficient appliances).

Demolition-reconstruction may be offered for homes whose repairs exceed 50 percent of the appraised value according to the property appraiser valuation.

For more, email affordablehousingservices@hcfl.gov or call 813-635-1610.









**Notice Under Fictitious Name Law Pursuant to Section 865.09, Florida Statutes**

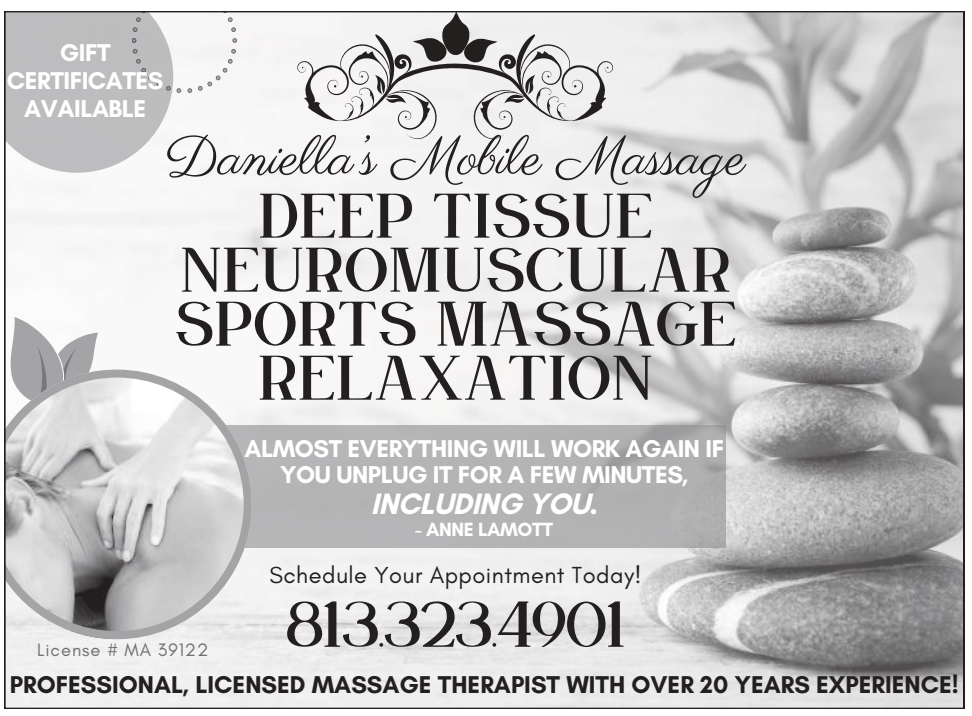
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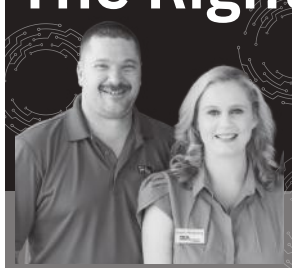
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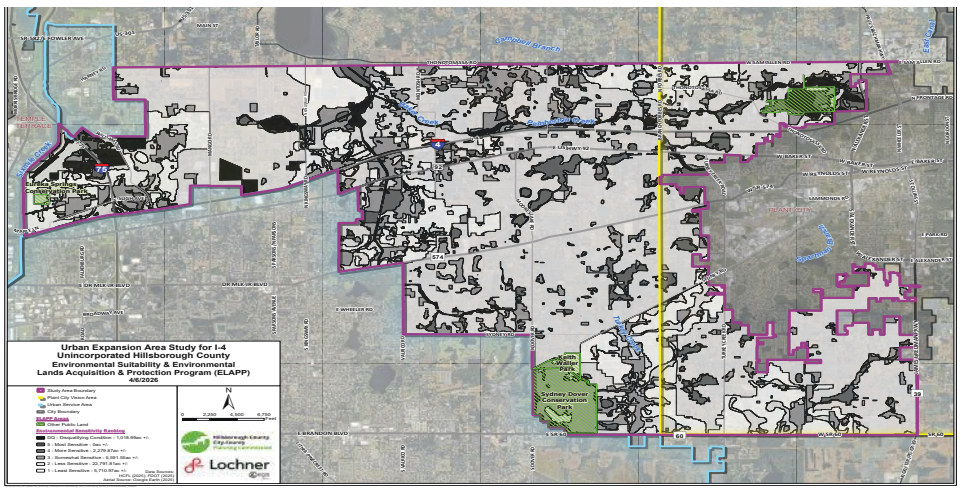


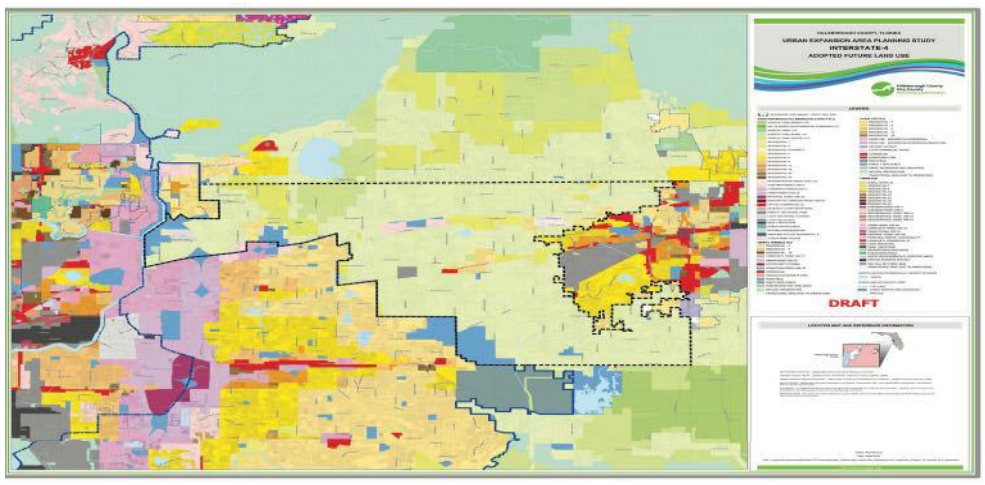
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# COUNTY'S PLANNERS MAP POTENTIAL 800 PERCENT GROWTH ALONG I-4

*By Brian Bokor*




As Hillsborough County's Urban Service Area (USA) begins to reach its long-term capacity, the Planning Commission has initiated a high-stakes study that could redefine the rural landscape stretching from Thonotosassa to the Plant City line.

The I-4 Corridor Urban Expansion Area Study covers 35,000 acres of what is currently rural land consisting of strawberry fields, cattle ranches and two-lane roads. During a recent virtual meeting, planners made the case that this area, long protected from high-density building, is now the county's primary solution for handling its projected growth.

The core driver of this study is a policy mandate established in 1993. By law, the county must maintain enough land within the Urban Service Area to handle 80 percent of all new growth. The USA is essentially a utility boundary that dictates where the county provides city-style infrastructure, such as central water, sewer and high-density transportation.

However, as available land within those boundaries shrinks, current projections show that the county could fall below the required growth threshold by 2040. To get ahead of the curve, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) directed staff to evaluate expansion zones in South Little Manatee and the I-4 Corridor.

The I-4 Corridor forecasts are striking. While the area currently adds 71 households per year, the County calls for 576 annually by 2050. That is an 800 percent acceleration — an eight-fold jump that creates a massive disconnect between these projections and the reality of our two-lane rural roads and existing services.

This pressure is complicated by shifting markets. Demand for office space has tanked with up to 20 percent vacancy, but industrial and logistics demand remains very strong. With prime I-4/I-75 access, developers are eyeing our Residential-1 agricultural land for large-scale warehouses and distribution centers, even though most residents still rely on private wells and septic systems.

To manage this transition, planners are proposing a nodal development strategy. Under this philosophy, higher-intensity growth would be concentrated in specific nodes, primarily located near existing highway interchanges like Mango Road, McIntosh Road and Branch Forbes Road. The goal is to cluster commercial and industrial uses in these hubs, theoretically allowing the county to preserve the rural character and environmental sensitivity of the land in between.

A central part of the early findings is a new environmental scoring system used to determine the feasibility of this expansion. Planners are aggregating data on floodplains, wildlife habitats and water resource sensitivity to determine which land is most sensitive for development.

Using a color-coded scale, floodways and highly sensitive habitats are marked for protection, while white and light-colored areas are seen as the most feasible for expansion. This data will be critical as the county moves into Stage 2 Land Use Workshops this summer, where the actual lines on the map will begin to be drawn.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the expansion remains the infrastructure and the associated costs. The study area is currently a utility desert by urban standards, and bringing central water and wastewater to 35,000 acres is a massive, multimillion-dollar endeavor.

Furthermore, the transportation network is comprised mostly of narrow rural roads that are already feeling the pinch of traffic. While road-widening projects are slated for major arteries like State Road 60 and I-4, the internal collector roads remain a major point of contention.

A focus of the study's scope involves reviewing fees and funding sources, leaving residents to wonder if new development will pay its own way through impact fees or if the financial burden will fall on the broader taxpayer base.

This study is only in the first of a four-stage process, and planners are emphasizing that no final decisions have been made. The Planning Commission is utilizing a community asset mapping tool that allows residents to go online and identify what they value most, from historic sites to scenic views, which they believe should be off-limits to developers.

"We want to understand what the community wants before we go about recommending expansions," the project team stated during the presentation.

The study is scheduled to conclude in the fall of 2026, when final recommendations will be sent to the Board of County Commissioners. For more information and to take the stage-one survey, residents can visit the website directly at https://planhillsborough.org/.

Detailed data slides and a full recording of the virtual meeting can be found via the project's YouTube channel or by visiting the I-4 Corridor section at the website www.planhillsborough.org/.



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# BLOOMINGDALE AND NEWSOME HOST SUMMER BASKETBALL CAMPS

*By Nick Nahas*

Bloomingdale High School is hosting basketball camps for boys and girls of all skill levels from fourth to ninth grade this summer.



*Coach Bower will also be hosting a joint camp with Newsome girls basketball Head Coach David Cassreino.*

Week one will be held from Monday through Thursday, June 8-11, and week two is from Monday through Thursday, June 15-18.

Session one is for grades four through six from 9 a.m.-12 Noon and session two is for grades seven through nine from 1-4 p.m.

Students will be instructed by Bloomingdale boys Head Coach David Maciejewski and girls basketball Head Coach Joel Bower along with players, with an emphasis on the improvement of fundamental skills and sportsmanship.

