

See Our Ad On Page 34

VALRICO
Osprey OBSERVER
YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

November 2026
Volume 23, Issue 11

24 YEARS Osprey OBSERVER POSITIVE NEWS

Ph: 813-657-2418



See Page 18

CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS

MAKE-A-WISH HELPS VALRICO TEEN STEP INTO NFL BROADCASTING BOOTH

By Marie Gilmore

A Valrico teenager whose heart condition forced him to give up competitive sports recently found a new way to stay close to the games he loves when Make-A-Wish Southern Florida helped make his dream come true.



Valrico's Justin Pogorzala, 15, met his broadcasting hero, CBS Sports announcer Kevin Harlan, as part of a Make-A-Wish Southern Florida experience.



Justin Pogorzala, 15, requires an implantable cardiac defibrillator to protect against sudden cardiac arrest. Before his diagnosis changed his plans, Justin was a promising young athlete. He has since channeled his passion for sports into a new goal — becoming a play-by-play broadcaster.

His broadcasting hero is CBS Sports announcer Kevin Harlan, and Justin's wish was to meet Harlan and experience what it is like to work behind the scenes of an NFL broadcast.

That wish became a multi-day VIP experience in South Florida when the Kansas City Chiefs faced the Miami Dolphins at Hard Rock Stadium.

Justin not only met Harlan but spent time with the veteran broadcaster, learning about his career and getting an insider's perspective on how a professional NFL broadcast comes together.

The two quickly connected over their shared love of sports. Harlan offered Justin career advice and was impressed by the teenager's knowledge of the game and his voice, telling him he sees a promising future for him in broadcasting.

Justin also had the opportunity to wear a headset and sit in the broadcast booth during the game, giving him a firsthand look at the action from the perspective of the announcers.

The experience extended well beyond the broadcast booth. Justin met players on the field, watched as Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes was interviewed and received team gear and memorabilia.

His family was also treated to a memorable experience, arriving at and leaving the stadium in a chauffeur-driven limousine.

The wish was made possible through a collaborative effort involving CBS, the NFL, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Miami Dolphins, all of which helped create a behind-the-scenes experience Justin and his family will remember.

For Justin, the opportunity provided more than a chance to meet a sports broadcasting idol. It offered encouragement and a glimpse into a possible future after his health challenges forced him to leave competitive athletics.

Make-A-Wish Southern Florida provided photos and video from Justin's experience. Materials are credited to Make-A-Wish Southern Florida.

NEW GREASE MONKEY BRINGS CONVENIENT AUTO CARE TO VALRICO

By Teri Perkins



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Joe and Melissa Canfield and the entire Grease Monkey – Valrico team on their grand opening and wishes them continued success as they become an integral part of the local business community.

Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC), in partnership with the Valrico Fishhawk Chamber of Commerce, proudly celebrated the grand opening of Grease Monkey – Valrico with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in October. Chamber members, ambassadors, community leaders and guests gathered to welcome the new business and show their support for owners Joe and Melissa Canfield.



BRCC President Amber Aaron welcomed attendees and thanked everyone for coming together to celebrate this exciting addition to the Valrico business community. Aaron then invited Joe and Melissa to share a few words about their business and their enthusiasm for serving local residents.

Grease Monkey – Valrico is a family-owned and operated automotive maintenance center offering a convenient, stay-in-your-car service experience designed to make routine vehicle maintenance simple and stress-free. The business provides quality oil changes and a variety of essential automotive services, including battery replacements, wiper blades, filters, fluid services and multipoint vehicle inspections.

Conveniently located on Lithia Pinecrest Road, Grease Monkey – Valrico is committed to delivering quality service while building strong, lasting relationships with customers throughout the community. As local business owners, Joe and Melissa are proud to invest in the Valrico area and look forward to serving their neighbors for years to come.

During the celebration, guests had the opportunity to tour the new facility, meet the Grease Monkey team, enjoy refreshments, participate in raffles and network with fellow chamber members and community representatives.

Following the official ribbon cutting, BRCC Honorary Mayor and Ambassador Abe Agosto presented a special proclamation declaring October 16, as Grease Monkey – Valrico Day, recognizing the business' grand opening and its commitment to serving the community.

The joint ribbon-cutting ceremony with the Valrico Fishhawk Chamber of Commerce highlighted the spirit of collaboration between local business organizations and their shared commitment to supporting economic growth, entrepreneurship and business success throughout the region.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Joe, Melissa and the entire Grease Monkey – Valrico team on their grand opening and wishes them continued success as they become an integral part of the local business community.

Grease Monkey – Valrico is located at 3618 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico, visit www.greasemonkey.com/locations/fl/valrico/.

IN THIS ISSUE:

TREE GRANTS.. .....PG 3
FLORIDA ADVENTURE BOOK...PG 7
FRIENDSGIVING.....PG 16
WWII CONFERENCE.....PG 22
EYE ON BUSINESS.....PG 34

PRSTD STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MANASOTA, FL
PERMIT #1456

ECRWSS EDDM
Postal Customer

Osprey Observer
2109 Lithia Pinecrest Rd.
Valrico, FL 33596



Patti Burnett, founder and owner of PattiCakes Custom Cakes in Brandon, combines her love of baking with a passion for giving back, supporting local schools, teachers and charitable organizations through her custom cakes and cookies. See Page 4 for full story.

give thanks.
bring something sweet.
(be everyone's favorite guest!)

Skip the flowers that fade.
Fresh fruit arrangements and chocolate-dipped treats to impress!

Call to Order: 656-500-6505

Edible Arrangements Valrico
3455 Lithia Pinecrest Rd
Valrico, FL 33596

Pickup & Delivery available!

Order in minutes – scan to shop!

Delivery available to Valrico, Brandon, Riverview, Ruskin, Plant City, Lakeland, Winter Haven & surrounding areas!

Offer valid 11/1/26 - 11/27/26 only at Edible Valrico. Dates subject to change. Cannot be combined with other offers. ©2026 Edible IP, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Edible, Edible Arrangements®, and the Fruit Basket Logo are registered trademarks of Edible IP, LLC.



The Home Team for Healthy Smiles!

Happy Thanksgiving

BRIDGES DENTAL
LAURA COYLE BRIDGES, D.M.D.

4316 New River Hills Parkway
Valrico, FL 33596

813-654-3399

www.bridgesdental.com



NEW PATIENT SPECIAL $99
Exam • X-Rays • Healthy Mouth Cleaning
With this coupon. Not valid with use of our wellness plan or prior services. Expires 12/31/2026

CROWN SPECIAL $999 Ceramic Crown
(D2750 and D2950)
Includes Crown and Buildup (if necessary)
*With this coupon. Not valid with other offers or prior services. Treatment credit valid on procedures $1,000+. Expires 12/31/2026

Dr. Caroline Dau | Dr. Laura Bridges

Proudly accepting the following dental insurance providers:

- Aetna
- Ameritas
- Assurant PPO
- Cigna
- Connection Dental
- Blue Cross Blue Shield
- GEHA
- Delta Dental
- MetLife
- Guardian
- Principal
- Premier

The patient and any other person responsible for payment has a right to refuse to pay, cancel payment, or be reimbursed for payment for any other service, examination, or treatment that is performed as a result of and within 72 hours of responding to the advertisement for the free, discounted fee, or reduced fee service, examination, or treatment.

Happy Thanksgiving

REED & REED
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

813.438.5960
NEEDREED.COM
101 E. Lumsden Road
Brandon, FL 33511

Personal Injury Cases
FREE CONSULTATIONS
Auto Accidents * Slip and Fall
Boating Accidents * Dog Bites
Wrongful Death * Motorcycles

LIKE
Having a Lawyer in the
FAMILY

Proud Supporters of ECHO * Board of Directors



CAMPBELL'S DAIRYLAND CELEBRATES 41 YEARS WITH PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

By Marie Gilmore



Campbell's Dairyland of Brandon has been named a recipient of the prestigious Iconic Business Award from Transworld Business Advisors of Florida, recognizing the restaurant's 41-year history, strong community roots and continued legacy under new ownership.

Located at 200 S. Parsons Ave., Campbell's Dairyland has been a Brandon landmark since 1985, serving generations of families with its signature chili dogs, burgers, ice cream and more than 30 milkshake flavors. Beyond its menu, the restaurant has become a favorite gathering place where families and friends have created lasting memories.

The restaurant's history began when Boyd and Pam Campbell purchased a former ice cream business called Dairy Isle in 1985. They introduced their family's cherished chili recipe, which had been passed down through five generations. The business was renamed Campbell's Dairyland in 1993, and in 1998, the Campbells' daughters, Jill Paules and Leesa Lee, along with their husbands, took over operations.

The family business faced a significant challenge in 2002 when a devastating fire forced the restaurant to close for more than eight months. Its eventual reopening demonstrated the strong connection between Campbell's Dairyland and the Brandon community.

In 2026, the restaurant began a new chapter when Chris and Karrie Mueller, owners of Dairy Joy, acquired the business. With Dairy Joy's Florida roots dating back to 1958, the Muellers are committed to preserving Campbell's Dairyland's name, traditions and nostalgic charm while continuing its legacy for future generations.

"Campbell's Dairyland represents everything that makes small businesses so important to our communities," said Andy Cagnetta, founder of Transworld Business Advisors of Florida. He noted that the restaurant has been part of Brandon's fabric for 41 years, bringing families together and creating memories across generations.

Chris said receiving the award on behalf of the Campbell's team was an honor and a testament to the Campbell family's hard work and dedication.

"I consider Campbell's Dairyland the Brandon community's store," Chris said. "As the new caregiver of this iconic business, I'm looking forward to preserving the community's memories here and ensuring that Campbell's can be enjoyed by Brandon families for decades."

The Transworld Iconic Business Award recognizes businesses that have made lasting contributions to their communities and highlights how successful ownership transitions can preserve local institutions.

For more information, visit tworld.com/locations/florida.

COUNTY OFFERS NEIGHBORHOOD TREE GRANTS TO GROW LOCAL CANOPY

Staff Report



Hillsborough County UF/IFAS Extension Service is planting the seeds for greener, healthier neighborhoods with the Neighborhood Tree Grant Program. Community groups in unincorporated Hillsborough County can apply now for financial assistance for the purchase and installation of trees in residential neighborhoods.



The program's overall goal is to enhance community spaces, expand the tree canopy and improve the local environment. By reinvesting tree mitigation revenues into community projects, the county aims to preserve and diversify its urban forest while creating more sustainable and attractive neighborhoods for years to come.

The program is funded through the Hillsborough County Tree Trust Fund, which uses fees collected through tree mitigation requirements to support new tree planting projects throughout the community.

How To Apply

The application period is open until January 31, 2027. Applications will be reviewed from February through March 2027, with award recommendations finalized in April 2027. Grant recipients will be notified by April 30, 2027.

For more information on the application process and how to apply, visit the Neighborhood Tree Grant Program main page at https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/hillsborough/agriculture/urban-forestry/neighborhood-tree-grant/.

Project Timeline and Requirements

Approved tree planting projects can begin in May 2027 and must be completed by November 30, 2027. Grant recipients must submit a final planting report within 30 days of project completion and a one-year establishment report to document the continued health and growth of the planted trees.

About Hillsborough County

Established in 1834, Hillsborough County government provides essential services to a diverse and growing community under the leadership of a publicly elected, seven-member board of county commissioners. Services include water, solid waste and recycling, parks and recreation, public safety, infrastructure, pet resources, economic development, environmental stewardship and a wide range of community programs and public services. Hillsborough County services are paid for in part by property taxes. Learn more at https://hcfl.gov/propertytax.





HCPS FFA STUDENTS SHINE ON NATIONAL STAGE, BRINGING HOME TOP HONORS

Staff Report



Durant High School Floriculture Team – 2nd Place Jackson Sturgis, Sophia Brownell, Payton Flanagan and Ashlyn Demanovich.

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) celebrates outstanding achievements by students and FFA chapters recognized at the 99th National FFA Convention held from October 21-24 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

HCPS students demonstrated their knowledge, leadership and agricultural skills on the national stage, earning top finishes in competitive events, national chapter recognition and individual honors.

Among the district's top achievements, Durant High School's Floriculture Team earned second place nationally, while its Environmental and Natural Resources Team placed third in the nation.

"Seeing our students compete and succeed at the national level is a tremendous source of pride for our entire district," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our students, their FFA advisors and our agriculture educators who provide hands-on opportunities that build leadership, technical skills and confidence. Congratulations to all our students and chapters for representing Hillsborough County so well on the national stage."

National Recognitions

Armwood High School:

• Recognized as a 3-Star National Chapter.

Durant High School:

• Floriculture Team — second place.

Jackson Sturgis.Sophia Brownell, Payton Flanagan. Ashlyn Demanovich.

Environmental and Natural Resources Team — Third Place:

•Christeen Joseph, 10th Highest Individual.

•Jessie Parker.

•Jonathan Miller.

•Marlena Lott.

Newsome High School:

•Recognized as a 3-Star National Chapter.

Turkey Creek Middle School:

•Recognized as a 2-Star National Chapter.

These national honors showcase the strength of FFA and agricultural education opportunities across Hillsborough County Public Schools. Through these programs, students develop leadership, career and technical skills while gaining experiences that prepare them for success in college, careers and their communities. Learn more about agriculture education at Hillsborough County Public Schools at www.hillsboroughschools.org.

BAKER PATTI BURNETTE HAS A SWEET SPOT FOR GIVING BACK

By Libby Hopkins



Patti Burnett of Brandon is the founder and owner of PattiCakes Custom Cakes. She is a University of South Florida alumna, former elementary school teacher and proud mom of five amazing kids.

"My business started from a love of art and baking, initially by baking only for family and close friends," Burnett said. "People loved my work and shared it with their friends, and PattiCakes Custom Cakes was born."

Burnett has a servant's heart for her community and local teachers. She supports many local schools by providing cookies or cakes for their fundraisers, combining her love of baking with a desire to give back. As a former elementary school teacher, she understands the challenges educators face when they want to do something special for their students.

"Since I'm a former teacher, I know what it's like to want to do special things for your students," Burnett said. "This isn't always easy for teachers to do, so I want to do my best to help them when I can."

For Burnett, those contributions are more than sweet treats; they are a way to stay connected to education and support the teachers serving her community. Her willingness to help reflects the same personal spirit that shaped her business from the beginning, a love of creating something special for others.

Burnett was recently asked to create special cookies for the 100th anniversary of Bryan Elementary School in Plant City. The request offered her an opportunity to put her baking talents toward a celebration of the school's history. It also had a personal connection: the school's principal had been a faithful customer for years.

"The principal of Bryan Elementary has been a faithful customer over the years, so I wanted to do something special for the school's anniversary," Burnett said. "One hundred years is an amazing accomplishment for any school."

Creating cookies for the occasion brought together two parts of her life: her work as a baker and her appreciation for education. For Burnett, the anniversary was an opportunity to recognize a school's milestone while giving back to someone who had supported her business. The gesture reflected her desire to make something special for others, with a sweet contribution to a meaningful community celebration.

"I support a lot of local charities, like ECHO, the Angel Foundation and High 5, to name a few," Burnett said.

Just as she looks for ways to help teachers, she also makes room to support local charitable efforts.

To learn more about PattiCakes Custom Cakes or order some of Burnett's sweet treats, you can visit her website at https://patticakescustomcakes.square.site/.

THE GALLERY TAMPA

Resort-Style Senior Living

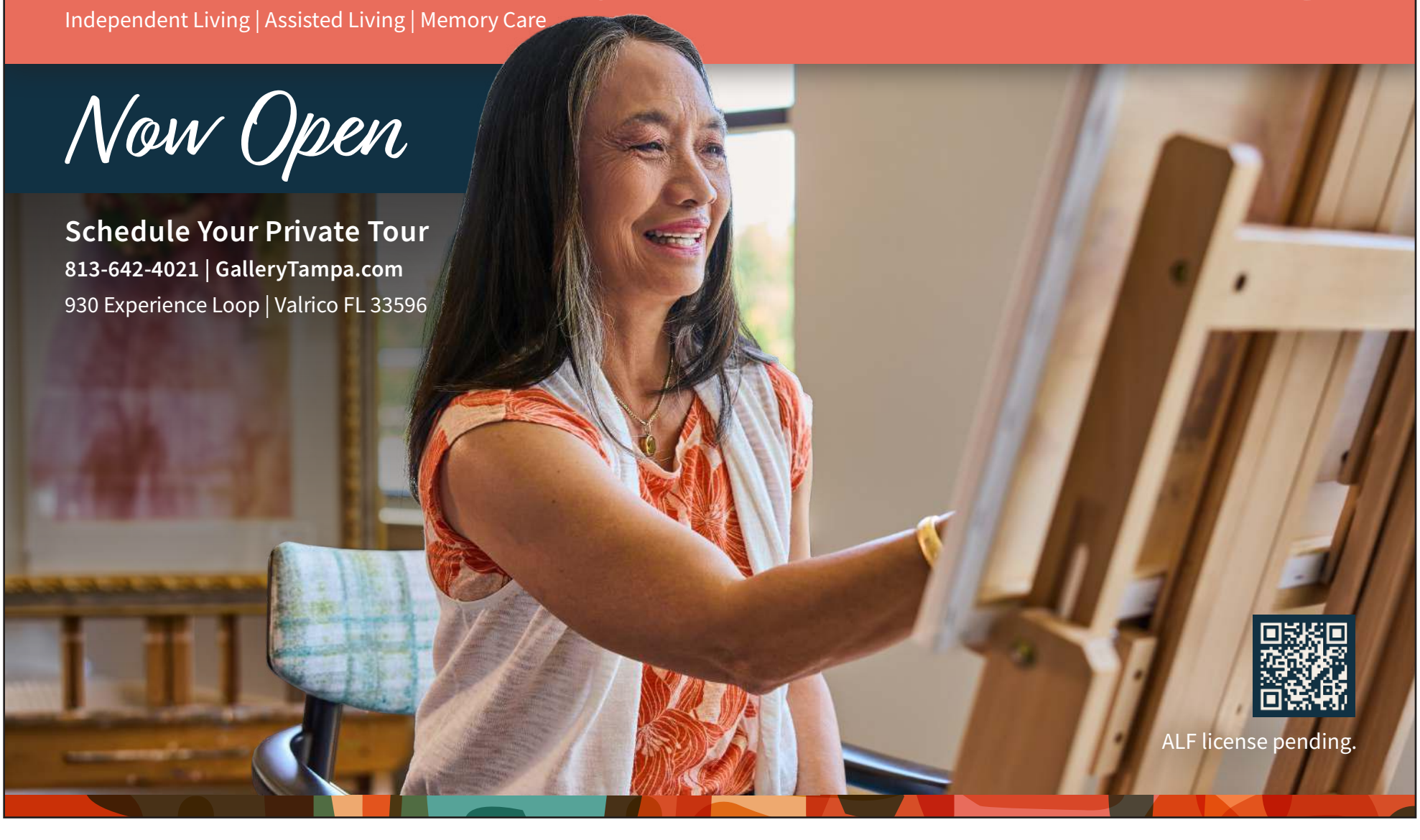
Independent Living | Assisted Living | Memory Care

Now Open

Schedule Your Private Tour

813-642-4021 | GalleryTampa.com

930 Experience Loop | Valrico FL 33596



ALF license pending.

NEW FLORIDA ADVENTURE BOOK FEATURES LOCAL TREASURES

By Kristen Hare

"I bet I've done everything in your book."

I hear this a lot. As a local journalist and author, I often meet people (locals and transplants) who are sure they've done it all. I've written five books about things to do in Tampa Bay and a book about old hotels, motels and inns. And I have not done it all.



Local author Kristen Hare.

But I do love to stump the folks who think they have. And the surest way to do that is to suggest something from our own corner of Tampa Bay.

My latest book, *100 Things to do in Florida Before You Die,* features some of my favorites, including sipping a cold beer and eating something delicious at The Beer Shed in Riverview.



I include the Showmen's Museum in Riverview. While many people know about the history of circus folks and Gibsonton, you get to go deeper into the lore, the histories and the men and women behind them at this museum dedicated to the people who worked behind and in front of the curtains at circuses, carnivals and traveling shows.

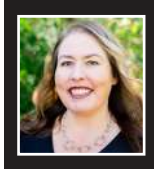
Of course, Plant City's strawberry shortcakes are famous, and Parkesdale Farm Market's sit at the top of the list. But have you tried the strawberry milkshake?

And finally, if I really want to surprise someone who's sure they've done it all, I ask them if they've seen the trees at Edward Medard Conservation Park. This reclaimed phosphate mine has been in all three editions of my book, *100 Things to do in Tampa Bay Before You Die;* it's in my new Florida book, and it's a treasure. In case you haven't yet been, bring $2 cash, take your second left onto Sacred Hills Drive, park facing the trees and head up the hill. There, you'll see the roots of trees exposed above ground thanks to decades of erosion. It's kind of magical. And when I tell the done-it-alls about that last one, it stumps them every time.

Want to tell me your favorites? I'd love to hear about them. Send me an email at oldfloridahotels@gmail.com, and if you include your mailing address, I'll send you an old Florida postcard too.

Osprey OBSERVER
YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS THROUGHOUT:
Bloomingdale/FishHawk • Riverview • Brandon/Winthrop • Valrico and NEW SouthShore (Apollo Beach/Ruskin/Wimauma)


MANAGING EDITOR
Marie Gilmore
813-657-2418
editor@ospreyobserver.com


DIRECTOR OF MEDIA OPERATIONS
Doug Gilmore
813-657-2418
doug@ospreyobserver.com


NEWS REPORTER
Taylor Wells
813-657-2418
twells@ospreyobserver.com


DELIVERY MANAGER
Bill Andrew
813-657-2418
bandrew@ospreyobserver.com


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
Libby Hopkins
813-657-2418
libby@ospreyobserver.com


CUSTOMER SERVICE
Jenny Bennett
813-657-2418
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

GRAPHICS MANAGER - **Kathi Hayes** - *khayes@ospreyobserver.com*

www.OspreyObserver.com

FOLLOW US:

BRCC BRANDON RIVERVIEW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE · GREATER SOUTHSHORE Chamber of Commerce · Riverview WOMAN'S Club · 100 Women Who Care Riverview/Fishhawk · VALRICO / FISHHAWK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ADVERTISING SALES TEAM


RIVERVIEW & SOUTHSHORE ADVERTISING
Melissa Hartmann
813-833-7470
mhartmann@ospreyobserver.com


BRANDON $ WINTHROP ADVERTISING
Jane Owen
541-405-5574
jowen@ospreyobserver.com


FISHHAWK & VALRICO ADVERTISING
CORPORATE/HOUSE ACCOUNTS
Kerrie Hoening
813-625-1527
kerrie@ospreyobserver.com

The Osprey Observer Has Moved To A NEW Location!!

Publishing Positive News Since 2001

116 E. Bloomingdale Ave, Brandon 33511 • (office) 813-657-2418

#1 BUG MUGGERS
SINCE 1973
TERMIDOR 10 YEAR GUARANTEE AGAINST SUBTERRANEAN TERMITES
FOR A FREE ESTIMATE
CALL (813)685-7711
BRANDON TERMITE & PEST CONTROL
MAIN OFFICE: 108 S. ST. CLOUD AVE, VALRICO
HOURS: 6AM - 6 PM
FAX (813)685-3607 | BRANDONPESTCONTROL@TAMPABAY.RR.COM
SERVING: CLEARWATER - TAMPA - ORLANDO - PLANT CITY

Gentle Touch Estate Sales LLC
Handling Your Treasures With a Gentle Touch
REASONS YOU SHOULD HAVE AN ESTATE SALE:
- Downsizing
- Moving Parents to Assisted Living
- Settling an Estate
- Moving into a new home.

UPCOMING SALES
November 20-21

Contact: Debbie Berg 813-812-0780 | debbie@gentletouchestatesales.com
www.gentletouchestatesales.com


Orange Blossom ORAL SURGERY
The Compassionate Oral Surgery Team
Your Wisdom Teeth and Dental Implant Experts
Our team listens to what matters to you, so you can feel assured at every step.
Two locations to serve you.


Dr. Arina Doroshenko, DDS, MD
13127 Kings Lake Dr #102, Gibsonton
(813) 677-0073
oboralsurgery.com

Dr. Esther Oh, DDS, MD
1402 Oakfield Dr, Brandon
(813) 796-5752
obosbrandon.com

LOCAL CEMETERIES HONOR VETERANS WITH WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

By Marie Gilmore



Local communities will come together on Saturday, December 19, for National Wreaths Across America Day, for which volunteers will gather at cemeteries across the country to remember and honor veterans by placing remembrance wreaths on their graves.

Two local locations participating in this year's program are Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell and Serenity Meadows Memorial Park, Funeral Home & Crematory in Riverview.

Wreaths Across America carries the year-round mission to "Remember, Honor and Teach," with volunteers coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies at thousands of locations across all 50 states, at sea and abroad. The national effort provides an opportunity for families, veterans' organizations, community groups and individuals to honor those who served.

At Florida National Cemetery, located at 6502 SW 102nd Ave., the National Wreaths Across America Day ceremony and wreath distribution will take place at 10 a.m. on December 19. The cemetery will also host a Friends & Family Day event on Saturday, December 12, giving community members an additional opportunity to learn more about the program and support the effort.

Community members can participate by sponsoring a wreath in honor of a veteran or volunteering during the wreath-laying event. Each sponsorship helps provide a wreath for a veteran's grave while supporting Wreaths Across America's mission of remembrance and education.

Serenity Meadows Memorial Park, Funeral Home & Crematory, located at 6919 Providence Rd., will also participate. The cemetery has 750 veteran graves and is working toward its goal of placing a wreath on every veteran's grave.

The ceremony at Serenity Meadows will begin at 10 a.m., with wreath placement immediately afterward. Volunteers will have the opportunity to participate in laying remembrance wreaths and saying the name of each veteran aloud, creating a personal tribute to those who served.

Serenity Meadows is accepting volunteers, and community members interested in participating can call 813-677-9494. Wreath sponsorships are $17.

National Wreaths Across America Day is more than a wreath-laying ceremony. It provides an opportunity for generations to come together, share stories of military service and ensure the sacrifices of veterans are remembered.

For more information about Wreaths Across America and opportunities to sponsor a wreath or volunteer, visit www.wreathsacrossamerica.org.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HIKING SPREE RETURNS FOR 11TH YEAR

By Marie Gilmore



Hillsborough County residents are invited to lace up their hiking shoes and explore the area's parks, preserves and natural spaces during the 11th Annual Hillsborough County Hiking Spree, taking place now through March 31, 2027.

The annual program encourages residents of all ages and fitness levels to get outside, stay active and discover the natural beauty found throughout Hillsborough County. Participants can choose from a variety of trails and experiences, making the Hiking Spree accessible to both experienced hikers and those who are new to the trails.

The Hiking Spree officially kicks off on Saturday, November 7, from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at Keystone Park and Recreation Center, located at 17928 Gunn Hwy. in Odessa. The free celebration will feature guided hikes, live presentations, interactive exhibitors, family-friendly activities and local food trucks.

No registration is required to attend the kickoff, providing an opportunity for returning hikers to reconnect with fellow trail enthusiasts while newcomers can learn more about the program and begin planning their Hiking Spree adventure.

To complete the Hiking Spree, participants must hike a minimum of eight designated trails, including at least one "choice" trail. Those who complete the requirements can earn rewards including an annual patch, a walking stick medallion or a bandana for their hiking companion.