"I enjoy teaming up with Coach Bower and the girls players during camp," said Maciejewski. "I think both of our programs do a really good job of supporting each other throughout the year, and I believe that this camp helps set the foundation for that with our teams. We have several players on both the boys and girls teams who have come to camp and are now players in our program. I enjoy seeing those players grow from middle school and elementary players into players in both our programs wearing the Bloomingdale jersey."

Players from beginner to advanced are welcome, with each one receiving a camp T-shirt.

The priority is for each camper to have fun and learn in a safe environment. Campers will be placed in groups by age, size and ability.

All campers participate in daily skills, instructions and drills and play in three-on-three or five-on-five games and contests daily.

Participants may arrive as early as 30 minutes before their session begins, with concessions and camp bank available.

Bower will also be hosting a joint camp with Newsome girls basketball Head Coach David Cassreino. The Rival Girls Basketball Camp will be held at Newsome High School from 9 a.m.-12 Noon from Monday through Thursday, June 22-25, for rising sixth to ninth graders. The cost is $125 per person.

"I am excited to see players from both schools work together to help develop the next generation of basketball players in our area," said Bower.

For more information on the camps, email Bower at joel.bower@hcps.net or Cassreino at david.cassreino@hcps.net.

"I'm looking forward to having our two programs come together this summer to help promote girls basketball in the community," said Cassreino. "This is a great opportunity for young girls to learn the game from the coaches and players of Bloomingdale and Newsome. It will be a fun week of basketball."

# TEEN RESTORES CLASSIC CARS, BUILDS YOUTUBE FOLLOWING AND HEADS TO D.C. FOR ADVOCACY

*By Kelly Wise Valdes*

When most teenagers were learning to drive, Ashlee Jaspers was learning to rebuild an engine. Now, the Newsome High School junior is preparing for a trip to Washington, D.C., where she will meet with congressional leaders on behalf of the automotive aftermarket industry — a journey that began with a simple question she asked her dad at age 13.




Ashlee Jaspers had wanted a car of her own, but her father, Todd Jaspers, had a condition.

"I told her I'd buy her a car, but she'd have to restore it herself," he said.

He believed the challenge would teach responsibility and respect. He also insisted on a manual transmission, joking that it meant "one less hand to hold a cell phone."

That decision set Ashlee Jaspers on a path she hadn't expected.

"My favorite thing about restoring cars is learning how all of the individual parts work together," said Ashlee Jaspers. "Before I got my '85 Pontiac Fiero, I had little to no knowledge on cars."

She remembers the moment she first started up the engine that she had rebuilt.

"It was probably one of the best moments of my life hearing the engine rumble to life," she said.

Her passion grew quickly. She launched a YouTube channel, 'Gen Z Garage,' to document her restoration process and hopefully inspire other young mechanics.

"TV and film production has always called to me," she said. "That's half the reason I started my YouTube channel. The other half is that I'd love to help others with their car restoration journeys."

Ashlee Jaspers said she was inspired by shows like *All Girls Garage*.

"Faye [Hadley] was definitely a huge inspiration," she said. "I'd love to meet her one day."

"We had tons of pictures of my parents' cars in a little electronic picture frame," she said. "I saw that the cars looked cool and that helped spark interest."

Todd Jaspers said he tries to stay hands-off so she can learn through critical thinking and troubleshooting.

"I uninvolve myself as much as possible to ensure she solves the problems herself," he said. "What I do make sure is that she does things safely." He calls the experience "an additional early college education."

Ashlee Jaspers' dedication caught the attention of the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA).

"She reached out to SEMA, and they were so excited to see someone her age with her passion," Todd Jaspers said.

The organization invited her to Washington, D.C., where she will attend a congressional reception, a congressional dinner and a full day of briefings and meetings with lawmakers.

To follow Ashlee Jaspers' YouTube channel, Gen Z Garage, visit www.youtube.com/@generationzgarage.

# HILLSBOROUGH COLLEGE UNVEILS NEW BRAND IDENTITY AND LOGO

*Staff Report*

Hillsborough College has unveiled a refreshed brand identity featuring a new logo, updated visual system and an enhanced college seal. The new brand reflects a thoughtful modernization of the college's image, designed to better represent the institution's growth, purpose and long-standing connection to the community.

"Hillsborough College's new branding captures the spirit of the college today: student-centered and deeply connected to the community," said Dr. Kenneth Atwater, Hillsborough College president. "The design honors our past while offering a more modern look at who we are, what we offer and where we're going. It underscores our commitment to expanding opportunity, advancing academic excellence and staying responsive to the evolving needs of our community."

The new brand identity was developed in partnership with Sensory 5 and Trickey Jennus, which incorporated feedback from college leadership, faculty, staff and students to create a refreshed look that reflects the college's mission and values. The updated system blends modern design elements that bring the brand forward with intentional references to the college's legacy visuals, resulting in a more cohesive and contemporary identity that honors the institution's foundation.

"Our visual identity is often the first way people experience the college, and this refreshed brand helps us tell our story with greater clarity and confidence," said Angela Walters Eveillard, executive director of marketing and public relations at Hillsborough College. "It introduces a more modern look while still echoing familiar elements that connect back to our history. Together, those qualities create an identity that feels current, authentic and true to who we are today and moving forward."

Hillsborough College offers more than 200 academic options, including a Bachelor of Science in nursing, associate in arts and associate in science degrees, college credit certificates, postsecondary adult vocational certificates, advanced technical diplomas and certificates as well as continuing education and lifelong learning courses.

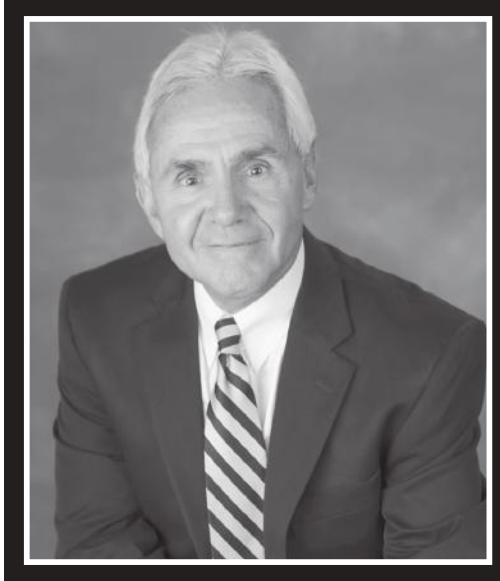
The new brand aims to unify how these opportunities are presented across print, digital and physical spaces, providing a consistent experience for students, faculty, staff and community partners.

The rollout includes updated signage across campuses, new digital assets, refreshed print materials and a cohesive visual system that will be incorporated into student communications, outreach materials and community engagement initiatives.

Hillsborough College serves more than 46,000 students annually at its five campuses located throughout Tampa Bay. For more information, visit www.hcfl.edu.


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# GET THE DIRT:
## AFRICAN VIOLETS: ONE OF MY FAVORITE PLANTS

*BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT*



My mother grew African violets on a TV tray in her room. She was very successful.

The tips below can increase your success in growing this adorable plant. Direct sunlight is damaging, but it thrives in bright light within 3 feet of a southeast or southwest-facing window. If the light level is too low, you will see thin, deep green leaves and the plant stretching for light. If the leaves are pale or greenish yellow, there is too much light, which slows growth and decreases flowering. African violets need eight to 12 hours of light and eight hours of darkness daily. Fluorescent and other artificial lights are options.

You can purchase African violet soil mixtures, which contain peat moss, vermiculite and perlite. Drainage holes in plant containers are a must. Water should be at room temperature. You can water from the top of the container or the bottom/saucer. Don't leave water in the saucer. Note that overwatering is a significant issue.

Water-soluble African violet fertilizer is available in nurseries and big-box stores. Follow the recommended application rate. If you overfertilize this plant, you will see a rusty appearance on the leaves.

This plant is easy to propagate. Select a firm leaf, then leave the leaf stem intact. Trim the stem to 1-1 1/2 inches. Use a pencil to make a hole in the soil mixture, then insert the stem in the hole. It generally takes three to four weeks for the roots to form. New plant leaves take three to four weeks to appear after rooting occurs. You can anticipate flowers in six to nine months thereafter.

To minimize pest management, remove faded flowers and unhealthy leaves. Provide adequate spacing so pests, like mealybugs and cyclamen mites, are not able to infest the other African violets nearby. Purchasing and using sterilized soil is also important.

Let's grow some lovely African violets inside or outside under lanai cover.

# TAMPA BAY HEAT ARCHERY WINS BIG AT STATE TOURNAMENT

*By Emily Harper*










Tampa Bay HEAT Archery is a faith-based program that allows homeschooling students to learn and compete in the sport of archery. This program was formed many years ago when Tampa Bay HEAT Homeschooling was created by Teresa Manganello.

"We put God first and compete for the experience not the accolades," said the Director of Tampa Bay HEAT Archery Katora Whitfield.

This program supports the development of 61 athletes, ranging from ages 9-19. Within HEAT Archery, there are three divisions dividing athletes up by grade level, including elementary school, middle school and high school.

Team practice is held at the Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale, located at 710 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon, between the months of September and May. There on Monday afternoons, its athletes learn the foundation of the sport, allowing them to feel confident in their skills.

The program is guided by the team motto, 'Shoot straight,' meaning to always do the right thing, even when no one is watching. Before competing, the teams gather around in a circle, putting their hands in, and shout in unison, 'Shoot straight.'

Recently, the program achieved remarkable success in the NASP State Tournament, winning five out of the six first-place trophies. All its divisions placed first in the 3D team awards, elementary school and high school got first place in the bullseye team awards, and middle school placed second in the bullseye team awards.

HEAT Archery is now focused physically and mentally on nationals. This tournament will be held in Kentucky on Friday, May 8, and will have families traveling for their archers to compete.

"It is extremely rewarding to work with these individuals. From the youngest to the oldest there are many different personalities and passions that help motivate the rest. Our archers are welcoming and respectful, making any newcomer feel like they belong," said Whitfield.

To get involved, contact archery@tampabayheat.org. Additionally, there is more at www.tampabayheat.org/sports/.


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# MEET THE PERSON BEHIND THE SMILES AND HIGH FIVES

*By Emily Harper*






Hermes Pasquez has been a crossing guard for the local elementary school, Cimino, for three years. Prior to moving to the Bloomingdale area, he served as a crossing guard at Westshore Elementary School located in Tampa. As a crossing guard, Pasquez's main priority is to assist families in crossing the street safely on their way to and from school.