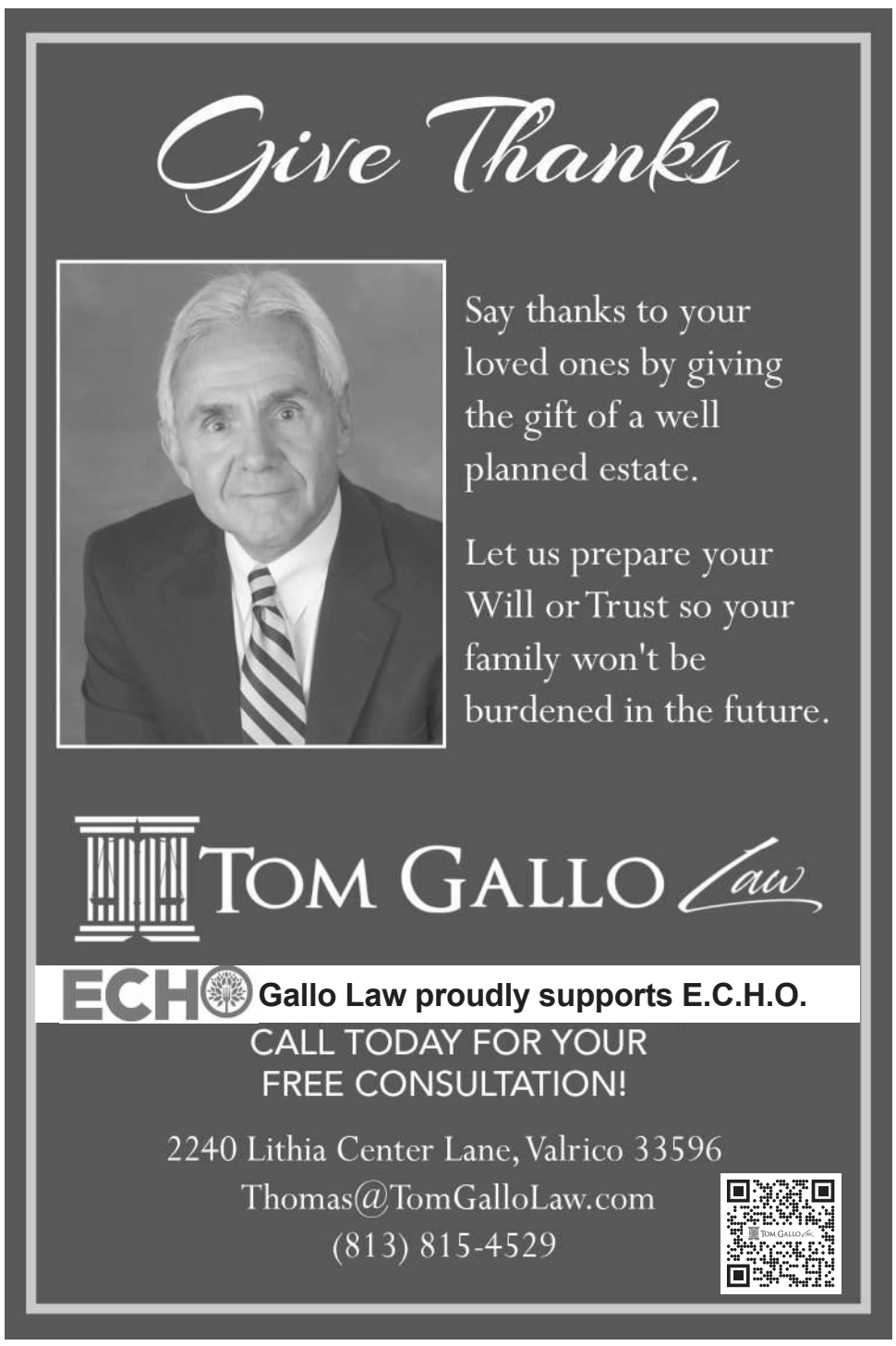
The Hiking Spree offers trails ranging from easy, paved pathways to more strenuous routes through natural areas. Neighborhood park and recreation center trails are generally shorter and paved, with many offering water, restrooms and other amenities. These trails are also a good starting point for people who are new to hiking.

Conservation park trails provide a more immersive nature experience, with many featuring primitive paths through habitats such as upland pine flatwoods, wetlands and forests. Nature preserve trails take hikers even farther into natural areas, with unpaved paths, rougher terrain and fewer amenities.

Local hiking opportunities featured in past Hiking Sprees have included FishHawk Creek Nature Preserve, Alderman's Ford and Rhodine Scrub Nature Preserve, giving residents in the eastern portion of the county opportunities to participate close to home.

Hikers are encouraged to bring a trail map, compass or GPS, plenty of water, appropriate shoes, sun protection, snacks and bug spray. Trail conditions can vary, so participants should select routes that match their experience and fitness level.

For more information, including trail locations, maps and reward details, visit the website at https://hcfl.gov/.







PREGNANCY CENTER OF PLANT CITY OFFERS PROGRAMMING FOR SOON TO BE FATHERS

By Libby Hopkins



The Fatherhood Education Program at the Pregnancy Care Center of Plant City is designed to equip expectant and current fathers with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to become a more engaged and responsible father.

The mission of the Pregnancy Care Center of Plant City (PCCPC) is to share God's compassion and provisions to those facing an unexpected pregnancy and to uphold the sanctity of human life. Originally opened in 1992, the Pregnancy Care Center of Plant City has served residents of Hillsborough and surrounding counties by helping thousands of families deliver healthier babies and make informed, healthy choices regarding their pregnancy. Services include pregnancy testing, wellness referrals, ultrasounds, prenatal health and parenting education classes, material assistance, support services for adoption planning, social service referrals, sexual risk avoidance education and referrals to counseling services.



With the growing need to ensure that fathers are involved in the life of their children, PCCPC implemented its Fatherhood Program.

"This program is designed to equip the fathers with pregnancy options counseling, prenatal and parenting education and to enhance the relationship with the mother," said PCCPC's fatherhood director, Mike Cross. "The PCCPC Fatherhood Program serves to advocate for fathers and equip them to grow and make life affirming decisions."

The goal of the Fatherhood Services Program is to offer compassion and support to help fathers to understand their role as father in the family. The heart of our ministry is family.

"We want families to not just survive but thrive, and we fully believe that our Fatherhood Program can be of great value in that quest," Cross said. "Our program equips fathers in the prenatal health of their partner and in parenting education and enhancing the relationship with mother and children."

The Fatherhood Education Program is designed to equip expectant and current fathers with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to become a more engaged and responsible father. The program addresses the practical and relational challenges fathers may experience as they navigate pregnancy, parenting, relationships, employment, financial responsibilities and family life. With individualized educational support and community referrals, participants will develop skills that promote healthy relationships, effective parenting, positive father-child engagement and greater family stability.

Another program PCCPC offers to expecting fathers is its Daddy Diaper Bags Program. "We've found that one way to get fathers excited about getting and staying involved in the Fatherhood Program is by offering Daddy Diaper Bags in our Baby Boutique," Cross said. "We're able to show the fathers that they have an opportunity to obtain a manly looking diaper bag. We also stock them with items for both the baby and dad." In addition to diapers and wipes in the bag for baby, PCCPC also puts in a dad ball cap, or some beef jerky, or some energy drink powder for him as well.

"Each one of these fully stocked Daddy Diaper Bags cost around $100 for the bag and contents," Cross said. "So, when you are thinking about your financial gift, please consider this as a gift to assist us in helping in fight for fatherhood involvement."

To learn more visit its website at www.plantcitypregnancycenter.org or call 813-759-0886. PCCPC is located at 304 N. Collins St. in Plant City.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

(never known to fail)

O Most beautiful flowers of Mount Carmel, fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my necessity. O Star of the Sea, help me and show me here you are my mother. O Holy Mary Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth, I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart, to succeed me in my necessity (make request). There are none that can withstand your power. O Mary conceived without sin pray for us who have recourse to thee (three times). Holy Mary I place this cause in your hands (three times).

Say this prayer for three consecutive days and then you must publish and it will be granted to you.

T.O.C.M.B.







HCA Photo Contest, Donations, Market & more...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

HCA Florida Special Photography Project

HCA Florida Brandon Hospital is inviting local high school student artists to submit their favorite digital images at 300dpi to kathleen.rogers2@hcahealthcare.com for a special photography project to provide featured art for the new emergency room serving FishHawk, Riverview and Bloomingdale, opening in 2027. Please include the photographer's name, high school and grade and the title of the image with each submission. Images should capture the heart of our community from local landmarks in Riverview, FishHawk and surrounding communities to stunning landscapes. The deadline for submissions is Friday, December 4.

Memory And More Health Awareness Event

The Vitality Respite Center of St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, located at 3315 S. Bryan Rd. in Brandon, will recognize Alzheimer's Awareness Month this November by hosting Memory and More, a community event designed to provide practical information, helpful resources and greater awareness of memory health. This free event will take place on Saturday, November 21, from 9-11 a.m.

Attendees will hear from three expert speakers who will address topics related to Alzheimer's. Free memory screenings will also be available from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (must register at www.saumc.net; space is limited), giving community members an opportunity to take a proactive step in understanding their cognitive health or the health of loved ones.

The Junior League Of Tampa Holiday Market

The Junior League of Tampa is hosting its 24th annual Holiday Gift Market at the Florida State Fairgrounds, located at 4800 U.S. 301 N. in Tampa, from Thursday through Sunday, November 12-15, to help fund another hundred years of impactful community projects.

The Holiday Gift Market, the league's largest fundraising event, is a Tampa tradition featuring specialty merchants. Shop for a cause and find something for everyone on your list with a wide variety of clothing and jewelry, holiday decor, home goods, food and children's items. The Junior League of Tampa commits 100 percent of the net proceeds from this event to funding its community projects and programs that impact more than 30,000 women, children and families in Hillsborough County every year.



Buckhorn enjoyed its neighborhood Halloween car parade on October 24.



Ed Ciesla and Jane Gilblair from Brandon Elks Lodge #2383 making a donation to Forgotten Angels.

Brandon Elks Lodge Supports Forgotten Angels With Generous Donation

Forgotten Angels recently received a generous donation from Brandon Elks Lodge #2383 in support of its mission to help young adults aging out of foster care. Ed Ciesla and Jane Gilblair visited the Forgotten Angels property to personally present a check to Cindy and David Tilley, recognizing the organization's work to provide young adults with a safe place to call home, guidance and opportunities to build successful, independent lives.

For more information about Forgotten Angels, visit its website at www.forgottenangelsflorida.org.

RED CALLIOPE GALLERY BRINGS NEW CABARET SHOW TO PLANT CITY

By Libby Hopkins



Red Calliope Gallery on Evers is home to Rouge Bar in Plant City, and it has become the go-to spot for great jazz music, uniquely crafted cocktails, over-the-top eats and entertainment.

"We are still a very new business, only a year and a half old, and really hope we can continue to grow in our community," said co-owner Rachel Dummeldinger. "We host wine-tasting events and keep a full weekly calendar of fun things for you to be a part of in our community."

The entertainment side of Red Calliope Gallery has grown by leaps and bounds over the last year. The Dummeldingers have produced two cabaret shows and are now beginning to host its third show, *A Table for Two Starring Slade*, in November.

"This show is wildly different as it has a very specific story line, whereas our others were more variety in nature," Dummeldinger said. "As in many theatrical productions, you often encounter a show within a show. ... Those are the sorts of fun nuggets you get with Table for Two."

Table for Two Starring Slade is an original work written and produced specifically for Red Calliope Gallery by its team of professionals. Its never-before-seen production debuts on Sunday, November 8, with two shows a night on the rest of the Sunday nights in November. Tickets are $65, with each seat being front row to the entertainment. Showtimes are 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

"Our show special is if you fill your table, purchasing four tickets, you receive a complimentary bottle of champagne," Dummeldinger said.

Ironically, Dummeldinger and her team have chosen not to disclose who the star of the show will be.

"We are billing our character as a guest," she said. "The show has several fun surprises, and we can't wait for our guests to be amazed."

Dummeldinger and her team have high hopes for their new cabaret show.

"Our show is created by artists, for artists, being brought to life in an art gallery," she said. "My hope is that our community comes out to support the arts. We also want people to view Red Calliope Gallery as the celebration of arts that it is. We host many events monthly that celebrate all these things, as well as fine wine-based events, art classes, live music, everything from jazz to cover bands."

If you would like to learn more about the events at Red Calliope Gallery on Evers and Rouge Bar, you can visit https://redcalliope.gallery/ or call 813-441-4227. Tickets for *A Table for Two Starring Slade* are also available on the website. Red Calliope Gallery on Evers and Rouge Bar is located at 109 S. Evers St. in Plant City.

COGGINS PLUMBING
CFC037149
813-643-7173
Licensed • Bonded • Insured
(813) 643-7173

- Plumbing Repairs
- Re-pipes
- Drain stoppages
- Home Additions
- Remodels
- Fixtures & Accessories
- Backflow Device Testing
- Water Softener Installation
- Water Heater Installation
- New Construction (Residential)
- New Construction (Commercial)

Find out more at our website:
WWW.COGGINSPLUMBING.COM
Proudly serving the Tampa Bay area for over 30 years.

15% OFF YOUR NEXT SERVICE CALL
Coupon Must Be Presented Prior to Service. Expires 12/15/26

$75 OFF NEW WATER HEATER PURCHASE & INSTALLATION
Coupon Must Be Presented Prior to Service. Expires 12/15/26

$350 OFF RESIDENTIAL REPIPES
Coupon Must Be Presented Prior to Service. Expires 12/15/26

Planning For Your Peace Of Mind



Estate Law 2 Go, PA
An in-person, virtual, mobile & notary service law firm

Simple & Complex Estate Planning
Medicaid • Special Needs Planning
Wills • Trusts • POAs • Deeds

Serving in Two Locations:
CARROLLWOOD
14502 N. Dale Mabry Hwy, Suite 200
Tampa, Florida 33618
BRANDON
1044 East Brandon Blvd
Brandon, FL 33511

Phone: 813-961-2802 | Fax: 877-841-9630
estatelaw2go.com | patricia@estatelaw2go.com

Patricia W Bradford, Esq.
ESTATE LAW 2 GO, P.A.

UNIQUE GIVING MACHINE OFFERS GIFTS FOR THOSE IN NEED

Staff Report

This holiday season, Tampa Bay residents are invited to share the joy of giving in a unique, hands-on way. Have you ever purchased warm meals, essential medical care, clothing for a child, or livestock for a family in need from a vending machine? From Monday, November 16, through Monday, December 7, visitors to Regency Square in Brandon can experience instant generosity through the Light the World Giving Machine.



Located in the central courtyard next to the AMC Theatre at Regency Square (2400-2478 W. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon), these vibrant red vending machines replace traditional snacks and sodas with tangible charitable items. Visitors use an interactive touchscreen to choose essential goods and services that benefit local nonprofit organizations and global humanitarian programs. An official launch event and ribbon-cutting ceremony will take place on Tuesday, November 17, at 11 a.m.

"We were very excited to be selected to participate in the Giving Machine. We were drawn to the concept because it offers our community a simple way to make a meaningful difference in a child's life. At Joshua House, children and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment need opportunities to feel safe, supported and hopeful about their future. We're grateful to be part of this effort, and excited for the care and generosity it will bring to the foster children we serve," said DeDe Grundel, executive director of Friends of Joshua House Foundation.

Every item purchased at the Light the World Giving Machine at Regency Square directly benefits one of four participating Tampa Bay area charities and two global charities: Joshua House, Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services, kidsPACK, Unicef (global), Coptic Orthodox Charities, CWS Global (global).

Items in the machine will range from $10-$100, making giving accessible for individuals and families of all ages. For those looking to maximize their community impact, the 777 Challenge allows donors to enter '777' on the Giving Machine touchscreen to purchase one of every available donation item for a total of $1,280, supporting every nonprofit represented in the machine.

One hundred percent of every donation made at the Giving Machine goes directly to the participating charities.The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints fully covers all operational and administrative costs as a gift to the community.

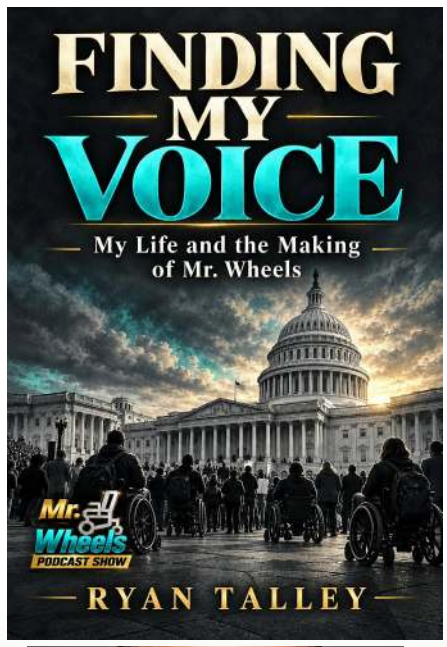
Since launching in 2017, the Light The World Giving Machine initiative has expanded to over 120 cities worldwide, raising more than $70 million in humanitarian aid and providing lifelines to hundreds of thousands of individuals worldwide.