Pasquez lived most of his life in Valencia, Venezuela, before moving to the United States in 2018. In Venezuela, he served as the general manager for the local professional soccer team. He also worked as a sports management director at a university called Universidad de Carabobo. There, he planned and oversaw the sports events at the university. Additionally, he, alongside the dean of the university, created a school for economically disadvantaged children to learn the game of soccer. At this school, he worked closely with the children by teaching them soccer skills, with an overall goal to inspire the next generation.

After moving to the United States, he wanted to continue his efforts in impacting the younger generation along with giving back to the community. As a crossing guard, he strives to encourage them by greeting them with high fives on their way to and from school. In return, Pasquez mentioned that he gains energy from interacting with them. Additionally, the children remind him of his now-grown grandchildren, whom he used to take to and from school.

Pasquez utilizes the Sunshine Line, a door-to-door bus providing transportation through Hillsborough County, to get to his workplace each morning and afternoon. He starts his day each morning around 6 a.m., when he gets picked up by the bus, to travel to work.

The community appreciates the job he does to keep their children safe. Students and parents have shown their gratitude by giving him treats and cards around holidays and the end of the school year.

# HILLSBOROUGH CO. SCHOOLS: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR WHAT'S NEXT

*By Superintendent Van Ayres*



A Letter From The SUPERINTENDENT of Hillsborough County Public Schools
*Van Ayres*

As we look ahead to graduation season this May, when more than 14,000 Hillsborough County Public Schools seniors will walk across the stage, we are reminded that each diploma represents not just an ending, but an important beginning.

Our responsibility as a school district is to ensure every student is prepared for what comes next. That commitment is why college and career pathways remain a central focus of our work.

We are proud to share that 74 percent of our high school graduates will earn college credit or an industry certification by the time they graduate—the highest rate in our district's history. Through advanced coursework, dual enrollment, and industry certification programs, students are earning college credit and gaining real-world skills before they leave our classrooms. These opportunities not only strengthen academic readiness, but also open doors to future success.

This work also plays a critical role in how our schools are evaluated. College and Career Acceleration (CCA) is a key component of the school grades assigned by the Florida Department of Education. When students enroll in and succeed in rigorous coursework, it reflects both individual achievement and the overall strength of our schools.

Our Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs further support this goal by helping students explore high-demand careers. From healthcare and construction to information technology and culinary arts, students are gaining hands-on experience and earning industry-recognized certifications that can lead directly to employment.

Our technical colleges expand these opportunities even further, serving both recent graduates and adults through specialized training aligned with workforce needs. These programs create a strong bridge between education and industry, fueling our local economy while changing lives.

The impact of this work is clear. More students are graduating with a plan, a purpose, and a pathway. They are leaving our schools not only with knowledge, but with confidence and direction.

As we celebrate the Class of 2026, we celebrate more than their accomplishments—we celebrate their readiness. Because in Hillsborough County Public Schools, we are not just preparing students to graduate; we are preparing them to succeed in whatever path they choose.

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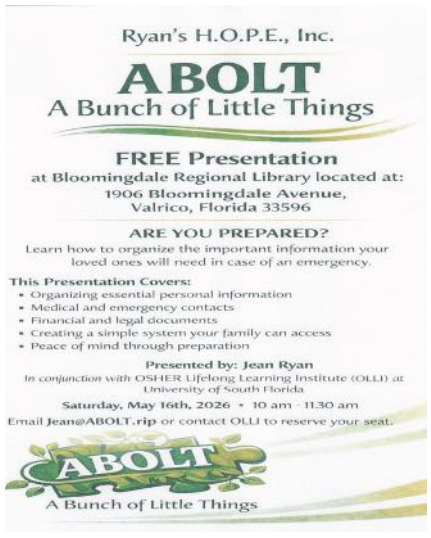
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# Get Organized, Casino Night and Biggest Ship in Port & More...

*Compiled by Jenny Bennett*
*jbennett@ospreyobserver.com*

## A Bunch Of Little Things

Are you prepared? Join Jean Ryan, in conjunction with the OSHER Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of South Florida, and learn how to organize important information your loved ones will need in case of an emergency. The presentation covers organizing essential personal information, medical and emergency contacts as well as financial and legal documents to create a simple system that your family can access, which in turn provides you with peace of mind. The presentation is free and will take place at Bloomingdale Regional Public Library, located at 1906 Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico, on Saturday, May 16, from 10-11:30 a.m. Email jean@abolt.rip to reserve your seat.




## Casino Night Fundraiser For A Kitten Place

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

## The Democratic Women's Club May Meeting

The Democratic Women's Club of Southeast Hillsborough County will meet on Thursday, May 7, at the Bloomingdale Regional Public Library (Room 219), located at 1906 Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico. The meeting begins at 6:30p.m., but come for meet and greet at 6 p.m.. The speakers will be Glenn Pearson and Tamika Lyles, Democratic candidates for U.S. House Florida District 16, and Aileen Rodrigues, a Democratic candidate for Hillsborough County Commission District 7. For more information, email sedwcinfo@gmail.com or call 813-503-8639.

## Volunteers Needed For Bloomingdale Oaks Subdivision

The trustees of the Bloomingdale Oaks Special Taxing District (STD) need new people to take care of its common areas. It is funded by contributions in the non-ad valorem taxes section of the property tax bill. Failure to get new volunteers will result in the dissolution of the STD. Contact Bill Grace at 813-310-0390 or email wgrace@aol.com for additional information.




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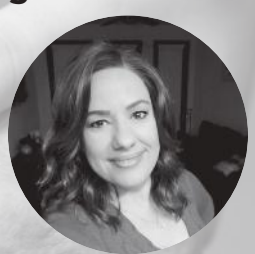


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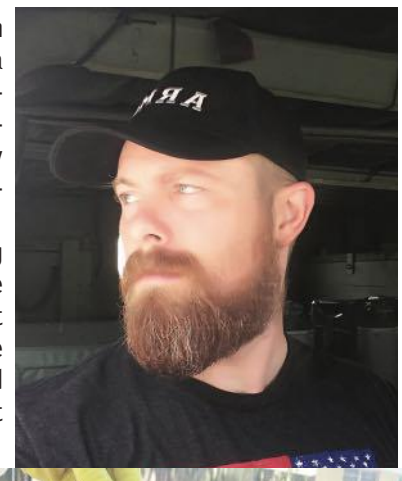
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# LOCAL RESIDENT TURNS HOBBY OF BEEKEEPING INTO A SMALL BUSINESS

*By Libby Hopkins*



Ryan Piatt of Brandon became interested in bees a few years ago after watching a pest control company remove a nest of yellow jacket bees from his mother's home.

"It was very interesting to watch," Piatt said. "The gentleman from the pest control company told me he was also a beekeeper, and we started talking about beekeeping."

That conversation led to Piatt becoming a beekeeper. He spent the next few years learning all he could about bees and keeping them.



"I read tons of books and watched many YouTube videos," Piatt said. "When I had the opportunity to buy a hive, I jumped on it."

From there, Piatt Homestead was born.

Beekeeping is a lot like farming. Some years are good and some years are not so good. Beekeeping offers environmental, economic, personal and health benefits, from pollination and honey production to stress reduction and educational opportunities. Bees are essential pollinators, supporting the growth of fruits, vegetables and wild plants. By keeping bees, you enhance local biodiversity and help maintain healthy ecosystems.

"I have 25 hives but lost a few due to weather conditions," Piatt said. "My goal is to have 40 hives and make beekeeping a full-time job for me and my family. I currently work in construction during the week and do my beekeeping on the weekends."

Piatt's beekeeping business provides services such as honeybee hive installation, honeybee hive removal, swarm rescue, pollination and honey extraction, and he offers honey, wax and of course bees.

"The thing I love most about my business is the conversations I get to have with my clients," Piatt said. "They are very interesting and I love to educate them on the in importance of bees."

Piatt hopes to continue to grow his beekeeping business and educate his clients about bees.

"There are so many health benefits from bees and their honey," Piatt said. "My hope is Piatt Homestead stands out as the kind of beekeeper people look for when they need responsible, humane solutions that preserve the hive, protect allergic household members and potentially allow someone else to care for the bees and harvest the honey."

If you are in need of his services, would like more information, or are interested in raising bees, contact Piatt at piatthomestead@gmail.com or call 813-898-3801.

# A COLORFUL TRANSITION: HOUSE OF COLOUR BEGINS NEW CHAPTER

*By Olivia Clark*

House of Colour Lithia, a business known for helping clients discover confidence through personal color and style analysis, is entering a new chapter as ownership transitions from Barbara Ellis to her longtime associate, Megan Schici.



*House of Color owner Barbara Ellis celebrates the new local owner Megan Schici.*

Ellis, who first brought House of Colour to the Tampa Bay area after experiencing her own transformation through color analysis, said the journey has always been about more than style.

"I had my color analysis done and it was life-changing information to have," said Ellis. "It made shopping and getting dressed so much easier. I knew I needed to bring the service to Tampa Bay."

Over the years, Ellis built a local following throughout Brandon. She said the most rewarding part of her experience has been the relationships formed and the transformations she witnessed.

"Meeting so many amazing people in our community who have come in for color or style sessions, hearing their stories and seeing their transformations as they apply what they've learned has been incredibly meaningful," said Ellis.

Schici's path to ownership began with her own House of Colour experience in 2021. After initially exploring franchise ownership, she later connected with Ellis at a networking event and joined as her associate.

"That was the day we met, and it truly changed the course of my journey," said Schici, new owner of House of Colour Lithia. "I was fortunate to become her associate, learning from her and working alongside her. An experience that prepared me for this next step into ownership."

"The transition has been totally seamless," said Ellis. "We've worked really well together these last three years."

Schici emphasized the importance of maintaining continuity while introducing her own perspective.

"Maintaining continuity starts with honoring the strong foundation that's already been built," said Schici. "At the same time, I believe growth comes from bringing your own perspective and strengths into the work."

Both owners expressed gratitude to their clients and the community.

"I would like to send a huge thank you to every person whose sat in my chair, referred their friends and family or supported the business," said Ellis. "You are in good hands with Megan."

For Schici, the transition represents a full-circle moment.

"This has been something I've hoped for since I first had my colors done." said Schici.

House of Colour Lithia is located in Lithia. For more, visit www.houseofcolour.com or call 773-909-0611










# TESSERA SENIOR COMMUNITY REIMAGINED AS AMBIANCE AT BRANDON

*Marie Gilmore*

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

Now known as Ambiance at Brandon, the community formerly operated as Tessera of Brandon and continues to offer assisted living and memory care services for seniors, including those living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Providence Senior Living is a private company, backed by senior housing developers, that functions as an owner/operator of senior living communities exclusively in Florida. Thanks to the new ownership, Ambiance at Brandon is now locally owned and managed. We believe senior care is meant to be hands-on and that every life we touch is a member of our family. That's why we carefully chose our team members for their passion and senior living backgrounds. Our team has more than 75 years of assisted living and memory care management experience combined, residents are known from the top down and our executives are integrated into daily operations. We are committed to serving residents in a manner that aligns with our Providence Senior Living Pillars: Love, Empowerment, Excellence and Purpose.

With new leadership in place, the goal is to blend enhanced amenities and updated programming with a resident-centered approach that prioritizes individual preferences and daily routines.

The transition reflects a broader investment in elevating both the environment and experience for residents and their families. Community leaders said the focus remains on creating a supportive, engaging atmosphere where residents can maintain independence while receiving personalized assistance when needed.

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

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

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

Located at 1320 Oakfield Dr., the Brandon community invites prospective residents and families to visit, meet staff, and explore whether the updated Ambiance lifestyle is the right fit.

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

# FIRE RESCUE LT. ALLEN RETIRES AFTER 34 YEARS OF SERVICE

*By Marie Gilmore*




*Retiring Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Lt. Levic Allen (center) is pictured with fellow firefighters as he completes his final day after a 34-year career in fire service.*

After more than three decades of service, Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Lt. Levic Allen is hanging up his gear and retiring after a 34-year career dedicated to protecting others.

Allen began his firefighting journey in Manatee County before spending the past 30 years serving in Hillsborough County. His final assignment was at Station 2 in Lithia, where he served as a lieutenant, helping protect families in Lithia and the more rural Keysville area.

Reflecting on his long career, Allen said it was always about people.

"The best part of the job is serving the public, and that's really what you get into the job for," he said. "The schedule is good, the people are awesome and they become an extended family."

Firefighters work demanding schedules, typically 24 hours on duty followed by 48 hours off, but Allen said the camaraderie and sense of purpose make it worthwhile. He emphasized that strong interpersonal skills are essential in the profession.

"You have to have people skills to do this job," Allen said. "Start as an EMT, get your fire certification and become a paramedic — that is the best way to get into this job."

Throughout his career, Allen experienced both routine calls and extraordinary moments. In 2005, he was part of the Tampa Bay Area Urban Search and Rescue Team, made up of members from multiple regional departments. The team was among the first to respond in Mississippi following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, providing critical aid in the aftermath of the historic storm.

Allen also noted that the job requires a commitment to lifelong learning.

"We are always learning, taking courses and advancing our knowledge throughout our career," he said.

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue is one of the largest and busiest departments in the state, responding to nearly 140,000 calls each year across 909 square miles. With more than 1,200 personnel and dozens of stations, the department provides a wide range of emergency services, from fire suppression to advanced life support and disaster response.

After a distinguished career marked by dedication, courage and compassion, Allen is looking forward to his next chapter. He and his wife plan to relocate to West Virginia, where he will begin a well-earned retirement.









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EXCELLENCE & ELEGANCE surround you at this magnificent, custom-built, 5,000-SF home in FishHawk's Kestrel Ridge! On a cul-de-sac half-acre in the security-gated enclave, the property features an impressive pool & spa lanai with a panoramic view of conservation woods & water. An outdoor kitchen & gas fireplace flank the heated pool on a travertine-tiled deck; triple pocket sliders open it all for great entertaining. Details are just as dazzling inside, of course: coffered ceilings, crown molding, columns & arches, gorgeous granite, diagonal-tile floors & backsplashes, decorative listello, raised-panel wood cabinets, walk-in wine closet & so much more. Offered for sale at $1,350,000.



THE SPARKLING STAR of this FishHawk home is the privacy-fenced pool, heated & newly resurfaced, welcoming you to a screened & super-sized lanai! For entertaining or simply relaxing, this backyard bonus is a big reason to buy. But beyond that obvious attraction are other advantages that make this 4-bed, 2-bath, 2020-SF Inland Vinoy design stand out from its neighbors: 2025 AC, 2023 roof, 2022 pool filter, replacement faucets & other fixtures, custom office furnishings built into the 4th bedroom, even an air-conditioned garage & a new storage shed at the end of an artificial-turf dog run. It's in the Tanager Ridge neighborhood, near Bevis Elementary, the Osprey Club & more! $525,000










Beyond that big front yard is a Florida pool home with more than you might think! Nearly 1 acre, privacy-fenced in back, pavered pool deck, 2 master suites among 4 bedrooms, 3 full baths, 2022 roof, money-saving well & septic, updated appliances, all in low-fee Shadow Run. $650,000



If you want & recognize quality upgrades beyond most in an upscale neighborhood, HERE is the home for you within wonderful Waterset! Inside & outside this Sandpiper by West Bay, you'll find improvements from a 400-SF screened lanai to $65,000 in casement hurricane-impact windows. $485,000



Better than when it was built! From new tile, LVP & epoxy floors to updated fans, fixtures, & other finishes, this thoroughly renovated townhome towers 4 stories above the Apollo Beach waterfront in the upscale boating colony of Sunset Bay. Get nearly 3,100 SF plus a tandem garage over 700 SF. $479,000

Pending sale in Boyette Springs! Overlooking a woodsy pond on 2/3 acre, a sports-style, saltwater pool awaits in a stone-pavered, screened & roof- sheltered pool deck. Updated kitchen, baths & other improvements in this 2,210-SF 5/3/3 a with pavered driveway & a screened garage door. $525,000



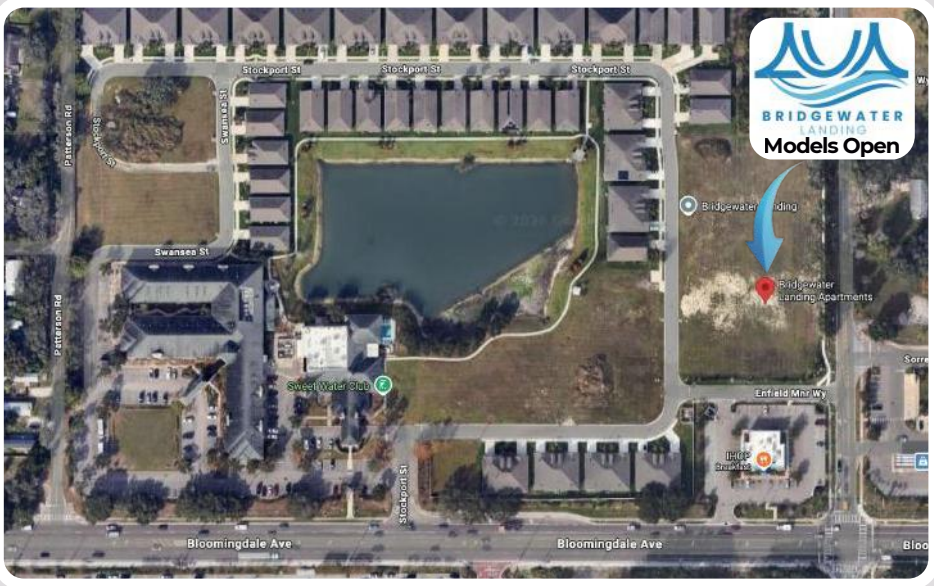
Pending sale in Triple Creek! Great price for a 1,900-SF 4/3/2 with a screened lanai, stone patio, & privacy-fenced view of woods. Resort-style community amenities include pools, playground parks, clubhouse & fitness centers, tennis & basketball courts, the Triple Creek Nature Preserve, etc. $350,000



Pending sale in Bloomingdale! With AC & roof new since 2023, plus other improvements from water heater & softener to stainless appliances & faux wood shutters, this 1,600-SF 3/2/2 is in Preston Woods, a non-through enclave close to the parks, golf course, schools, shops & so much more. $335,000








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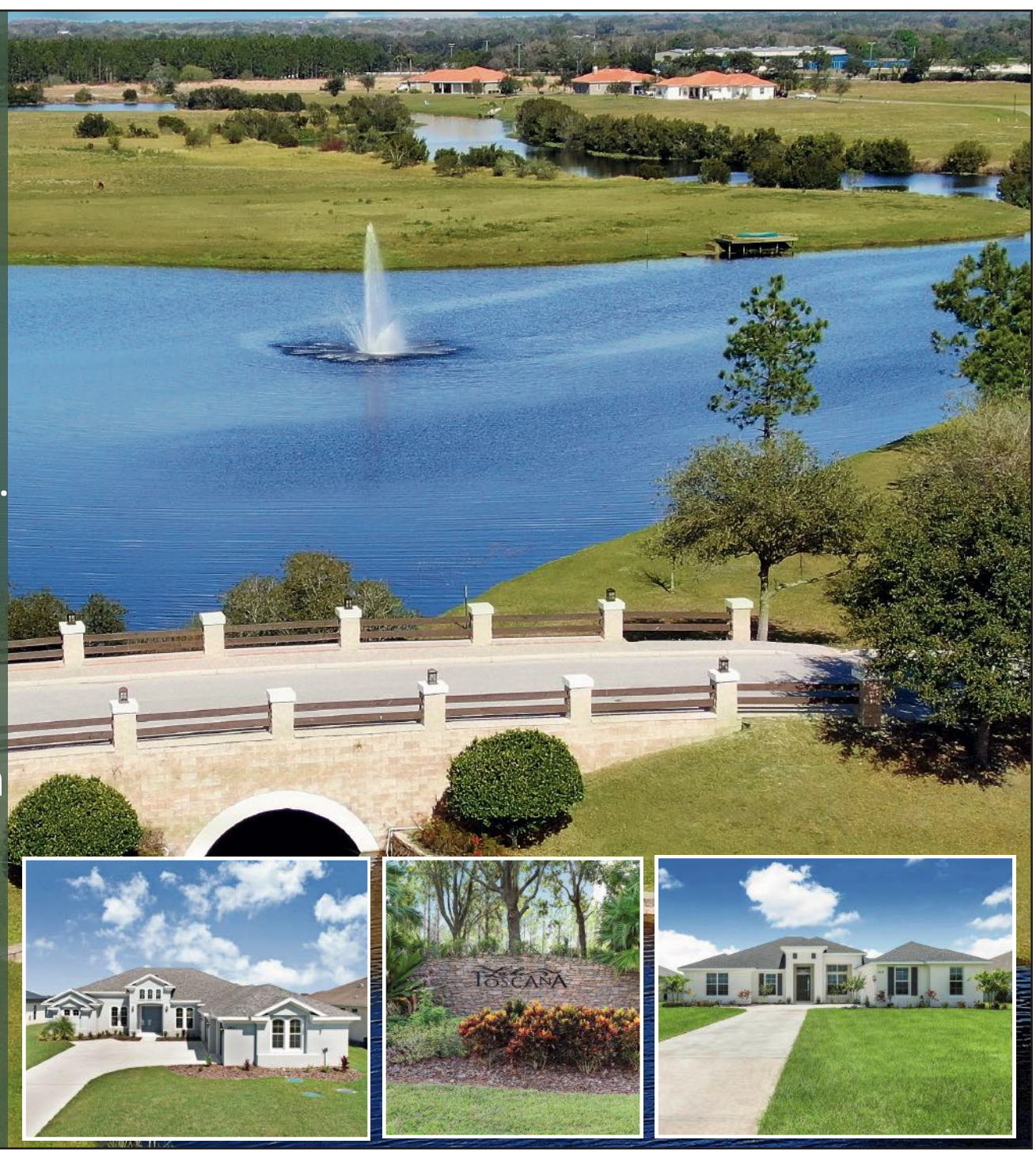
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Edited by: Jenny Bennett

# 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.

## 76 Fences Continues Expansion




76 FENCE has announced its largest multi-territory commitment in Florida to date: seven territories awarded to Tom Donnelly and Kate Donnelly. Tom Donnelly brings leadership and operations management experience, while Kate Donnelly contributes expertise in business administration and client relations. Together they are building a family-operated fencing business designed to scale across multiple territories.