To learn more about the Light The World Giving Machine and view event schedules, visit www.givingmachine.org or follow @GivingMachineFlorida on Instagram and Facebook.

VALRICO PODCASTER RYAN TALLEY, 'MR. WHEELS,' RELEASES MEMOIR

Staff Report

Valrico author and podcaster Ryan Talley, known to his listeners as 'Mr. Wheels,' has released his first memoir, *Finding My Voice: My Life and the Making of Mr. Wheels*. The book came out on October 31 and is available on Amazon.



The story starts with a regular bus, a few steps and a mother who believed her son could climb them. Talley's mom took him to practice boarding a standard bus again and again so he could ride it on his own. Those early experiences helped shape his independence and the determination that would become an important part of his life.



"Before I had a microphone, a following, or a show called Mr. Wheels, I had those steps," Talley said. "And I had my mother helping me figure out how to get up them."

From there, the short, candid memoir follows Talley through classrooms that left him unchallenged, childhood adventures inspired by The Goonies, his discovery of writing, the unexpected joy of substitute teaching and the online community that grew around his TikTok streams. When hateful online debates wore him down, he turned to writing and long-form conversation, and Mr. Wheels was born as a space where disabled people, and anyone who's been made to feel they don't belong, could connect, feel seen and be themselves.

Through personal stories and humor, Talley explores the experiences that shaped his perspective, the importance of finding one's voice and the value of building connections with others. His memoir also offers readers an opportunity to better understand the everyday experiences of people living with disabilities.

"There's anger here. There's joy," Talley said. "And there's the kind of humor that comes from being able to laugh at myself while still asking some uncomfortable questions. Yes, there will be cursing on the way to the message. Joy can handle a few bad words."

Talley is the founder and host of the Mr. Wheels Podcast and writes about disability inclusion and everyday life on Substack. A power wheelchair user, he lives in Valrico and is active in disability advocacy across Tampa Bay.

*Finding My Voic*e is available now in paperback (www.amazon.com/dp/b0hm58qkpc) for $15 and Kindle (www.amazon.com/dp/b0hppqllcb) for $10. For more information, visit the website at www.mrwheels76.com/finding-my-voice.



THE GALLERY TAMPA CREATES AN UPSCALE COMMUNITY TO CALL HOME AT EVERY STAGE OF SENIOR LIVING

By Brian Bokor







A favorite chair, a treasured collection or cherished keepsakes can help a new residence feel like home. At The Gallery Tampa, residents are encouraged to bring those personal touches with them as they settle into an upscale community designed around comfort, convenience and care.

"We don't care how many holes they put in the walls," Executive Director Launa Moore said, highlighting the community's openness to residents personalizing their new homes.

That sense of belonging extends beyond each residence. Shared gathering spaces, dining venues and activities are designed to bring neighbors together, encouraging new friendships and helping residents feel at home within the community.

The community is centrally located at 930 Experience Loop along Bell Shoals Road in Valrico, south of Bloomingdale Avenue and north of the FishHawk Boulevard/Boyette Road intersection.

The first resident moved in on November 1, with several more having arrived the following day. The 17-acre community brings independent living, assisted living and memory support together on one campus. Moore said residents can move between levels of care while staying at The Gallery, and couples can live in different care areas within the community.

The community features 202 residences: 115 independent living homes, including six villas and 24 flats; 45 assisted living residences; and 42 memory support residences.

Interiors were created by Senior By Design, a Dallas, Texas-based interior design firm, around The Gallery's art theme. The team selected high-end materials and furnishings shipped from its Dallas warehouse.

Comfort guided the choices, especially for the chairs. Designers considered seat height, cushion firmness and supportive armrests to make sitting down and getting up more comfortable. Tastefully selected art complements the interiors throughout public spaces and residential corridors. Large windows and natural materials connect the interiors with the campus' mature trees.

Other design details came from abroad. Moore said the curtains were hand-stitched in Portugal and the mirrored ceiling was inspired by a design found in Barcelona. A custom teal Yamaha piano stands in the independent living lobby alongside areas for residents and guests to gather.

That attention to detail continues in memory care, which has an open, bright design; high ceilings; and nurses on staff. Meals are thoughtfully tailored to help residents feel comfortable and enjoy a familiar sense of home.

Dining is another part of daily life. The five venues include the Golden Marlin Bar, Little Marlin Restaurant, Gulfstream Restaurant, a cocktail bar and bistro, and a specialty raw bar. Private dining rooms are also available, and The Gallery offers a continental breakfast.

Moore said executive chef David Dunn came from Meat Market, while chef de cuisine Corey Pitts previously cooked for the Buccaneers and Detroit Pistons. The team also includes line cooks from Bern's Steak House and Meat Market.

Residents also have access to a salon with a men's barber section and pedicure chairs, a theater, activity rooms, an art studio, a media room, a fitness center, a resort-style pool and a pickleball court.

Outside, the campus includes a dog park, an outdoor kitchen and grilling area and a 5-acre nature preserve offering opportunities for birdwatching. Residents may bring pets of any size, provided they are friendly with people and other animals.

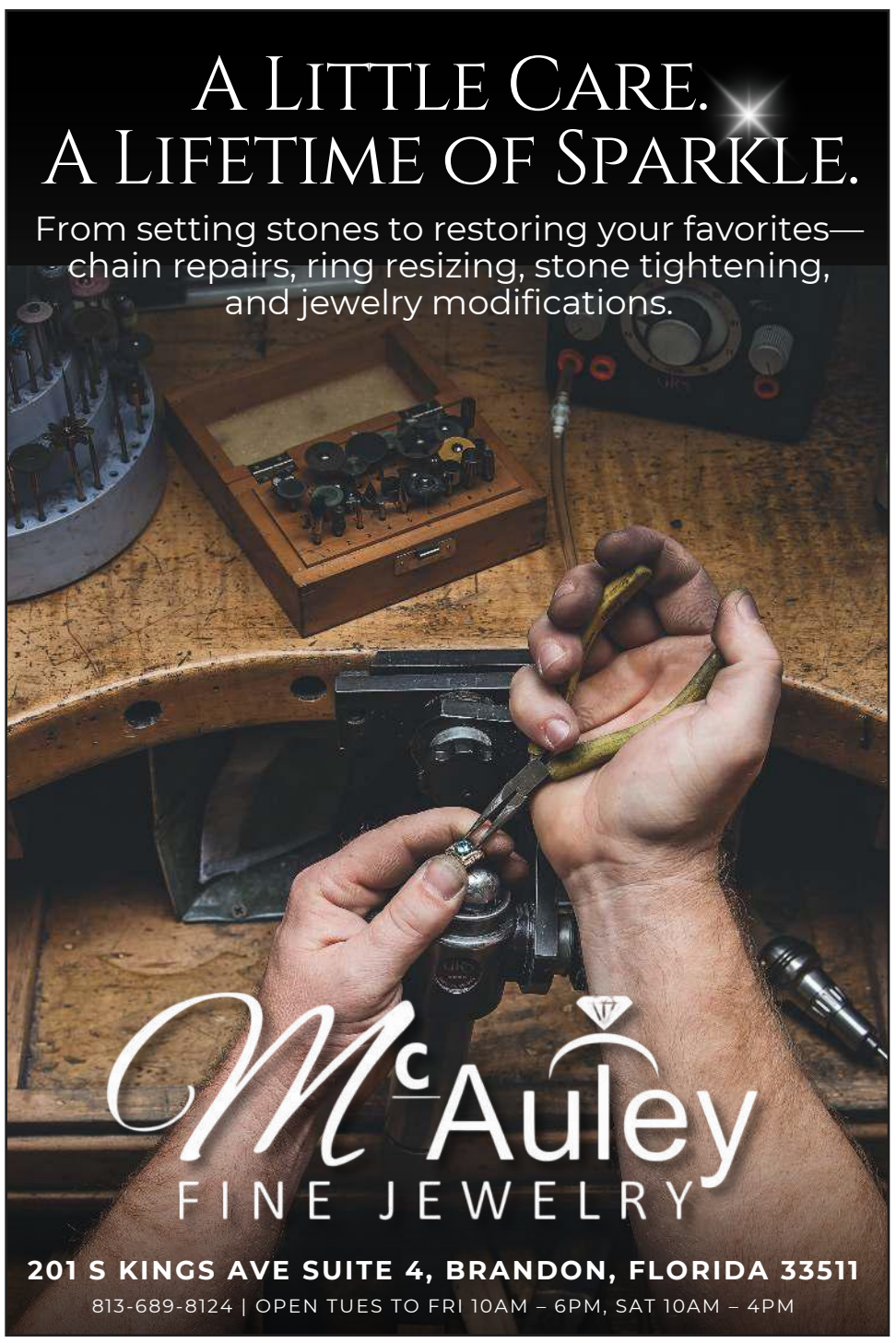
The team also includes Nick McLaughlin, director of sales; Michele Rivard, lead resident services; and Shannon VanderKooy, leasing counselor.

Many residents are local people looking to downsize while staying close to the places and routines they know, Moore said. Chauffeured and scheduled trips help residents stay connected to favorite restaurants, shops, churches and other familiar destinations, making it easier to maintain the everyday connections that make the area feel like home. Wesley Elias, director of resident experience, coordinates events and outings, giving residents opportunities to enjoy familiar favorites and discover new ones.

The leasing center is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and by appointment on weekends.

For more information or to schedule a tour, call 813-642-4430.





ALIGN RIGHT EVOLVES INTO ELEVATED REALTY WITH FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

By Libby Hopkins



This August, Align Right Realty went through a rebranding and became Elevated Realty. While its name is changing, the foundation of its company remains the same. Elevated Realty continues under the ownership and leadership of broker/owner Lisa Tackus, with the same trusted leadership and committed agents, unwavering commitment to excellence, and dedication to customers and the Tampa Bay community.

The rebrand reflects the company's continued growth and long-term vision while honoring the relationships built over the past seven years as a brokerage and more than 21 years of real estate experience. Rather than making a departure from that history, the Elevated Realty name connects the company's established foundation with its aspirations for the future. It brings the focus back to the people at the heart of the business: customers seeking exceptional service, agents who need support and communities that benefit from lasting relationships.

"This rebrand represents who we have become and where we're going," Tackus said. "Our mission has always been to provide exceptional service, support our agents and positively impact the communities we serve. Elevated Realty reflects our commitment to raising the standard in every customer's experience."

Her words underscore the purpose behind the new identity: growth grounded in the same relationships and service commitments that helped shape the brokerage. The name signals a forward-looking vision while keeping those priorities at the center of the company's next chapter.

Customers, agents and business partners can expect the same personalized service, local expertise and trusted relationships that have defined the brokerage's success. For those who have come to know the company, the new name does not mean starting over; it represents a continuation of the connections already established. The office location, leadership and office number remain unchanged, offering familiar points of contact as the brokerage moves forward under its new identity. That continuity places the emphasis on maintaining relationships rather than simply introducing a new brand.

"We are deeply grateful for the trust and support of our customers, agents, referral partners and community," Tackus said.

Elevated Realty is a locally owned, independent real estate brokerage serving Tampa Bay and the surrounding communities. Guided by the philosophy of "Raising the standard," the company is committed to delivering exceptional service.

Tto learn more, visit its www.elevatedrealtyfl.com or call 813-563-5995. Its office is located at 11962 Balm Riverview Rd. in Riverview.

LIONS CLUB CONTINUES HOLIDAY TRADITION WITH LUMINARIA PROJECT

Staff Report



Brandon Lions Club members prepare for the annual Luminaria Project, a holiday tradition that began in 2002. The $9 kits include 15 bags, candles, cups and sand.

For more than two decades, the Brandon Lions Club has been helping local families brighten Christmas Eve while supporting charitable causes through its annual Luminaria Project. The tradition began in 2002 and continues this year with luminaria kits available throughout the Greater Brandon area.

Each year, residents, neighborhoods and community groups participate by lining walkways and driveways with glowing, white luminaria. Traditionally displayed on Christmas Eve, the simple lights create a warm and festive atmosphere while supporting the Brandon Lions Club's charitable work.

Each luminaria kit includes 15 white paper bags, 15 long-burning votive candles, 15 candle cups and a bag of sand to provide a stable base for each candle. The kits are available for $9 each.

Orders must be placed by Sunday, November 15. No payment is required when placing an order. All orders are cash on delivery and may be picked up or, for orders of 15 kits or more, delivered to participating neighborhoods.

Orders will be available for pickup or delivery on Saturday, December 19, at the Brandon Lions Club, located at 610 Limona Rd. in Brandon.

To order, contact Joe Kuebler at 813-263-2522 or email brandonlionsclub@gmail.com.

Proceeds from the Luminaria Project benefit Brandon Lions Charities, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that supports eyesight and hearing programs at the state and national levels. Locally, the organization supports Dogs Inc., ECHO, Family Promise, the Brandon High School Don Bishop Track Meet, Selah Freedom Inc. and other community needs.

The Brandon Lions Club, chartered in 1954, is the area's oldest community service organization. While Lions Clubs are known for their commitment to sight conservation, prevention of blindness and assisting those experiencing vision loss, the Brandon club supports a variety of charitable and community programs.

The annual Luminaria Project reflects the club's long-standing commitment to combining community service with opportunities for residents to come together and celebrate the holiday season.

The Brandon Lions Club meets on the first and third Thursdays of each month at its clubhouse. Dinner begins at 6:15 p.m., followed by the meeting at 7 p.m.

For more information about the Luminaria Project, Brandon Lions Club activities or membership opportunities, contact the club or attend an upcoming meeting.







FOOD BANK EXPANDS PROGRAMS TO HELP SENIORS AND STUDENTS FIGHT HUNGER

By Libby Hopkins



The mission of United Food Bank and Services in Plant City is to help those in need by moving them from a "state of hunger" and "impoverishment" to self-sufficiency, empowerment and self-reliance.

The organization is succeeding in this mission through two unique programs: Feeding Our Legacy, which helps local seniors, and Feeding Our Future, which helps local school and college students.

"Our Feeding Our Legacy program helps local seniors access food and essential household resources closer to home," said Mary Heysek, United Food Bank and Services' president and CEO. "We visit two off-site locations each month, one in Bealsville and the other at Plant City Towers in downtown Plant City, to serve seniors who may have difficulty traveling to our main facility or lack reliable transportation. We currently have 376 seniors registered and served through this program, and that number continues to grow. Our goal is to make nutritious food and essential supplies more accessible while helping seniors maintain their independence and quality of life."