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

## FishHawk Oral & Facial Surgery Accepting New Patients

FishHawk Oral & Facial Surgery is now open at 16132 Churchview Drive, Suite 101, Lithia, Florida, and is accepting new patients and referrals. The practice provides comprehensive oral and facial surgical care for the FishHawk community and surrounding areas.

Led by Travis Williams, DMD, MD, services include dental implants, wisdom tooth removal, extractions, bone grafting, impacted tooth exposure, oral pathology evaluation, treatment for jaw and TMJ concerns, facial trauma care, and surgical anesthesia and sedation options.

"We built this practice around one simple goal: make high-quality surgical care feel straightforward and supportive," said Dr. Williams. "Our team focuses on clear communication, comfort, and results patients can trust."

To request an appointment, call (813) 687-5257 or visit fishhawkofs.com.

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

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## Summer Athlete Training Program At Fitness Forge

This summer, Fitness Forge, located at 13456 Boyette Rd., in Riverview, is offering a discounted program for local student athletes ready to level up. It's training is built around real results—strength, size, speed, and durability. Athletes will follow a structured strength program using proven lifts like squats, bench press, and Romanian deadlifts to increase power and performance. For muscle growth, it tracks progress using Styku 3D body scans, giving athletes real data on their body composition throughout the summer.

Injury prevention is a priority. It incorporates mobility, flexibility, and stability training to keep athletes healthy and performing at a high level. On the indoor turf, athletes will train speed, agility, and explosiveness with drills that directly translate to sport.

Proper nutrition is also coached—what to eat before, during, and after competition.

The goal is simple: leave stronger, faster, and more prepared than ever.

Visit its website at www.fitnessforge2025.com for more information.



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

*By Emily Harper*



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

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

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

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

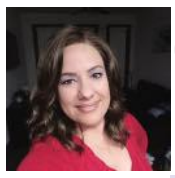
He started to coach in 2007, which opened up many more opportunities for him to represent his country. He became Saint Lucia's national team coach and eventually returned to the Olympic stage as a coach.

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

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

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

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



# CAN YOU REMOVE SOMEONE FROM YOUR WILL?

*By Laurie E. Ohall, Florida Board-certified Elder Law Attorney*




It's a question that comes up more often than you might think. Relationships change. Families experience conflict, estrangement or circumstances that make you reconsider who should inherit from your estate. If you're wondering whether you can remove someone from your will, the short answer is yes, but how you do it matters enormously.

You Have the Right To Change Your Mind

In Florida, you have the legal right to revise your will at any time while you are alive and mentally competent. That includes removing a beneficiary entirely, reducing what someone receives, or restructuring your estate plan to reflect your current wishes.

What you cannot do is simply cross out a name or write changes in the margins and call it done. Informal alterations like that are not legally valid and can create serious problems for your family down the road.

The Right Way To Remove Someone

The proper way to update your will is to execute a new will or a codicil, which is a formal amendment to an existing will. Your new document should clearly revoke prior versions to avoid any confusion about which version controls.

You may be surprised to learn that simply not mentioning someone in a new will isn't always enough — particularly when it comes to children. Florida law has specific protections for overlooked or 'pretermitted' heirs, meaning a child who isn't mentioned may still have a legal claim to a portion of your estate. Intentional exclusions need to be handled carefully and explicitly.

What About Spouses?

Removing a spouse is more complicated. Florida's elective share law gives a surviving spouse the right to claim a portion of your estate regardless of what your will says. And if you have a house in Florida, there are specific rules about who you can leave it to if you are married.

Don't Forget the Rest of Your Plan

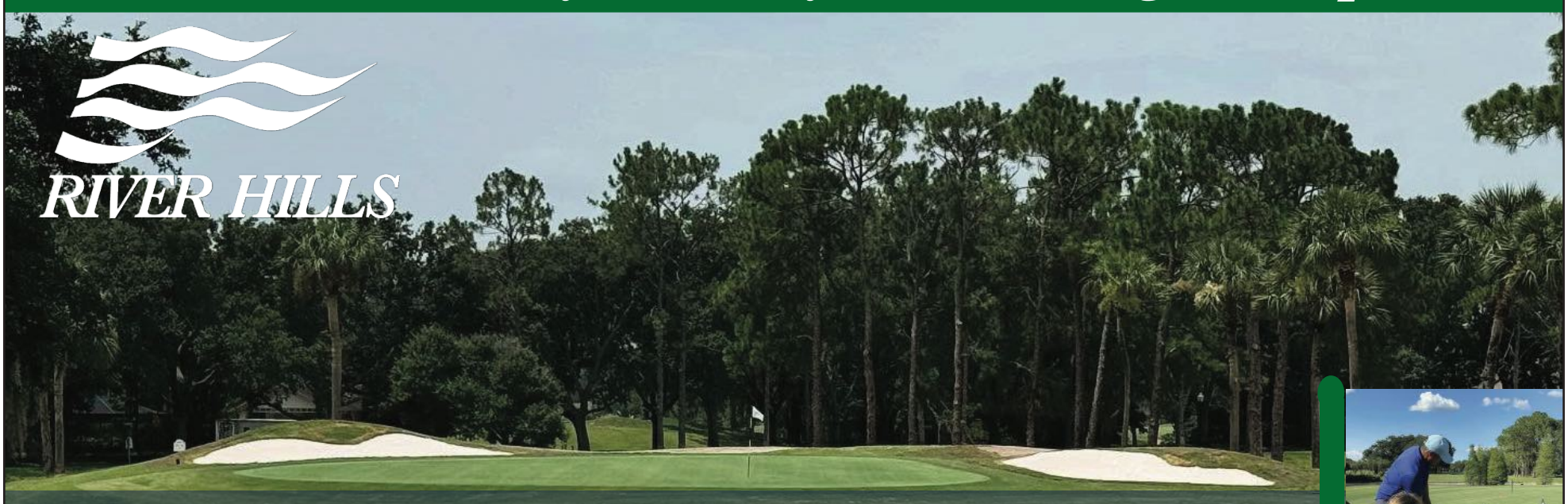
A will is only one piece of your estate plan. If you've named someone as a beneficiary on a life insurance policy, retirement account or transfer-on-death account, those designations pass outside of your will entirely. Updating your will without reviewing your beneficiary designations can leave assets to someone you intended to exclude.

If your relationships or circumstances have changed, your estate plan should reflect that.

*Laurie Ohall is a Florida board-certified elder law attorney practicing in Brandon, Florida. She has been practicing law for 30 years and her practice is focused on estate planning, elder law planning and probate. Ohall is licensed to practice law in Florida and Ohio.*


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# VALRICO FOUNDERS TABLE PROVIDES CONNECTION FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

*By Jane Owen*



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

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

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

"I didn't have a lot of expectations going into this. I went into this saying I want to connect with people, and I want a place where I can talk about my struggles — more than anything, because I was struggling at the time," Blackmon said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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# ROCK STEADY BOXING HELPS PARKINSON'S PATIENTS FIGHT BACK

*Staff Report*





A specialized fitness program designed for people living with Parkinson's disease offers people a chance to improve strength, balance and confidence through noncontact boxing exercises.

Rock Steady Boxing FishHawk, founded in 2017, uses training techniques inspired by professional boxers and adapts them for individuals with Parkinson's. Classes include stretching, running, jump rope, balance work, push-ups and guided boxing drills, all led by trained coaches. The program is open to men and women of all ages and ability levels.

"We are fortunate to have this program," said Kathy Glazewski, a NASM-certified personal trainer who completed Rock Steady Boxing's intensive training camp and is now certified to lead classes for individuals with Parkinson's disease.

Participants often report a wide range of benefits, including improved coordination, strength and overall fitness. Many also experience increased confidence, better posture, enhanced motor skills and a stronger sense of community through the supportive group environment.

The Rock Steady Boxing method was originally developed in Indianapolis, Indiana, over a seven-year period. In 2012, the organization launched a formal training camp to expand the program nationwide and internationally. Today, there are more than 800 affiliates worldwide. All Rock Steady Boxing coaches complete certification through the organization's headquarters in Indianapolis.

For Riverview resident Silvia Fabelo, the program has been life-changing. After noticing a tremor in her right foot, she sought medical advice and was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Her neurologist recommended Rock Steady Boxing.

"I went straight from the doctor's office to the program," Fabelo said. "I found a group of people supporting me and a network of information. I want to make sure everyone knows about this program."

Parkinson's disease affects an estimated 1-1.5 million Americans, with approximately 60,000 new cases diagnosed each year.

Rock Steady Boxing FishHawk classes are held at 3636 Erindale Dr., Ste. 103, in Valrico. For more information, visit the website at www.rocksteadyboxing.org/ or email fishhawk@rsbaffiliate.com.

# NEWSOME BOYS TRACK ATHLETES SET NEW RECORDS & HEAD TO STATES

*By Emily Harper*



The Newsome High School boys track and field team competed in the 2026 Vernon Korhn Hillsborough County Championship on April 8 at Freedom High School. The team had an outstanding performance, scoring over 100 points across multiple events and winning the title by more than 30 points over the runner-up.

First-year Coach Edward O'Grady, said, "It's a great win, and it validates all of our hard work this season. I could not be more proud of the boys. Thanks in large part to the superb coaching and leadership of my predecessor, Coach Brian Sears, we have a well-rounded team with talented athletes across all events."

New school records were set earlier this season when Carter Easley broke the school record in the 400-meter hurdles. Additionally, the 4x400-meter relay team also set a new school record, including Navian Metelus, Ben Freamon, Anthony Jones and Zach Donaldson.

"One of the great things about track and field is the fact that a young athlete may be entered in a large invitational and not finish near the top but still produce a big personal best and come away from the event with that indescribable feeling. As a coach, I get just as excited in those moments as in the winning ones," said O'Grady.

Newsome had athletes compete in almost every event with multiple competitors in each event. Three of these athletes placed first in their events, including Justin Belteau in pole vault, Easley in 400m hurdles and Blake Huff in both shot put and discus.

"I am very fortunate to have a solid group of talented and hardworking seniors that have really led the way, not only when it comes to athletic performance but also leadership," said O'Grady, complimenting the dedication of the seniors.

Because of their performance, the team will start their journey in what is referred to as the 'State Series.' First, they competed in the district championship, which took place on April 22 at Newsome High School. Athletes who advance from this championship will compete in the regional championship on Saturday, May 2, and then the state championships, if they continue to qualify, on Saturday, May 9, at the University of North Florida.




# SAFETY AND BOATING TIPS HIGHLIGHT SAFE BOATING WEEK IN RIVERVIEW

*Staff Report*




National Safe Boating Week returns from Saturday through Friday, May 16-22, marking the annual kickoff of the Safe Boating Campaign, a global effort encouraging boaters to enjoy the water responsibly. This week serves as a reminder for all boaters to refresh their safety skills and prepare for the upcoming season.

Flotilla 74, Brandon, will support the campaign with two local events at Williams Park, located at 9425 U.S. 41 S. in Riverview:

• Free Vessel Safety Checks on Sunday, May 17.

• Hillsborough County Marine Safety Event on Friday, May 22, 9 a.m.-12 Noon.

According to U.S. Coast Guard statistics, drowning accounts for three out of four recreational boating fatalities, and 87 percent of those who drowned were not wearing life jackets. Choosing the right life jacket — U.S. Coast Guard approved, activity-appropriate and properly fitted — is one of the simplest ways to stay safe on the water.

Top safety tips from the National Safe Boating Council:

• Take a boating safety course. Training options are available for all experience levels.

• Check your equipment. Schedule a free vessel safety check to ensure required gear is present and working.

• File a float plan. Share your itinerary, passenger list, vessel details and communication equipment with someone on shore.

• Wear a life jacket — every time. A stowed life jacket cannot save a life.

• Use an engine cut-off switch. It's the law and prevents runaway vessels if the operator falls overboard.

• Monitor the weather. Check forecasts before and during your trip.

• Stay aware. Know your surroundings, speed zones and navigation hazards.

• Never boat under the influence. Designate a sober skipper.

• Keep communication devices on hand. Carry more than one option that works when wet.

The Safe Boating Campaign is funded through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund and administered by the U.S. Coast Guard. Free and paid educational resources are available at https://safeboatingcampaign.com/.

The National Safe Boating Council, established in 1958, continues to lead national efforts in boating safety education and professional development. Learn more at www.safeboatingcouncil.org.

# GASWORX DISTRICT PLANS LIVE NATION MUSIC VENUE WITH SEATING FOR 4,300

*Staff Report*



KETTLER, a nationally recognized real estate investor, developer and property management company, recently announced plans to deliver a 4,300-capacity music venue within the Gasworx district. The venue will be operated by Live Nation and is designed to complement Tampa's growing live music ecosystem while honoring the unique culture, energy and historic character of Ybor City.

The planned midsize venue is slated to open in late 2028 and will provide an intimate setting capable of hosting a wide range of artists and performances, filling a gap in Tampa's live entertainment landscape. The venue will attract touring artists and strengthen the broader music scene across the Tampa Bay region. Located on North 15th Street near the future marketplace, the site is steps from the Seventh Avenue entertainment corridor, the Centro Ybor parking garage and a future TECO Streetcar stop along Channelside Drive.

"Ybor City has a distinct character and a long tradition of nightlife and live music," said James Nozar, president of development at KETTLER. "Our goal is to create a venue that carries that legacy forward by adding a new destination for residents, visitors and artists. It will bring a distinct atmosphere to the neighborhood and give people another reason to experience Ybor and stay longer."

"We're proud to partner with KETTLER to bring this venue to life," said Brittany Flores, Live Nation's Florida market president. "This project is a meaningful investment in Tampa and in the future of its music scene, growing the market and giving fans more of the shows they want close to home. We're building something that reflects the energy and history of Ybor City and helps grow Tampa as a destination for live music."

As a long-term investment in the community, the venue is designed to strengthen the local economy and support continued growth. The venue is projected to generate $80 million in annual economic impact while drawing visitors who will support nearby restaurants, hotels and local businesses. It will also support approximately 440 jobs and is expected to contribute roughly $6 million each year in state and local tax revenue. The venue will also be available for private and corporate events.

"This investment reflects the strong momentum and confidence behind Tampa Bay's economy," said Craig J. Richard, president and CEO of the Tampa Bay Economic Development Council.

Upon completion, Gasworx will deliver approximately 5,000 new residences, over 500,000 square feet of new trophy office space and 120,000 square feet of ground-floor retail, including a 28,000-square-foot marketplace opening in 2027 that will feature restaurants, market-style offerings and unique retail, along with a new 1-acre park as a central gathering space for residents and visitors.

Gasworx is a joint venture between KETTLER, local developer Darryl Shaw and international property company PPF Real Estate.

For more information on Gasworx and leasing, visit https://gasworx.com/.

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# TOURS RETURN TO THE YUENGLING BREWERY AFTER 8-YEAR HIATUS

*By Jane Owen*




After an eight-year pause, brewery tours are officially returning to the Yuengling Tampa Brewery. Bookings went live on March 15 for visitors to begin making reservations, and tours began on March 20. The experience offers guests a behind-the-scenes look at America's oldest brewery brewing beer inside Florida's oldest operating brewery.

The relaunch of tours gives beer lovers and history enthusiasts alike the opportunity to learn about the craftsmanship and tradition that define the Yuengling name. Brewed locally in Tampa for more than 26 years, the brand is rooted in the company's nearly 200-year legacy as a sixth-generation, family-owned and operated American brewery.

Originally constructed in 1958 by the Schlitz Brewing Company, the Tampa facility was one of the most advanced breweries of its time. Ownership later transferred to Stroh's Brewery before being purchased by Yuengling in 1999, making Florida the company's second home behind the breweries in Pottsville, Pennsylvania — and the oldest brewery in America. Today, the Yuengling Tampa Brewery continues the family brewing legacy, blending tradition with modern brewing technology to produce its iconic beers for the Southeast region.

The Yuengling Draft Haus & Kitchen opened on-site in Tampa in June 2023. Since then, the only public access to brewery tours was through the restaurant's monthly Eagle Series Beer Dinner Experiences — chef-curated, multicourse beer pairing dinners featuring Yuengling favorites, like Traditional Lager, alongside small-batch, limited-release Eagle Series beers. The return of regularly scheduled tours now makes the brewery experience accessible to a broader audience of visitors to the Draft Haus & Kitchen beyond these exclusive, ticketed events.

Tour Experience Details

Yuengling Tampa Brewery Tour highlights include: • An overview of Yuengling's almost 200-year heritage.

• Insight into Florida's oldest operating brewery.

• A guided behind-the-scenes look at the brewing process.

• Photo opportunities throughout the facility.

• Opportunity to taste the broader portfolio of Yuengling brands and special, limited-edition beers only available on-site.

Tours will be available on Fridays and Saturdays, with plans to expand availability in the future.

Tickets start at $10.95 per person, and tours are open to all ages. Guests ages 21 and up may upgrade their experience to include a guided beer flight tasting.

The Yuengling Tampa Brewery is located at 11109 N. 30th St. in Tampa. To book tickets, visit www.yuengling.com/tampa/. For more information, visit the website or call 813-488-6444.

# OVER 300 DOGS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO MEET AND ADOPT ON THE SPOT AT MEGA-ADOPTION EVENT

*Staff Report*



*Dogs and potential adopters connected at last year's mega-adoption event in Plant City.*

Canine lovers, mark your calendars. From Sunday through Tuesday, May 17-19, the Florida Strawberry Festival Fairgrounds will transform into a haven for dog enthusiasts as nine county and municipal shelters converge for a mega-adoption event.

Spanning the Tampa Bay region, participating shelters from Pasco, Polk, Sumter, Orange, Manatee, Pinellas, Marion and Hillsborough counties will bring forth a diverse selection of over 300 adoption-ready dogs each day. All available dogs will be vaccinated, spayed/neutered and microchipped, with all associated fees waived, thanks to the support of the Pet Resources Foundation, the Team Godwin Foundation, Friends of Animals Services - Pasco County, Orange County Animal Services and the Florida Strawberry Festival.

The Grimes Family Agricultural Center, located at 2508 W. Oak Ave. in Plant City, will play host to this heartwarming event, welcoming visitors from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Friday through Sunday. However, to ensure adequate preparation and staffing, the Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center, located at 440 N. Falkenburg Rd. in Tampa, will be closed to the public on Thursday and will offer limited services on Friday and Saturday.

The event couldn't come at a more crucial time. Shelters across the nation are grappling with record-breaking numbers of homeless dogs, and Hillsborough County is no exception. Currently, the Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center is operating at about 140 percent of its dog capacity, with some canines residing there for over 100 days.

The mega-adoption event not only presents an opportunity for families to find their newest four-legged friends, but it also underscores the importance of adopting or fostering shelter dogs. Every adoption not only saves a life but also opens up space for another dog in need.

So, if you've been considering expanding your family with a furry friend, head down to the Florida Strawberry Festival Fairgrounds. Your future best friend might just be waiting for you there.

To browse a full list of available PRC pets, visit the PRC online kennel at https://hcfl.gov/.

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# TIPS FOR STRESS-FREE TRIPS WITH AUTISTIC CHILDREN AND ADULTS



As we head into the warmer months, many families start thinking about vacations, staycations and simply getting out to enjoy life a little more. For families like ours, traveling with an autistic loved one can feel overwhelming at times. But I want to encourage you to travel, make memories and truly enjoy the experience.

The key is preparation ... and a little flexibility.