Seniors are an increasingly vulnerable population, with older adults representing one of the fastest-growing segments of the homeless population. Too often, seniors must make difficult choices between purchasing nutritious food and paying for medications or other essential expenses.

"Through our Feeding Our Legacy program, we work to ease some of that burden, improve access to food and resources and help our seniors maintain their health, independence and dignity," Heysek said.

The organization's college hunger program, part of Feeding Our Future, partners with 26 local schools to provide 1,300 weekend food bags each week during the school year and 1,500 break bags each week during nonschool time.

"We also partner with two colleges to help address food insecurity among students at Hillsborough College by providing food assistance each week," Heysek said. "We currently serve approximately 35 students weekly. United Food Bank and Services stocks an on-site student food pantry at the University of Florida IFAS, extending our support to students beyond our immediate community."

United Food Bank and Services is looking to build partnerships in the Valrico, Brandon and Lithia areas to extend its reach and make food assistance more accessible to families and individuals who can't travel to its Plant City location.

"As our community continues to grow, it is important that we look at where additional support may be needed and how we can work with local organizations to reach people closer to where they live," Heysek said.

For more information, visit ufbpc.org or contact Heysek at 813-764-0265. The office is located at 702 E. Alsobrook St. in Plant City.

$350,000 AWARD TO EXPAND CAREER SUPPORT FOR TAMPA BAY VETERANS

Staff Report



CareerSource Tampa Bay (CSTB) was awarded $350,000 in state appropriations funding for the Veterans Project for Job Recovery, sponsored by Florida Senator Nick DiCeglie and Representative Berny Jacques. The project will provide training, employment and supportive services to local veterans, transitioning service members and eligible spouses.

The project will prioritize veterans facing barriers to employment, including veterans experiencing homelessness, veterans with disabilities and women veterans. The goal is to help participants obtain or retain employment and pursue opportunities for career advancement and increased wages.

The investment will serve a significant veteran population in the Tampa Bay region. Nearly 175,000 veterans live in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, representing approximately 12 percent of Florida's veteran population.

From July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, CSTB served 2,814 veterans across Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. Of those, 2,087 were veterans facing qualifying employment barriers, 666 were veterans with disabilities, 440 were women veteran and 258 were experiencing homelessness.

"Supporting those who have served our country is a vital part of our mission at CareerSource Tampa Bay," said Keidrian Kunkel, president and CEO of CareerSource Tampa Bay. "With such a significant veteran population in our region, this funding represents an important investment in veterans and their individual needs, while creating stronger pathways to translate their military skills and experience into meaningful, high-demand and high-wage careers."

About CareerSource Tampa Bay

Effective July 1, 2024, CareerSource Tampa Bay is the designated local workforce development board serving Hillsborough County and Pinellas County. CareerSource Tampa Bay is governed by a board of directors whose members are appointed by a consortium of chief local elected officials (CLEOs) from each county commission.

CareerSource Tampa Bay is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. All voice telephone numbers listed may be reached by persons using TTY/TDD equipment via the Florida Relay Service at 711.

CareerSource Tampa Bay is the direct service provider for various workforce programs which are supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, Agriculture and other agencies as part of awards totaling $38,665,000 with 93 percent federally funded (updated annually, as of September 2025).

For more information about CareerSource Tampa Bay, please visit the website at www.careersourcetampabay.com.



TB | kw SUBURBAN TAMPA KELLERWILLIAMS REALTY

TONY BARONI TEAM PRESENTS

12 DAYS OF GIVEAWAYS



December 12th – 23rd

12 DAYS.
12 WINNERS.
$100 EACH!

A new winner will be announced everyday on our Facebook Page!

Enter by Dec 11th for your chance to WIN and Help us Give Back!
Scan the QR code or visit us at TonyBaroni.com/Contest

The Tony Baroni Team Proudly Serves Tampa Bay Families and Their Real Estate Needs

METRO MINISTRIES

The Tony Baroni Team will donate $3 per entry to Metropolitan Ministries Tampa Bay

the PROMISE The Tony Baroni Team

The Promise means that we will deliver the best service you could ever imagine receiving. That everyone on our team will be focused and care about your needs as if you were our only client. That we will anticipate challenges and get ahead of it so we can stop any surprises. The Tony Baroni Team is focused on making this a ★★★★★ experience that exceeds all your expectations.

TB | kw KELLERWILLIAMS
Tony Baroni Team

3,500+ Homes SOLD | 3,000+ 5 Star Reviews

866-505-6115

TonyBaroni.com | @tonybaroniteam



VALRICO / FISHHAWK
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

SHOP LOCAL



2 Chr 29:3
MASTER GARAGE DOOR CO.
DOORS • OPENERS • SPRINGS
(813) 684-7744
steve@mastergaragedoor.com
mastergaragedoor.com

28 years serving the community with only the highest quality parts and service.

Garage Door Service, Repair & Installation

- Residential Garage Doors
- Garage Door Openers
- Broken Springs
- Cables
- Rollers
- Doors off Track

FREE Estimates on New Garage Door Installs

Celebrating 28 Years of Serving Our Community

Who's Walking Your Dog Today?

Dogs * Cats * Exotic Pets * Pets With Medical Needs

JOIN OUR PAW PERKS!

Reliable Midday Visits for Your Pet

Recurring Care That Keeps Tails Wagging and Routines Intact

Trusted experienced care when you can't be there.

WALK THE WALK
PROFESSIONAL PET CARE

813-465-3082
walkthewalkppc.com
@walkthewalkppc



INSURED AMERICAN of FAMILY

EVERY CARRIER. ONE CONVERSATION.

Open enrollmentishere. Havea planor need one? I'll find your best option.**Ifyoursis already right, I'lltell you to keep it.**

MEDICARE · ACA · PRIVATE MARKET · DENTAL/VISION

SCAN TO BOOK
InsuredAF.com/oe

BEST OF FLORIDA 2026 REGIONAL WINNER

Craig Gruenbaum
VETERAN / FAMILYOWNED&OPERATED

CALL 813-919-8536

COASTALVERIFY

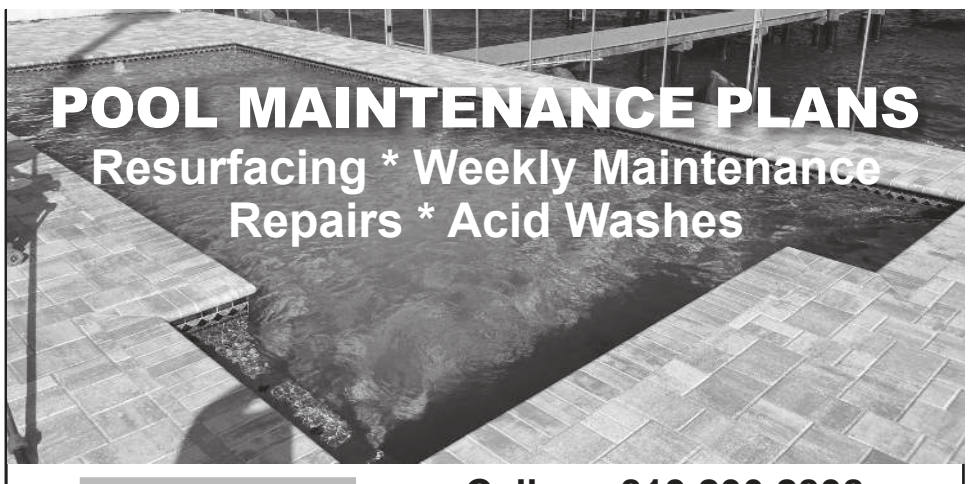
VERIFY BEFORE YOU BUY™

TAMPA BAY PROPERTY TURNOVER INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM™

✓ Property Condition Verification ✓ Risk & Hazard Identification
✓ Photo Documented Reports

Commercial & Residential Properties

Call 656-222-1706 | www.coastalverify.com



POOL MAINTENANCE PLANS

Resurfacing * Weekly Maintenance
Repairs * Acid Washes

EDGE POOLS

Call us: 813.230.2838
Call Today
Visit Our Website:
www.EdgePoolsFL.com

Lic#: CPC1459497 Family Owned & Operated

SOUTHERN CONSTRUCTION

When disaster strikes, Southern Construction is ready to help you rebuild.

Expert Emergency Care Available 24/7

*Specializing In: Water * Fire * Mold * Flood*



- Florida Certified General Contractor
- IICRC Certified
- Certifications in:
  Water Restoration
  Fire & Smoke
  Mold Remediation

813-848-4213
southernconstruction.net
office@southernconstruction.net
Southern Construction Industries, Inc southern.construction
CGC1526952

As Seen On HGTV



FREE POWER WASHING + FREE STUCCO REPAIRS

ON EVERY EXTERIOR REPAINT

NO SHORTCUTS NO SURPRISE COSTS
JUST QUALITY WORK YOU CAN TRUST

T&J Painting
Residential • Commercial
813.723.9124

PROFESSIONAL CREWS · FAMILY OWNED · LICENSED & INSURED · 180+ 5-STAR REVIEWS

CALL OR TEXT TO GET A FREE ESTIMATE TODAY! +813 723-9124

Tampa's Plumbing Solution
CFC1431290

Installation, Service & Repair

813.540.1010

www.TampasPlumbing.com

- Plumbing Fixtures
- Water Leak Repair
- Water Filters/Softeners
- Shower Valves
- Sump Pumps
- Water Heaters
- Garbage Disposal
- Toilet Repairs
- Drain Clog
- Natural Gas & LP Plumbing

Hablamos Español Licensed, Bonded & Insured

info@TampasPlumbing.com

ADT HOLIDAY SHOW CELEBRATES TALENT AND COMMUNITY

By Emily Harper



High 5 participants in the Adult Day Training (ADT) program will take center stage on December 17 for the organization's annual Holiday Show at The Regent in Riverview.

High 5's ADT Holiday Show is an unforgettable evening where individuals who are part of the Adult Day Training Program (ADT) get the opportunity to showcase their talents and abilities. This annual event is an opportunity for them to shine on stage in front of the people who support them.

"The ADT Holiday Show is such a special event for our program. It gives the adults we serve an opportunity to showcase their talents, build confidence, and celebrate their abilities in front of the people who support and encourage them. More than just a holiday performance, it's a chance to recognize their individuality, creativity, and accomplishments while bringing our High 5 community together," said Jada Spano, High 5's Chief Communications Officer.

According to High 5's website, its ADT program "gives adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities the opportunity to build independence and confidence, learn new skills, stay active, and be an engaged part of their community." In addition, High 5's team is dedicated to understanding each individual's learning style to help them reach their full potential.

The Holiday Show will take place on December 17 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Road in Riverview, FL. The theme for this year's show is The Polar Express, and guests are encouraged to "dress as you are."

"One of the most memorable parts of last year's event was seeing the excitement and pride on the participants' faces as they performed in front of their families, friends, and supporters. Watching them step into the spotlight, share their talents, and receive that encouragement from the audience was a powerful reminder of why this program matters so much," said Spano.

All of the funds raised at this event will directly go to the ADT program to support expansion, curriculum, scholarship opportunities, and more. To RSVP or learn more about sponsorship opportunities, visit https://high5inc.org/talent-show/.

TWO BLOOMINGDALE SWIMMERS BREAK RECORDS AT COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Nick Nahas



Matthew Zet and Sophia Torres have trained together since they were young. They continue to inspire, cheer and root for each other to this day.

Torres broke the girls 100-yard breaststroke record that had stood since 1996. She previously set two school records at Newsome High School during her freshman and sophomore years before transferring to Bloomingdale for her final two years of high school.

"I knew the record had stood since 1996, so I was really excited to have the opportunity to break a record that had lasted for so many years," said Torres. "My mom texted me right after the event because she was so excited, and when I saw her message, it was such a cool feeling. I now hold a record at both Newsome High School and Bloomingdale High School, which makes the accomplishment even more special. It's exciting to be part of both schools' swimming histories."

Zet also made history, breaking the boys 100-yard breaststroke record that had stood since 2003.

"This record that I broke means a lot to me because it really shows that all of the work that I have put in over the years has finally paid off," said Zet. "This record is just the first of many to come."

Zet and Torres have trained together since they were young and continue to inspire and cheer each other on.

"Matthew and I have been friends and training together for many years, so it was really great to see us both succeed at the county championships," said Torres. "Being able to set records together, especially in the same events, made it even more meaningful. We both work extremely hard in training, so it's exciting to see that dedication pay off for both of us."

Bloomingdale boys Swim and Dive Head Coach Jason Fatjo has enjoyed watching the two swimmers excel.

"Sophia is a powerhouse swimmer who excels as a natural talent as well as on a technical level," said Fatjo. "While this is her first year with Bloomingdale, she has an indispensable camaraderie with her fellow Bulls that has been cultivated over years of team swimming."

"I could see Matthew's fist-pump reaction when he saw the time," said Fatjo. "He had entered the water with a goal, and the spirit of achievement was shared, not just with me, but with the team as a whole. The team captain was leading with his example."

"My goals for the rest of the season are to qualify for finals at the state championships and continue lowering my times in my main events that I swim," said Zet.

Torres also qualified for the Toyota U.S. Open Championships and Speedo Winter Junior Championships in December.

"This is the first time I've qualified for either meet," said Torres. "I knew Winter Juniors was a realistic goal I could work toward, but qualifying for the U.S. Open was something I honestly didn't expect yet."



NEW BRANDON FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER HONORS JUDGE KATHERINE ESSRIG

Staff Report



Families in Brandon have a new, expanded resource for support, parenting guidance and children's developmental services with the opening of the Katherine Essrig Children's Board Family Resource Center.

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County will officially dedicate the center on Monday, November 16, recognizing the longtime service and advocacy of the Honorable Judge Katherine G. Essrig. The new facility provides a welcoming place where families can connect with services and find support to help their children thrive.

Named in honor of Essrig, a Tampa native and longtime champion of children and families, the center recognizes her more than two decades of service on the Children's Board of Hillsborough County Board of Directors. Throughout her more than 30-year judicial career and community involvement, Essrig has advocated for stronger child welfare systems and improved outcomes for children and families throughout the county.

The expanded Brandon location builds on the Children's Board's commitment to helping families access resources within their own communities. The center is funded by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County and operated by Lutheran Services Florida.

Services include family support, developmental screenings, parenting assistance, community referrals and other designed to help children remain healthy and safe, stay on track developmentally and resources prepare for learning and success.

The center also provides opportunities for families to build connections and identify support systems that can make a difference as children grow. By bringing services together in a welcoming community setting, the resource center helps parents and caregivers find assistance and guidance when they need it.

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County invests in quality programs that support the success of children and families throughout the county. Its work focuses on ensuring children are healthy and safe, developmentally on track, supported by strong families and ready to learn.