Start with what you know works best for your loved one. Familiar items can make a big difference. Pack their favorite snacks, comfort items like blankets or toys and anything that helps regulate or calm them. If your child or adult thrives on routine, try to keep parts of that routine consistent, even while away.

Think ahead about your environment. If you're staying in a hotel, request a quieter room. If you're going somewhere new, look at photos online or talk through the experience ahead of time so it feels more predictable.

Plan your days, but don't overplan them.

Build in breaks. Allow time to rest. Know that not everything will go exactly as planned, and that's OK. Some of our best memories have come from the moments we didn't expect.

One thing that has helped our family is having a 'backup plan.' If something becomes overwhelming, we pivot. Maybe that means stepping outside, taking a car break or even calling it a day early. Success doesn't mean doing everything; it means everyone feeling safe and supported.

And let's be honest, there may be moments. Loud moments. Uncomfortable moments. Moments where you feel like all eyes are on you. I've been there. Take a breath. Give yourself grace. You are doing your best, and that is more than enough.

Most importantly, don't let fear stop you from living life.

Our families deserve joy. Our loved ones deserve experiences. And we, as parents and caregivers, deserve to make memories alongside them.

If you're looking for support, resources or community connection along the way, there are organizations like Experienced Autism Alliance here to help families navigate the journey. Learn more at https://autismalliancefl.org/.

So, whether it's a big trip, a weekend getaway or just a day out in your own community, go for it. Prepare, stay flexible and embrace the journey.




# HURRICANE AWARENESS: PREPARE AND STAY SAFE



Hurricanes are powerful and destructive natural disasters that can cause significant damage to communities, infrastructure and the environment. Understanding hurricanes, how they form, their potential impacts and the importance of preparedness can help reduce the risks they pose to individuals and communities.

The Dangers of Hurricanes

While hurricanes are known for their strong winds, they can cause a variety of dangerous effects:

1. Strong Winds: Winds can cause buildings to collapse, trees to fall and power lines to snap, as well as flying debris.

2. Flooding: Heavy rainfall can lead to flash flooding and river flooding, submerging roads, homes and infrastructure.

3. Storm Surges: A storm surge occurs when strong winds push seawater onto the land, causing coastal flooding and damage, often the most deadly aspect.

4. Tornadoes: Hurricanes can spawn tornadoes, which can further increase damage and risk.

5. Power Outages: Power can be out for up to seven days.

6. Food Shortages: With the lack of power, stores are closed, refrigerators no longer work and transportation of food becomes difficult.

Preparing for a Hurricane

Proper preparation can save lives and reduce property damage. The SouthShore Disaster Council is hosting two hurricane preparedness symposiums, one on Saturday, May 30, at 10:30 a.m. at Calvery Church, located at 1250 E. College Ave. in Ruskin, and the other on Thursday, June 11, at 10:30 a.m. at Sun City Center United Methodist Church, located at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center.

Please attend one of these informative presentations, which will include HCFR, HCSO, local utilities and other catastrophe and disaster preparation and recovery resources. Learn your evaluation zone, how to prepare your home, how to deal with evacuations and how to shelter in place.

Conclusion

Hurricanes are among the most powerful and destructive natural disasters, but with proper awareness, preparation, and action, the risk they pose can be minimized. Educate yourself and make a plan.

# Christian Voice



## Grace Notes

*Rooting for the Underdog*
*By Debora Coty*

"Behold, the winter is past... The flowers have already appeared in the land... and the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance" (Song of Solomon 2:11-13 NASB).

Interest in flowers peaks in the springtime, when in most regions of our fair country, flowers pop up and burst forth with fragrant blooms that tickle our various fancies.

Here in Florida, though, the state named for its incredible flora and fauna, spring sprang back in February, and the blossoms are now struggling to keep from shriveling up to beef jerky status in the daily 90-degree heat.

Despite sprouting in a blast furnace, the amazing, wee crocus has recently captured my attention. No, not despite it, because of it.

These lovely delicate-appearing but stalwart-in-constitution little underdogs are not to be denied – they pop up everywhere. Like a surprise blessing from the Master Creator. A relative of the iris and the source of saffron (the priciest spice in the world), many survive in blazing sun-drenched places where wind or rain has blown their sturdy little seeds to reach out in propagation glory.

The determined crocus puts up with everything nature and mankind bombards upon it and keeps smiling.

Reminds me of another underdog who happens to be a real dog. My rescue pup Laz the Resurrection Dog, so named because his heart stopped beating for several minutes until he was miraculously resuscitated. Laz has tolerated a lot of blast furnace stuff during his lifetime, including abuse, abandonment, and yes, even death.

Yet Laz puts up with everything that comes at him and keeps smiling.

I want to be more like that. When a blast of life's heat hits me, I want to grow, not grouse. To weather it, not wither. To smile, not grimace. I want to keep striving, not roll over and play dead.

We all root for zealous underdogs and persevering crocuses, don't we? Rocky Balboa; Cinderella; the tortoise racing the hare; Ru-dy, Ru-dy! So I'm thinking that Papa God has a special place in His heart for underdogs who keep pressing on despite the oppressive heat blasting their way. Would that be you, my friend? What heat blasts have you endured lately?

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

## ENTERING MY 70S ON TWO WHEELS!




"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint," (Isaiah 40:31).

We are now almost one month into both my new decade (the 70s) and my 'shall I — shan't I?' dance with riding a bicycle. The 70s, of course, are inevitable; the biking is something I still have to decide.

Little by little I have been breaking myself in. This week, I skipped one day and then, Wednesday and Thursday, did my first 8-mile effort. I pushed it pretty hard but finished the ride convinced I have been making progress.

Friday morning, I agreed to an outing with 'the biker gang' and they showed up at Maul-Hall at 8:15 with the intention of getting me all the way to the village of Speed and back, 16 miles total.

What a beautiful morning. We set out at around 65 degrees, and it was 76 when we got back. Not just to speed but at speed, no less.

I was pleased with how well I maintained pace, and it proved to be a really enjoyable ride. We put in a slight scenic detour on the way home, and by the time we made it back to Saint Patrick Street we had logged in over 19 miles.

I believe what made this more doable was the encouragement from the guys who rode with me. Not just 'doable' but more like eagles' wings, running — riding — and not growing weary.

This point — this principle — has been a foundational pillar of my approach to teaching and encouraging men over the past several decades. The American 'manly men go it alone' ethos is not only impractical; it is counter to God's fundamental design and intention. We were created for community, for communion both with God and with one another.

I do not know if I will be a regular participant in some of these insanely demanding bicycle rides — but I do understand that the men I am getting to know and genuinely love here in Tarboro (at church, and in the community) help me to ride on eagles' wings in many ways.

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself," (Exodus 19:4). Tired ... and grateful. — DEREK



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













# GIRL SCOUTS LAUNCH HANDS-ON HEALTHCARE PATCH PROGRAM WITH HCA FLORIDA HEALTHCARE

*Staff Report*




*Girl Scouts from West Central Florida participate in hands-on simulation lab activities during the new Healthcare Patch Program at HCA Brandon.*

A new pilot program is giving Girl Scouts in West Central Florida a closer look at careers in health care through hands-on training, hospital tours and direct interactions with medical professionals.

Girl Scouts of West Central Florida has partnered with HCA Florida Healthcare to launch a Healthcare Patch Program designed to inspire middle and high school students to explore future careers in medicine and related fields. The program officially launched on April 3 with immersive learning experiences held at two Brandon locations.

Participants spent part of the day at the HCA Healthcare Center for Clinical Advancement, where students worked in simulation labs using lifelike mannequins and practiced clinical scenarios that mirrored real hospital situations. Demonstrations included cardiac care, respiratory treatment, and pediatric care, giving students a realistic sense of how health care teams respond in fast-paced environments.

The experience continued at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, where students were taken behind the scenes to observe hospital operations and meet doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. The goal was to introduce participants to the wide range of career pathways available in the medical field and show how different roles work together to deliver patient care.

Organizers said the program was made possible through a grant from the HCA Healthcare Foundation Healthier Tomorrow Fund, which supports initiatives aimed at building a stronger future health care workforce. The patch program is intended to spark early interest among students who may be considering health care as a career path, while also helping older students prepare for higher education and training programs.

Students heard from a diverse panel of professionals representing fields such as nursing, pharmacy, respiratory therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, first response, and health care supply chain management. Educational partners also included Hillsborough College and Galen College of Nursing.

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, a 479-bed acute care facility accredited by The Joint Commission, serves as one of the region's major health care providers.

Through the new patch program, organizers hope to continue building awareness and enthusiasm for health care careers while giving students meaningful, real-world exposure to the medical field at an early age.

The hospital is located at 119 Oakfield Dr. in Brandon. For more, visit the website at www.hcafloridabrandon.com.




**Notice Under Fictitious Name Law Pursuant to Section 865.09, Florida Statutes**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the undersigned, desiring to engage in business under the fictitious name of **Heartfelt Armory** located at **17908 Bledsoe Loop,** in **Hillsborough County,** in the city of **Lithia, FL**
**Shey-La Johnson** intends to register said name with the Division of Corporations of the Florida Department of State, Tallahassee, Florida
**Dated at Valrico, Florida this 20th day of April 2026**
**Owner: Shey-La Johnson**













## NOTICE OF ACTION FOR DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE

**CASE NO: 26-DR-002049**
**DIVISION B-P**
**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, FLORIDA**

To: Jean Max Antoine

YOUR ARE NOTIFED that an action of dissolution of marriage has been filed against you and you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on Gerana Thegenis, whose address is 13130 Garnet Raspberry Ave., Wimauma, FL 33598 on or before May 12, 2026 and file the original with the Clerk of this Court at 800 East Twiggs Street, Tampa, FL 33602, Room 101 before service on Petitioner or immediately thereafter. If you fail to do so, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

# WHY VALRICO AND LITHIA PET PARENTS ARE CHOOSING LOCAL, LICENSED, PET CARE

*By Samantha Evensen*




Let's paint a picture.

You've just booked a pet sitter through a popular gig app. It was easy, the reviews seemed fine and the profile photo showed someone smiling next to a golden retriever. You might meet that person, and they promise you the best. You head out of town. And then ... they don't show. You can't get a hold of them. You panic.

Sound familiar? If you're a pet parent in Valrico, Lithia or the surrounding communities, you've probably experienced or at least have heard about this exact scenario happening.

The pet care industry has exploded with gig-economy platforms promising convenience at the tap of a button, but convenience and accountability are not the same thing. Not even close.

Gig-based pet care apps operate like marketplaces. They connect pet owners with independent contractors who set their own hours, their own rates and often their own standards. The platform takes a cut. The sitter shows up (or doesn't). And when something goes wrong, the fine print in those terms of service tends to be where accountability quietly disappears.

To be fair, there are wonderful, caring individuals on those platforms. But 'wonderful' shouldn't be a gamble, especially when we're talking about an extension of your family.

Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care built its business, and its reputation, right in the Valrico and Lithia community. When you give it access to your home and trust it with your pets, it takes that seriously.

Its team members don't just show up, it shows up prepared, professional and backed by a company that stands behind every single visit. If someone on Walk the Walk's team has an emergency, it has local backup. If something unexpected happens with your pet, it has protocols, not panic.

"Samantha came over to meet them, and I immediately felt at peace. That feeling has only grown stronger with every interaction since. Sam and her entire team operate at the highest standard. Their communication is exceptional, the visit notes are thoughtful and thorough. ... They have been an absolute Godsend," said Danielle H., a Walk the Walk client.

When you hire a Valrico or Lithia-based business like Walk the Walk, your money stays in this community.

When you choose Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care, you're choosing a licensed, insured, locally rooted team that treats your pets like family..

Walk the Walk serves Valrico, Lithia and the surrounding communities. Visit it at www.walkthewalkppc.com to learn more or book your first visit today.

# PRESERVING BRANDON: GRASSROOTS EFFORT KEEPS HISTORY ALIVE

*Staff Report*

There is something special about a community that chooses to remember where it came from.

In a place like Brandon, a community that has grown rapidly, it can sometimes feel like history is being replaced faster than it can be preserved. What was once a small town founded in the 1800s has transformed into a vibrant area filled with neighborhoods, businesses and families.

But even as Brandon continues to grow, its story still lives all around us in the names of our streets, in historic homes and in the memories of longtime residents.

That is where Preserving Brandon began.

Nearly two years ago, what started as a simple observation turned into something much more meaningful. There was no central place for people to come together to share stories, learn about local history or support preservation efforts in our community. Rather than waiting for something to exist, a group of passionate residents came together to create it.

Preserving Brandon was born from that shared desire to connect, educate and celebrate the rich heritage of our community.

Since then, what began as a grassroots effort has grown into a vibrant movement. Today, we are proud to be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization bringing together neighbors, historians and community partners who share a common goal: ensuring that Brandon's history is not lost but honored and preserved for future generations.

Through community meetings, partnerships and events, we have created a space where stories are shared, connections are built and history comes to life. Whether it's highlighting historic landmarks, supporting local preservation initiatives or simply gathering to learn from one another, every effort helps strengthen our community.

This May marks our two-year anniversary, a milestone that belongs not just to our organization but also to the entire community that has supported and believed in this mission.

Preserving Brandon is, at its heart, about people. It is about honoring those who came before us, celebrating who we are today and ensuring that future generations will always have a place to look back and say, "This is where we came from."

And we are just getting started.

Everyone in the community can play a part. Please get in touch with us at preservingbrandon@gmail.com.

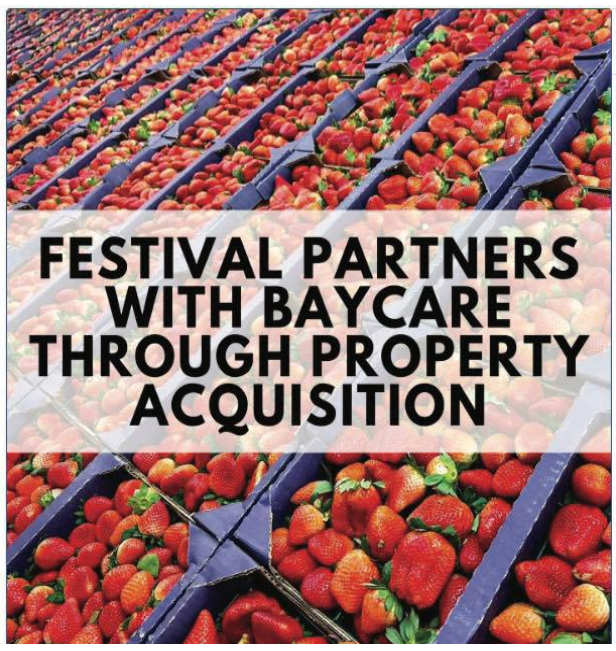
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# STRAWBERRY FEST AND BAYCARE INVEST IN FUTURE WITH PROPERTY PURCHASE

*Staff Report*




The Florida Strawberry Festival announced recently that its partnership with BayCare Health System has widened through the purchase of the property that was formerly home to South Florida Baptist Hospital, creating new opportunities for future festival growth and improved guest access.

The newly acquired property will play an important role in supporting the festival's long-term planning, particularly by providing additional parking and operational space for close to 600,000 guests who attend the event each year in Plant City.

Festival leadership said the expansion reflects a shared commitment between the festival and BayCare to continue investing in the community while preparing for the future of one of Florida's most recognized annual events.

"This is an exciting step forward for the Florida Strawberry Festival and for our partnership with BayCare," said President of the Florida Strawberry Festival Kyle Robinson. "The addition of this property helps us plan for the long-term growth of the festival and improve the experience for our guests. BayCare has been an incredible partner, from the multipurpose building showcased during the 2026 festival to now helping make this property acquisition possible. Together, we're investing in the future of the festival and the community we serve."

The expanded partnership builds on BayCare's ongoing support of the festival, including the 15,000-square-foot BayCare multipurpose building that debuted during the 2026 event. The facility provides a climate-controlled gathering space featuring restrooms, a showcase stage, seating areas, vendor space and a permanent strawberry shortcake location celebrating one of the festival's most beloved traditions.

Located just north of the Milton E. Hull Building and south of the Amscot Main Ticket Gate 1, the building was designed to serve both festival guests and the community year-round as a flexible venue for receptions, corporate events, trade shows, competitions and other gatherings. Festival leaders said the property purchase and facility improvements represent a continued investment in ensuring the festival can accommodate growing attendance while maintaining a welcoming and accessible experience for guests.

# MAKING A MORE WATER-WISE FLORIDA DURING WATER CONSERVATION MONTH

*By Tal Coley, FNGLA*



April is Water Conservation Month in Florida, a time to reflect on one of our state's most valuable — and most vulnerable — resources.

Water defines Florida. It shapes our environment, fuels our economy and sustains our quality of life. From our world-renowned springs to our coastlines, water is at the heart of what makes this state special. But it is not limitless.

Right now, much of Florida is experiencing drought conditions. The Southwest Florida Water Management District announced that Citrus, DeSoto, Hardee, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota and Sumter counties, as well as portions of Charlotte, Highlands and Lake counties, are under Phase III extreme water restrictions.

The restrictions include once-a-week lawn watering, tighter irrigation hours and other mandates for car washing and aesthetic fountains.

The good news is that Floridians have more tools than ever to be part of the solution.

Outdoor water use presents one of the greatest opportunities for impact. In many households, irrigation systems account for a significant portion of total water use. During times of drought, even small changes in how we manage our landscapes can make a meaningful difference.

That's where expertise matters.

Florida's irrigation specialists, landscape architects and others trained and experienced in smart irrigation are uniquely equipped to help property owners navigate these challenges.

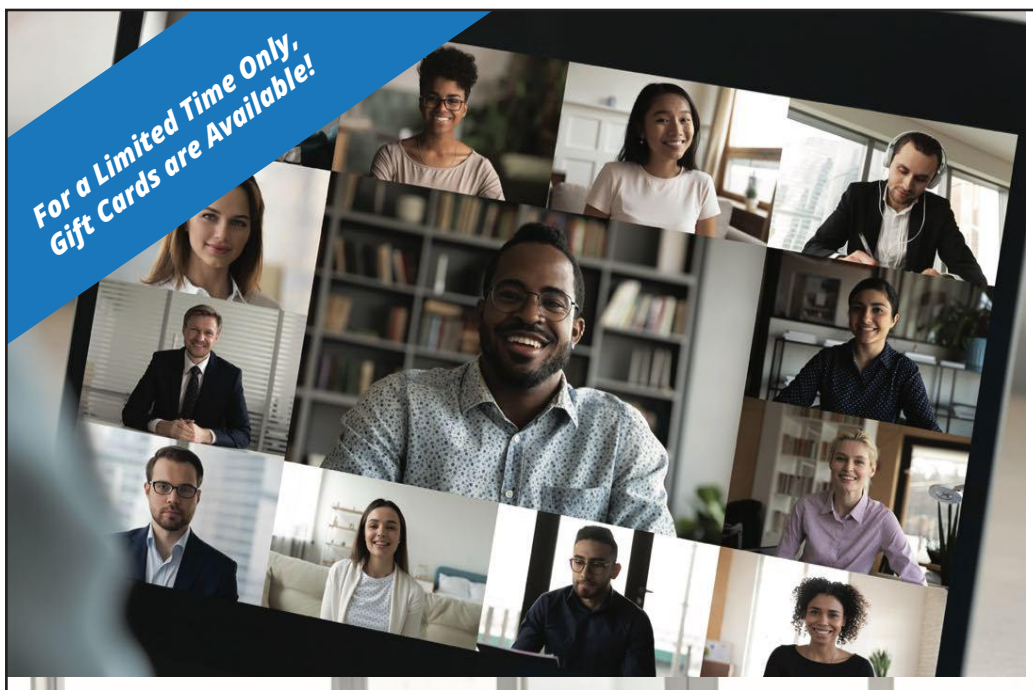
The principle of 'right plant, right place' is a proven approach to building landscapes that thrive in Florida's climate, even under water restrictions. Drought-tolerant plants, proper soil preparation and thoughtful design can significantly reduce the need for supplemental irrigation.

Technology also plays a critical role. Smart irrigation systems, including those that respond to weather conditions or soil moisture levels, ensure that landscapes receive only the water they actually need. These systems not only conserve water but also help homeowners and businesses reduce utility costs over time.

Horticulture professionals stay on top of trends and seek out education, training and certifications to help Floridians conserve water. They are aware of programs like Florida Water Star, a voluntary certification program for homes and commercial buildings that promotes water efficiency both indoors and outdoors. It sets standards for features like plumbing fixtures, appliances, landscape design and irrigation systems to reduce water use.

Water conservation is not just about responding to drought but also about preparing for the future. Growers are cultivating resilient plant varieties, and landscapers are implementing efficient designs.

This Water Conservation Month, every Floridian is encouraged to take a closer look at how water is used. Small, informed decisions innovation can collectively make a significant impact.




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