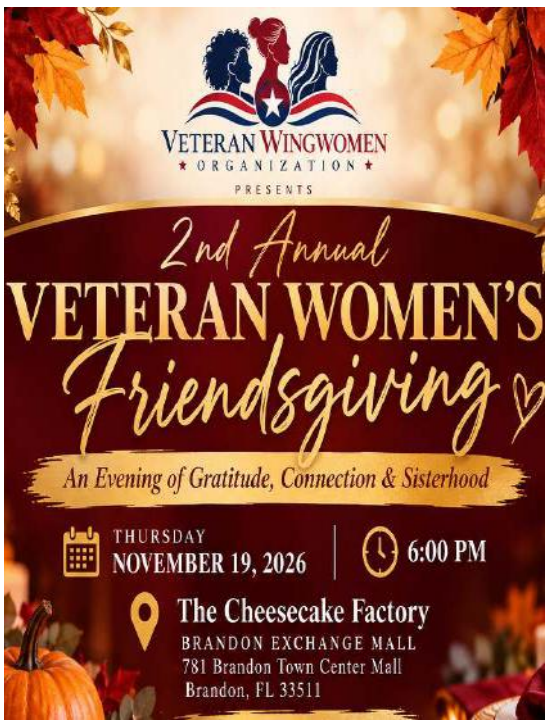
In 2025, the Children's Board invested $60 million in grants supporting more than 80 nonprofit organizations and 152 programs serving children and families.

The new Brandon center expands access to those efforts locally while honoring Essrig's lasting contributions to the community. Its dedication celebrates both the opening of a larger resource for area families and the legacy of a leader whose work has helped shape services and advocacy for children across Hillsborough County.

Families seeking support can visit the Katherine Essrig Children's Board Family Resource Center at 308 W. Robertson St. in Brandon.

VETERAN WOMEN INVITED TO SECOND ANNUAL FRIENDSGIVING IN BRANDON

Staff Report



Women veterans in Brandon and surrounding communities will have an opportunity to connect, share stories and celebrate the spirit of Thanksgiving during the second annual Veteran Women's Friendsgiving on Thursday, November 19.

Hosted by Veteran WingWomen Organization founder KeishaMarie Douglas, a retired U.S. Air Force veteran, the gathering will take place at 6 p.m. at The Cheesecake Factory at Brandon Exchange mall, located 781 Brandon Town Center Dr. in Brandon.

The event was created to provide women who have served in the military with a welcoming space to build friendships, strengthen connections and enjoy time with others who understand the unique experiences of military service.

For Douglas, the idea is rooted in a Thanksgiving memory from 2001, when she was deployed overseas with the Air Force. Although her military role was as a dental assistant, she was temporarily assigned to work in a dining facility during the holiday.

She remembers walking from table to table in a makeshift dining tent, talking with fellow service members and checking on how everyone was doing.

Twenty-five years later, that experience continues to influence her desire to bring people together and help others feel welcomed, valued and connected. That mission is especially meaningful during the holiday season, when some veterans may find themselves far from family or without a strong support network nearby.

Douglas hopes Friendsgiving will offer more than a shared meal. It is an opportunity for women veterans to spend time with others who understand military life, exchange experiences and develop relationships that can continue long after the gathering ends.

Through Veteran WingWomen Organization, Douglas works to create opportunities for women veterans to find community and support as they navigate life during and after military service.

The organization's Friendsgiving event reflects that mission by encouraging camaraderie and reminding participants that they do not have to navigate their experiences alone. Women veterans interested in attending the second annual gathering must register by Sunday, November 15. Space is limited, and advance registration is required.

To register, visit https://forms.gle/e6veQhLcLo2dw2GN7.



There's never been a better time to quit with Group Quit

*Tobacco Free Florida's Group Quit Sessions (in-person or virtual) now offer participants $25 - $125 in gift cards for their attendance.**

Group Quit offers free, expert-led in-person or virtual sessions for all Florida residents regardless of insurance status. Upon class completion, participants are eligible for nicotine replacement therapy such as patches, gum, or lozenges.**

Pre-registration required

Call USF AHEC today at:
813-974-7889

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

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

AHEC USF AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER PROGRAM
Florida HEALTH | Tobacco Free Florida .com

THREE INDUCTED INTO BLOOMINGDALE ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME '26 CLASS

By Nick Nahas

Two former student athletes and a former head coach were inducted into the Bloomingdale High School Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2026 in front of a sold-out homecoming football game at Charlie Harris Stadium in Valrico.



Photo credit Michael Nahas

Former Bloomingdale High School athletes and coach reunite: Bonnie Hess (center), who coached Bloomingdale volleyball from 1994-2008 and earned 440 career wins, stands with Ryan Nye (left), who wrestled for the Bulls from 2002-06, and Representative Michael Owen (right), who played varsity baseball for Bloomingdale in 1994 and 1995.

Bonnie Hess was Bloomingdale's head volleyball coach from 1994-2008, winning 75 percent of her games with 440 victories overall. Her teams earned five district titles, seven regional appearances and one final four appearance, finishing third in the state in 1994, her first season. Hess coached 26 players who went on to play in college and was named Western Conference Coach of the Year in 2006. She also sponsored the Fellowship of Christian Athletes club, which had the largest FCA program in the southeast United States for several years.

"It means a lot, it was totally unexpected," said Hess. "This was my life for 17 years or so. My son grew up in the gym because he was very young when I came here. This is like my old home, but I haven't been here in years, and what I'm seeing are students that I had that are now teaching here, so it means a lot; it's very moving."

Representative Michael Owen played varsity baseball for Bloomingdale as a catcher and first baseman in 1994 and 1995. The Bulls won back-to-back Saladino Tournaments and district championships during those years. Owen continued playing at Hillsborough College and Saint Leo University, graduating cum laude before attending Western Michigan Law School. He later returned to Hillsborough County to practice law and was elected to the County Commission in 2022 and the Florida House of Representatives in 2024.

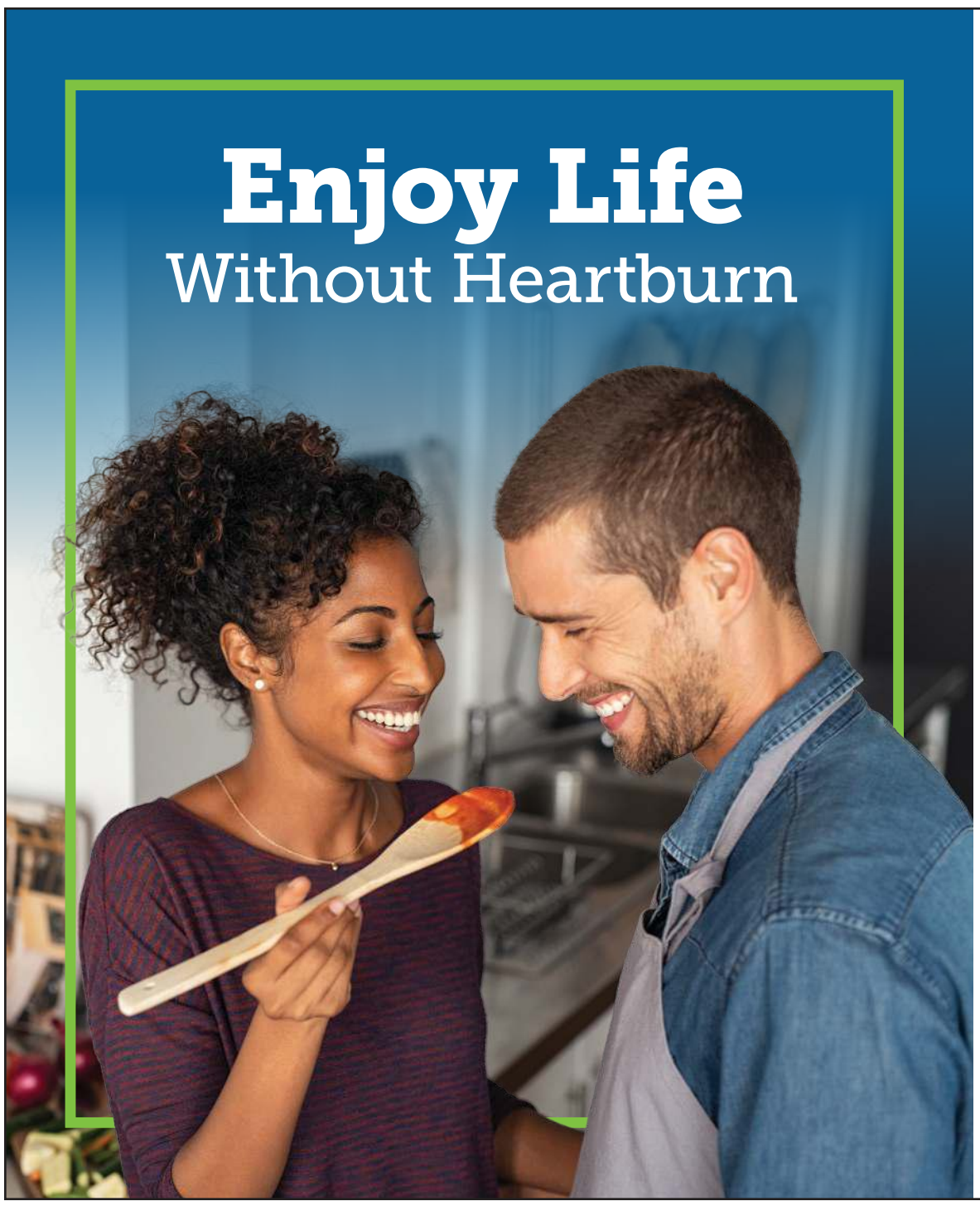
"It means a lot just because this is my hometown," said Owen. "Other than going to law school, I've always kind of hung around home. It's just an honor because this place meant a lot to me — it reminds me of the good old days when I drive by the school. It just means a lot to me to be here with other great people that have come before me."

Ryan Nye wrestled for Bloomingdale from 2002-06. During his four-year varsity career, he was a two-time team captain, two-time state finalist and 2006 state champion. After graduation, Nye attended the United States Military Academy at West Point. He currently serves as a major in the Army.

"I think about how high school sports got me into college," said Nye, "It helped get me the career that I have today and how all these things that I did when I was 16, 17 really made the difference, and so it's nice to come back."







Expert Digestive Care for Lasting Relief

Heartburn, also known as acid reflux, can happen from time to time. But when it becomes frequent, it may be gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), a condition that can affect your esophagus, teeth, voice box and lungs.

At AdventHealth, our digestive specialists use advanced diagnostics to understand what's causing your symptoms and create a personalized plan for relief — so you can get back to enjoying life's simple pleasures.

Take our free GERD assessment today.
RefluxExperts.com

AdventHealth Riverview

4549733764

ANNUAL BRANDON HOLIDAY PARADE SUPPORTS TWO LOCAL NONPROFITS

By Marie Gilmore



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

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

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

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

For parade merchandise and event information, visit www.brandonparadeoflights.com, and be sure to follow the Brandon Parade of Lights on Facebook and Instagram.

More Than a Parade. A Brandon Tradition That Gives Back.

TABLE 100 CREATOR BOB CLARK JR. SHARES LEADERSHIP LESSONS AT ST. LEO

By Marie Gilmore



Bob Clark Jr., president of Tampa Steel Erecting Co. and longtime Tampa business leader, will share leadership lessons and insights from nearly 65 years in the family business during "Breakfast with Bob Clark Jr.: The CEO Breakfast Series" on December 4 at Saint Leo University.

For 25 years, Bob Clark Jr. has brought Tampa business and community leaders together through a weekly lunch at the Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City. On December 4, the longtime business leader will share the stories and leadership lessons behind those connections at Saint Leo University.

Clark, president of Tampa Steel Erecting Co., is the featured speaker at "Breakfast with Bob Clark Jr.: The CEO Breakfast Series," scheduled for 8 a.m. on Friday, December 4, at the Saint Leo University Wellness Center, located at 12338 Priory Circle in St. Leo.

Clark will discuss nearly 65 years of experience in his family's business, sharing insights on leadership, building lasting relationships and strengthening communities through meaningful connections.

The event is open to Saint Leo students, faculty, staff, alumni and the general public. Registration is free but required and available online at https://form.jotform.com/262932628653061.

"Bob Clark represents the kind of leadership we want our students to see up close: someone who has spent a lifetime building not just a company but a community," said Saint Leo University President Dr. Jim Burkee.

Founded in 1945, Tampa Steel Erecting Co. is Florida's oldest surviving structural steel fabricator. Under Clark's leadership, the company has contributed to notable projects, including EPCOT's Spaceship Earth, SeaWorld's Shamu Stadium, The Florida Aquarium, the 40-story Tampa City Center and Tampa International Airport's Airside F.

Clark is also known for creating connections through his weekly Table 100 lunch at the Columbia Restaurant. Since moving the gathering to the restaurant in November 2001, he has carefully arranged seating to bring together people from different industries, organizations and backgrounds, creating opportunities for professional relationships and collaboration.

Beyond his business leadership, Clark serves on the boards of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, Visit Tampa Bay, Floridians for Better Transportation and the Florida Transportation Builders Association. He has also served as executive director of the Miss Tampa Pageant for more than 30 years.

Saint Leo University, founded in 1889, is Florida's oldest Catholic university and serves students through its campus, online programs and education centers nationwide.



Meet our *Brandon Team* at Bank of Central Florida

As a part of our expansion plan, Bank of Central Florida continues to grow in Hillsborough County with our newly-opened Loan Production Office in Brandon, FL.



Lauren Fernandez
Tampa Bay
Market Executive
lauren.fernandez@bocfl.com



Robert Cobb
East Hillsborough
Team Leader
robert.cobb@bocfl.com



Jonathan Oliver
Commercial
Relationship Manager
jonathan.oliver@bocfl.com

> We are honored to be part of the Brandon market and look forward to continuing to build long-term relationships here for years to come. This is a robust market with significant business growth opportunities and we are excited for what the future holds.
>
> — ROBERT COBB

Bank of Central Florida's focus on team-supported service and entrepreneurial solutions are how we serve clients best.

Secure, Optimized Cash Flow Management

Personalized Products and Services for All Your Financial and Treasury Needs

Asset Risk Strategy Development with Relationship Management Team Support

Bank of Central Florida®

Brandon – Loan Production Office
513 Westbrook Avenue, Suite 104
Brandon, FL 33511
Phone: (813) 409-3600
Lobby Hours: By Appointment Only

To connect with the Brandon team, scan the QR code or visit **bankofcentralflorida.com** for more information.

MEMBER FDIC EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

HOPE SERVICES EXPANDS JOB AND LIFE SKILLS TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

By Libby Hopkins



Hope Services is a workforce development organization dedicated to helping individuals overcome barriers to employment and achieve sustainable careers.

Hope Services was founded in 2003 to help individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment build brighter futures. Since then, it has grown to offer personalized employment services and a Life Skills and Vocational Training Center with programs in culinary arts, construction, retail and hospitality.

"Our goal is to help each person gain the skills, confidence and support needed to enjoy a meaningful career and greater independence," said Hope Services' Founder and CEO, Cindy Bray. "The greatest reward is seeing someone gain confidence, find a job and build independence."

Hope Services' mission is to provide personalized vocational services that enable its clients to realize their career potential.

"At our company, we know that disabilities do not undercut a person's value or potential, and we've found that these individuals carry with them unique giftedness that can enrich a company's culture," Bray said. "As the company has grown tremendously throughout West-Central Florida, our passion and core beliefs stay the same — we care, we help and we give hope."

Hope Services offers personalized job coaching, career guidance, job placement, on-the-job training and work-based learning experience to help individuals find and succeed in meaningful employment. Its Life Skills and Vocational Training Center provides hands-on training in culinary arts, construction, retail and hospitality.

"We help people build practical skills, confidence and independence, with support tailored to their individual goals," Bray said. "In 2025, we served 689 individuals and helped 423 people find jobs. Behind those numbers are lives changed, families strengthened and local employers connected with capable workers. To me, our greatest impact is giving people hope and a positive future."

Bray and her team are excited to expand into Hudson with a second Life Skills and Vocational Training Center.

"We anticipate renovations beginning in January 2027, with a hopeful grand opening in spring," Bray said. "The center will offer training in culinary arts, construction, health care skills and retail. A future second phase may include a thrift store and coffee shop, creating additional opportunities for hands-on learning and meaningful employment."

Bray knows that community support makes Hope Services' work possible.

If you would like to learn more about Hope Services, you can visit its website at https://hopegetsjobs.org/ or call 813-907-3731. Its office is located at 5426 Land O' Lakes Blvd. in Land O' Lakes.

BUSCH GARDENS UNWRAPS HOLIDAY MAGIC WITH CHRISTMAS TOWN

Staff Report



The holiday season is coming to life at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay as Christmas Town returns from now through Monday, January 4, on select dates, transforming the park into a festive destination filled with dazzling lights, holiday entertainment, seasonal treats and family-friendly experiences.

Christmas Town is included with park admission and features millions of lights throughout the park, along with more than 70 miles of illuminated displays. This year also brings several new experiences designed to add even more holiday excitement.

New attractions include Lights of Wonder, a nighttime drone show featuring dazzling drones synchronized to classic holiday music, and A Very Merry Cirque, an acrobatic holiday production. The new Christmas Town Market will also feature local artisans and festive shopping opportunities.

Returning favorites include the award-winning Christmas on Ice, Mrs. Claus' Storytime, Three Kings Journey and the Holly Jolly Express. Families can also visit Rudolph's Winter Wonderland, meet Rudolph and his friends and experience Santa's North Pole, where children can share their holiday wishes and take photos with Santa.

For those looking for a little more excitement, many of Busch Gardens' popular attractions and coasters, including Iron Gwazi and Phoenix Rising, will be operating during the event. The Skyride will also be illuminated with holiday lights, offering guests a festive view of the park.

Seasonal food and drinks are another highlight, with holiday-inspired menu items, hot chocolate and freshly baked cookies available throughout the event. Christmas Town Sampler Lanyards start at $35, while a new five-punch Dessert Sampler includes a reusable hot chocolate mug.

The holiday celebration continues through New Year's Eve, when guests can enjoy live entertainment and fireworks. Families can also celebrate with a kid-friendly Noon Year's Eve event.

"Christmas Town is Tampa Bay's best holiday tradition that allows families to celebrate and create long-lasting memories," said Brian Bacica, park president at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay and Adventure Island.

With lights, live entertainment, holiday characters, rides and seasonal treats, Christmas Town offers families plenty of opportunities to make new holiday traditions.

For dates, hours and tickets, visit www.christmastown.com.



IMPORTANT 2026 PROPERTY TAX NOTICE

The 2026 Hillsborough County tax roll has been delivered to the Tax Collector by the Property Appraiser's office. The collection of the ad valorem taxes and non- ad valorem assessments will begin on **November 1, 2026**.

Nancy C. Millan, Tax Collector

To the Residents of Hillsborough County,

The 2026 property tax roll is now open, and tax bills will begin arriving in mailboxes and inboxes in early November.

Your property taxes do more than cover a bill. They fund the schools our children attend, the first responders who answer our calls, and the parks, roads, and services that make Hillsborough County home. Our job is to make paying them as simple as possible, so you can take care of it and get back to your life.

Whether you prefer to pay online, by mail, or in person, we've made it easy, and paying early means you save.

Have a question? Don't hesitate to reach out to our team. We are here to serve you, and we are grateful for the trust you place in us.

Sincerely,

Nancy C. Millan
Hillsborough County Tax Collector

PAY EARLY. GET A DISCOUNT

4% if paid by Nov. 30
3% if paid by Dec. 31
2% if paid by Jan. 31
1% if paid by Feb. 28

Pay in March, and you'll pay the full amount with no discount.

Taxes are considered delinquent on Apr 1st, 2027

SCAN TO PAY ONLINE

PAYMENT OPTIONS

ONLINE Easiest and Fastest!
Pay online at **HillsTaxFL.gov** by credit/debit card or eCheck. Credit/debit card payments are subject to a convenience fee. There is no convenience fee for eCheck.

BY MAIL Send check/money order to:
Nancy C. Millan, Tax Collector
PO Box 30012
Tampa, FL 33630-3012

DROP BOX
Select offices have drop boxes available to the public. Visit **HillsTaxFL.gov** for locations. *Please do not deposit cash into drop boxes.*

IN PERSON
Visit **HillsTaxFL.gov** for a list of convenient locations.

NANCY C. MILLAN
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR

STAY CONNECTED WITH US | HILLSTAXFL.GOV

2026 PROPERTY TAX REFORM: KNOW THE FACTS

BLOOMINGDALE FASHION CLUB PROVIDES FREE HOMECOMING ATTIRE

By Jane Owen



Secretary Lillian Walsh, Club President Alexandru Marin, and Treasurer Lawrence Derosier in the Bulls Boutique

High school homecoming dances provide life-long memories. It is not only an event that serves as a grand finale of a week-long school celebration. It is opportunity for students to connect with their friends and dress up.

Bloomingdale High School's Fashion Club did not want any student to miss the Homecoming dance due to financial constraints. The club, formed last year by club president Alexandru (Alex) Marin, created a boutique so students could shop for free for Homecoming clothes and accessories.

The Fashion Club collected donations for weeks and then with the support of their club sponsor, art teacher Pam Reeves, they opened the Bulls Boutique 3 weeks before the Homecoming dance.

The Bulls Boutique provided a private shopping experience for students. There were no requirements and no questions asked. The club members did not interact with the students or know who they are, as to respect their privacy.

Marin, the Fashion Club president, got the idea for the boutique after watching a TikTok video about a girl that could not go to Homecoming because she didn't have a dress.

"I was thinking, if there's people like that on the internet, there must be other people that aren't brave enough to talk about it on the internet but still need a dress. I wanted to do something at school to help people that might not be open enough to talk about it publicly," Marin said.

Reeves, the club sponsor, said the best part of watching the club put the boutique together was their genuine interest in helping other students and their true excitement when they heard there was a shopper. Reeves said it was beautiful to see the impact on the student shoppers.

"When our first shopper came in, she tried on several dresses. When she found one, she called me in and you could see how happy she was. Then she said, "I feel like Cinderella," Reeves said.

Club secretary Lillian Walsh said it feels rewarding knowing their work was going to such a good cause. "It's so nice to know we made someone's day a little better. It's beautiful, Walsh said.

Club Treasurer Lawrence Derosier said it feels great knowing they are helping. "There's definitely a certain stigma around taking like free stuff. But it's one thing being embarrassed to do it. It is another thing not having the option to," Derosier said.

Bloomingdale's Fashion Club has 45 members. The officers are President Alexandru Marin, Vice President Stacie Montes de Oca, Secretary Lillian Walsh, Treasurer Lawrence Derosier and Public Relations Amelia Miller. They plan to open the Bulls Boutique again before Prom.





F.E.E.D.
Food, Education, Empowerment for Development

UNITED FOOD BANK AND SERVICES

JOIN US!

A fun, hands-on program designed for **parents, grandparents, and caregivers** of students ages 4-18 who want to help **their children and families grow, learn, and thrive.**

¡ÚNETE A NOSOTROS!

Un programa divertido y práctico diseñado para **padres, abuelos y cuidadores** de estudiantes de 4 a 18 años que desean ayudar **a sus hijos y familias a crecer, aprender y prosperar.**

What you get:

🍎 **Free healthy food for your family every week**

👨‍🍳 **Live cooking demonstrations featuring simple, delicious recipes**

📚 **Free books for your children or grandchildren to take home**

❤️ **Free health assessments and practical wellness tips**

🥦**Nutrition education that shows just how good healthy food can taste**

Upcoming Sessions:

Spring A: January 12 - February 18
Spring B: March 30 - May 6
Summer: June 1-July 8
Fall A: August 17 - September 23

Tuesdays (English) OR Thursdays (Spanish)

Funding generously provided by:

Children's Board HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY www.ChildrensBoard.org

Email: mdavis@ufbpc.org
Phone: (813) 764-0625 Ext. 5
Website: www.ufbpc.org
The United Food Bank and Services
702 E. Alsobrook St.
Plant City, FL 33563

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO SIGN-UP NOW

VALRICO / FISHHAWK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

JOIN US!
- Weekly Networking
- Business Growth
- Open Seating
- Community Involvement
- Presentation & Member Level Opportunities

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST CHAMBER MEMBERS!
Top Notch Trees & Land Clearing LLC
Warby Parker
The UPS Store 7834
Radiant Clean
Watch Me Swim
Natural Healing of Tampa Bay
Clear Path Tax & Advisory, LLC
A Kid's Place of Tampa Bay
Local Business Brief

General Assembly Meeting
2nd Tuesday of each month.
NEXT MEETING:
Tuesday, December 8
at 9:00 a.m.
Voodoo Brewing Co.
3432 FL-60, Valrico

NEW MEETING LOCATIONS!

midday POWER HOUR+

Midday Power Hour *Plus*
Every Wednesday, 11:00 a.m.
Beef 'O' Brady's Bloomingdale
889 East Bloomingdale Avenue, Brandon

Visit www.ValricoFishHawk.org
813-324-7902

WINTER VILLAGE IS RETURNING TO CURTIS HIXON PARK

Staff Report

Real-ice skating, local shopping and festive entertainment highlight annual tradition

Tampa's Downtown waterfront will transform into a festive holiday destination when Winter Village, presented by the Tampa Bay Lightning, returns to Curtis Hixon Park from Friday, November 20, through Sunday, January 3, 2027.

The annual event will bring the community together for real-ice skating, holiday shopping, seasonal food and beverages, live entertainment and family-friendly activities along the Tampa Riverwalk.

"Winter Village is a celebration of what makes Tampa's Downtown special: our community, our local businesses and the public spaces that bring us together," said Kenyetta Hairston-Bridges, president and CEO of the Tampa Downtown Partnership. "Each year, Winter Village creates opportunities for residents and visitors to connect, support local businesses and make lasting holiday memories."

The real-ice skating rink will once again serve as the centerpiece of the event. Skating sessions last 75 minutes and include skate rental. Tickets cost $17 for skaters over age 12 and $15 for children under 12. College students with valid identification can receive $2 off skating rentals on Thursdays from 5-9 p.m.

Winter Village will feature weekly programming throughout the season, including silent discos, Saturday night entertainment from 7-8 p.m. and seasonal character visits on select Sundays from 1-4 p.m. Guests may encounter Frosty, Elsa, Olaf, the Grinch and the Gingerbread Man. Special ice-skating performances will also take place on select dates.

Visitors can explore The Shops of Winter Village, delivered by PODS, featuring eight full-season retailers, seven partial-season shops and 18 rotating vendors. Offerings will include handmade jewelry, apparel, home decor, candles, Tampa-themed gifts, baked goods and artwork.

Shop Small Weekend will take place Saturday and Sunday, November 28-29, from 1-4 p.m., highlighting young entrepreneurs. The first 100 shoppers at the Winter Village Shop will receive a free commemorative tote bag.

Food and beverage vendors, including Hot Dog Fever, Whatever Pops, Blind Tiger and Gourmet Crepes and Coffee, will offer everything from coffee and pastries to crepes, empanadas and frozen treats.

Visitors can reach the event through nearby scooter and bike rentals, DASH Tampa micro-transit service and the Pirate Water Taxi. The Winter Village Express will also return, offering a festive TECO Line Streetcar ride between Whiting Station and Ybor City for $10 per ticket. Advance reservations are required.

Skating reservations and Winter Village Express tickets are available online. For schedules, tickets and updates, visit wintervillagetampa.com.

GREATEST GENERATION CONFERENCE TO BRING WWII HISTORY TO TAMPA

Staff Report



World War II history will come to life this December when the VBC Greatest Generation Live World War II Conference brings veterans, historians, authors and military enthusiasts together in Tampa from Wednesday through Sunday, December 2-6.

The four-day conference will explore some of the most significant campaigns and personalities of World War II while providing opportunities for attendees to hear directly from veterans and experts. December 6 is the departure day and will have no formal programming.

The conference opens on December 2 with registration and a welcome reception, followed by dinner and an opening program. The keynote address will be presented by Michael S. Bell, executive director of the Jenny Craig Institute for the Study of War and Democracy at The National WWII Museum. His presentation, 'The American Liberators: The U.S. Army and Germany's Concentration Camps,' will examine the role of American soldiers in the liberation of concentration camps.

Thursday's sessions will begin with 'Masters of the Air: The Bloody 100th and the Air War Over Europe,' featuring 100th Bomb Group historian Mike P. Faley, author Rebecca Crosby Hutchinson and Luftwaffe historian Colin Heaton, a consultant to the Apple TV+ series Masters of the Air.

The afternoon session, 'Turning the Tide: Guadalcanal and Buna, New Guinea,' will focus on the Pacific War and feature historians and authors Jeff Ballard, Dave Holland, James Campbell and Chris Kolakowski.

Friday will continue with 'Winning the War: America's High Command,' examining the leadership of figures including George Patton, Mark Clark and Dwight Eisenhower. Speakers will include Helen Patton, granddaughter of General George S. Patton, retired Lt. Col. Roger Cirillo and author Michel Paradis.

The afternoon session, 'Coming Home: The Hidden Legacies of World War II,' will explore the lasting effects of the war on veterans and their families. Authors David Nasaw, Carol Schultz Vento and Richard Sherman will participate.

Friday evening will feature a film tribute honoring attending World War II veterans, followed by a veterans dinner featuring conversations and interviews.

The conference will conclude on Saturday with an excursion to the Zephyrhills Museum of Military History for Pearl Harbor remembrance activities, guided tours and a closing luncheon. Transportation will be provided.

The conference offers attendees an opportunity to learn from those who have dedicated their lives to preserving the history and stories of the Greatest Generation. For more information, visit https://veteransbreakfastclub.org/wwii-tampa-2026/.

SUN HILL OPTICAL



Eye Exam $35 with rebate
Must bring in coupon at time of service. Expires 12/31/26



$100 OFF a Complete Pair of Eyeglasses
Some restrictions apply. Most Prescriptions. Not valid with any other offers. Expires 12/31/26

Contacts
Exam and 7 months supply of contacts Total price $189
Some restrictions apply. Not valid with any other offers. Expires 12/31/26

$99 Progressive No-Line Bifocals
Some restrictions apply. Clear. Not valid with any other offers. Expires 12/31/26

SUN CITY CENTER
(813) 634-6344
1601 Rickenbacker Dr Ste 8
Sun City Center, Fl 33573
Hours: Mon-Fri 9 AM-5 PM
Saturday: By appointment

VALRICO
(813) 653-2244
1940 Highway 60 E
Valrico, FL 33594
Hours: Mon-Fri 9 AM-6 PM
Saturday: By appointment

RIVERVIEW
(813) 672-8100
11649 Boyette Rd
Riverview, FL 33569
Hours: Mon-Fri 9 AM-6 PM
Saturday: By appointment

Our office accepts many Insurance Plans so we ask that you contact our staff who will research and verify your insurance coverage.

Se habla español

SUNHILLOPTICAL.COM

SW Sweet Water Grand
The Bridges



We Care Like Family
Resort Style Senior Living

Our community emphasizes resort-style living with an all-inclusive approach to medication care, housekeeping, maintenance, chef-prepared meals, utilities, phone, internet, and TV. We aim to create a vibrant and active lifestyle for seniors. Living Our Best Life and making memories while doing so.

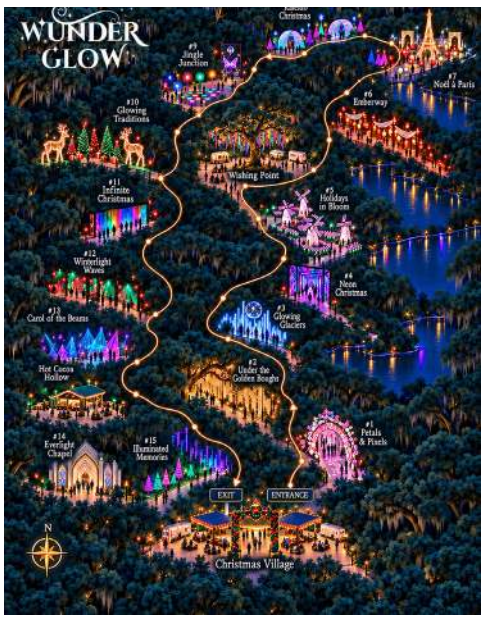
Call Kristy for a Personal Tour!
813.413.8900
$500 OFF Deposit

Independent Living
Assisted Living
Memory Care
Pets Welcome
Medication Management Included
Vibrant Social Activities
Chef Inspired Meals

For more information visit our website
www.BridgesRetirement.com
Assisted Living Facility #11670

WUNDER GLOW BRINGS A MILE OF HOLIDAY LIGHTS TO DADE CITY

Staff Report



Wunder Glow will open Saturday, November 21, bringing more than a mile of holiday music and light scenes to 50 acres of Florida's majestic oaks in Dade City. At a cost of over $10 million, the new holiday music and light show walk-through experience has been built by the same team behind Snowcat Ridge and TreeHoppers Aerial Adventure Park.

Tickets are on sale now at https://wunderglow.com/, with general admission tickets starting at $18.95. The team also unveiled the first artist's renderings, previewing the music and light scenes guests will discover along the path. Guests can play with fog-filled bubbles, ride a butterfly swing and step across glowing floor pads. At Wishing Point, they can tie a ribbon to the wishing tree. Hot Cocoa Hollow offers hot cocoa and a glowing dance floor beneath falling snow effects.

Dozens of artists, designers and craftspeople have helped bring Wunder Glow to life, including concept artists, scenic designers, skilled painters and lighting designers. Their work combines detailed scenery, synchronized lighting and holiday music to create magical scenes throughout Florida's oak forest.

"We wanted to create an amazing experience where families could spend an entire holiday evening together," said Benjamin Nagengast, CEO of Wunder Glow. "From exploring the lights beneath the oaks to sharing hot cocoa and visiting Santa, our goal is to give our guests a holiday tradition to return to year after year."

Symphonies of Light & Sound will feature illuminated scenes synchronized to holiday music, including the golden canopy of Under the Golden Boughs, Glowing Glaciers, Noël à Paris and the mirrored Infinite Christmas. Along the way, Wunder Spots will offer photo opportunities with a giant sleigh, sculpted wings and a glowing heart arch.

Christmas Village will feature four food trucks, a biergarten, s'mores fire pits and a gift shop. Families can visit Santa and enjoy story time with Mrs. Claus through Thursday, December 24. Santa visits are included in admission, with photo packages sold separately.

The season runs through January 9, 2027, with closures on Thanksgiving Day and from January 4-7, 2027. Christmas Village opens at 5:15 p.m. on operating nights, followed by the holiday light and music path at 5:30 p.m. Closing times vary by date. Guests should allow two to three hours for their visit.

Ticket prices vary by date and entry time, and tickets cost $6 more at the box office. Children under 2 are admitted for free. For a limited time, use code WUNDER10 at https://wunderglow.com/ to save 10 percent on all ticket types during the preseason sale.







Edward Jones — edwardjones.com | Member SIPC

FINANCIAL FOCUS®
Simple budgeting tips that fit real life
Sept. 14, 2026

If you've just started managing your own finances, recommitted to doing it well or noticed your spending isn't making you as happy as you'd hoped, a budget might be exactly what you need. When you know where your money is going, you're likely to feel more in control and more confident your finances reflect what actually matters to you.

A simple budgeting framework to start: The 50/30/20 rule

One of the easiest ways to structure a budget is the 50/30/20 rule. The concept is refreshingly straightforward: Put 50% of your after-tax income toward necessities (housing, groceries, utilities, transportation), 30% toward wants (dining out, entertainment, streaming subscriptions) and 20% toward savings or paying down debt.

The 50/30/20 rule is a great foundation, but you may need to adjust it a little. If you live in a high-cost city, housing alone might require more than half your paycheck. Or you may have high income and can save more than 20%. Think of the 50/30/20 rule as a starting point you can adjust as your life evolves.

Not sure where your money goes?

That's completely normal. If you honestly don't know what you spend each month, try a low-pressure approach first. Spend a few months simply observing. Check your accounts without judgment, noting money coming in and going out. Think of it as a financial check-in rather than a report card. You can't change the past, but you can absolutely adjust for the future.

From there, small steps go a long way. Even spending 15 minutes a week on your budget can make the whole process feel far less daunting.

Make technology your easy button

Some budgeting apps do the routine work for you, syncing with your accounts and tracking spending automatically. Others are more hands-on, encouraging you to map out your spending plan in advance. There's likely one out there for every style of budgeting. The goal is to find a system you'll actually use and stick with.

When the numbers feel discouraging

Sometimes looking at spending brings up more stress than relief. If that happens, start by shifting your perspective. Focus on the expenses that brought you real value — a modest gift that meant the world to a friend or how your rent provides a comfortable, stable life. Then look for changes that align your spending with your values. Substituting expenses, reducing expenses or creating more income could all be used to help you keep your spending below your income.

Build a buffer

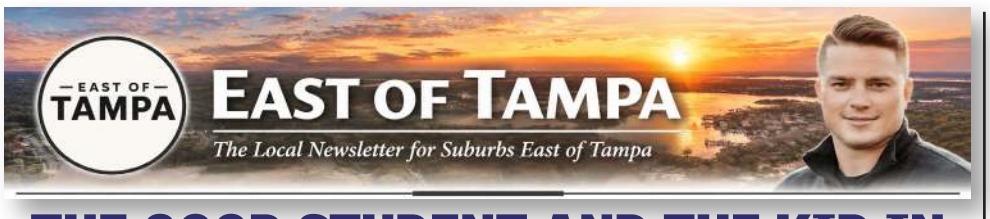
If you can, consider building a small buffer into your budget for unexpected expenses such as birthdays, minor repairs or spontaneous plans. Adding perhaps 3% of your income or a set dollar amount, like $200, helps keep those costs from throwing your whole plan off course.

The bottom line

With a few simple steps, budgeting becomes easier to stick with and more meaningful over time. At its core, it's a way to align your money with what matters while enjoying today and planning for tomorrow.



Adam M benAbram
Financial Advisor
10312 W Bloomingdale Ave
Suite 105
Riverview, FL 33578
813-626-3052
www.edwardjones.com/adam-benabram



THE GOOD STUDENT AND THE KID IN THE BACK ROW

By John Plumstead, The East Of Tampa Guy



Every class had a kid who did the reading, turned it in on time and got it right. And every class had a kid in the back who skipped the essay and raised his hand to ask the teacher how she ended up teaching in the first place.

Marie Gilmore was the first kid. I was the second.

In January 2002, Marie hand-delivered 750 copies of a brand-new newspaper to homes in FishHawk Ranch. By the second month, neighborhood kids were delivering it. By the third, it went out by mail. Today the *Osprey Observer* reaches more than 70,000 homes every month, and it's paid for entirely by local businesses who believe in it.

She's done that for almost 25 years. Every month, every fact checked, always about the people, places and things that make this community great. That's the good student.

I never saw myself as a writer. Articles were for the smart kids. I was the guy who took pride in a good joke or a good presentation, and who always had a question that got the teacher off track. I still do. How'd you build this? Was it hard?

So, I'm starting a podcast.

On the East of Tampa Podcast, I sit down with the business owners, coaches and neighbors who built East Hillsborough and ask the questions I've always wanted to ask.

Marie writes it down. I'd rather talk. If you've ever sat next to me at a chamber breakfast, you know I might like the sound of my own voice a little too much.

So, when it came time to pick a first guest, the kid in the back row went straight to the front of the class.

Marie and I talk about how the *Observer* got started, what it takes to put out five editions and more than 200 pages every month and what she's seen change around here since that first stack of 750 papers.

You can listen to the East of Tampa Podcast wherever you get your podcasts. Follow us on social and subscribe to the newsletter at https://eastoftampa.com/.

And the next time the *Osprey Observer* shows up in your mailbox, think about how it got there.

How awesome are Marie Gilmore and the *Osprey Observer* team?

LOCAL SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED AS FLORIDA SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

By Marie Gilmore

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is proud to announce that 38 schools have been designated as 2025-2026 Florida Schools of Excellence by the Florida State Board of Education on October 14. The designation recognizes schools whose sustained academic performance places them among the highest-performing schools in the state.



The Schools of Excellence designation is awarded by the Florida State Board of Education pursuant to Florida law and honors schools that demonstrate exceptional student achievement and academic outcomes.

"Being recognized as a Florida School of Excellence is a tremendous honor and a reflection of the hard work happening in classrooms across our district every day," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "This achievement belongs to our students, teachers, support staff, school leaders and families who work together to create outstanding learning environments for our students. We are incredibly proud of these schools and grateful for their commitment to excellence."

The recognition adds to a growing list of academic accomplishments across Hillsborough County Public Schools and highlights the district's continued focus on student achievement, high expectations and supporting each student's success.

The designation also celebrates the collaboration among educators, administrators, families and students that helps schools build strong academic foundations. From classroom instruction and individualized student support to family engagement and school leadership, these efforts contribute to an environment where students can reach their full potential.

For schools across Hillsborough County, the recognition serves as an opportunity to highlight successful practices and celebrate the dedication of the people who make a difference in students' lives each day. Teachers and staff play an important role in creating engaging learning experiences, encouraging students to set ambitious goals and helping them develop the skills needed for future success.

The 38 schools represent a significant achievement for the district and its school communities. Their designation reflects a commitment to maintaining high standards while continuing to provide students with opportunities to learn, grow and succeed.

HCPS continues to emphasize academic excellence throughout its schools, with a focus on ensuring students are prepared for the next steps in their education and beyond. The Florida Schools of Excellence recognition underscores the importance of continued teamwork and dedication in supporting positive educational outcomes across the district.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES START HERE



Every student is unique. That's why Hillsborough County Public Schools offers more opportunities to learn, grow and prepare for the future—in safe, supportive learning environments where students can thrive.

From STEM, advanced academics and the arts, to career and technical education, athletics, specialized programs and more, students can explore opportunities that match their interests, goals and learning needs.

With more than 40 tuition-free Magnet Schools, families can find engaging programs and learning environments designed to help students build their future.



Find your school. Attend upcoming events. Explore the possibilities. Discover what's next. Apply Now! Magnet & School Choice Application Window is Now Open through December 7 at 11:59 p.m.



HCPSChoice.com

Hillsborough County PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Preparing Students for Life

FOOD NETWORK CHEF SHARES HIS CULINARY JOURNEY IN NEW BOOK

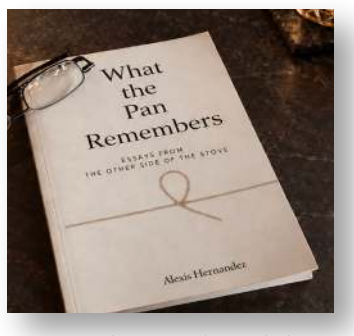
By Makenzie Atkins Noel

For chef Alexis Hernandez, food has always been about more than what is on the plate.

The Sun City Center resident has built a career spanning professional kitchens, restaurant ownership and television competitions, including Food Network Star and a winning appearance on Cutthroat Kitchen. Today, he is exploring another side of his culinary career through writing, sharing the memories and experiences that have shaped his relationship with food.



Chef and author Alexis Hernandez, a Sun City Center resident and Food Network competitor, continues to share his passion for food through cooking and writing.



His new book, What the Pan Remembers, is a collection of personal essays about the people, places and moments he remembers through food.

Raised in a Cuban American household in New Jersey, Hernandez grew up eating rice, black beans, yuca, plantains and breaded chicken. His curiosity about cooking expanded when he began exploring cuisines beyond those he knew at home, eventually leading him to culinary school at Sullivan University in Louisville, Kentucky.

He went on to gain experience in professional kitchens before owning Union Hill Kitchen in Atlanta, Georgia, where he learned firsthand the challenges of running a restaurant. From managing a small kitchen to making last-minute adjustments when ingredients ran short, Hernandez learned that being a chef required more than knowing how to cook. His experience competing on competition shows brought new challenges, but he said some of his greatest lessons came from solving problems in his own kitchen.

"I learned a lot from television, but I probably learned more on the nights when something went wrong in my own kitchen and I had to figure out what to do about it," Hernandez said.

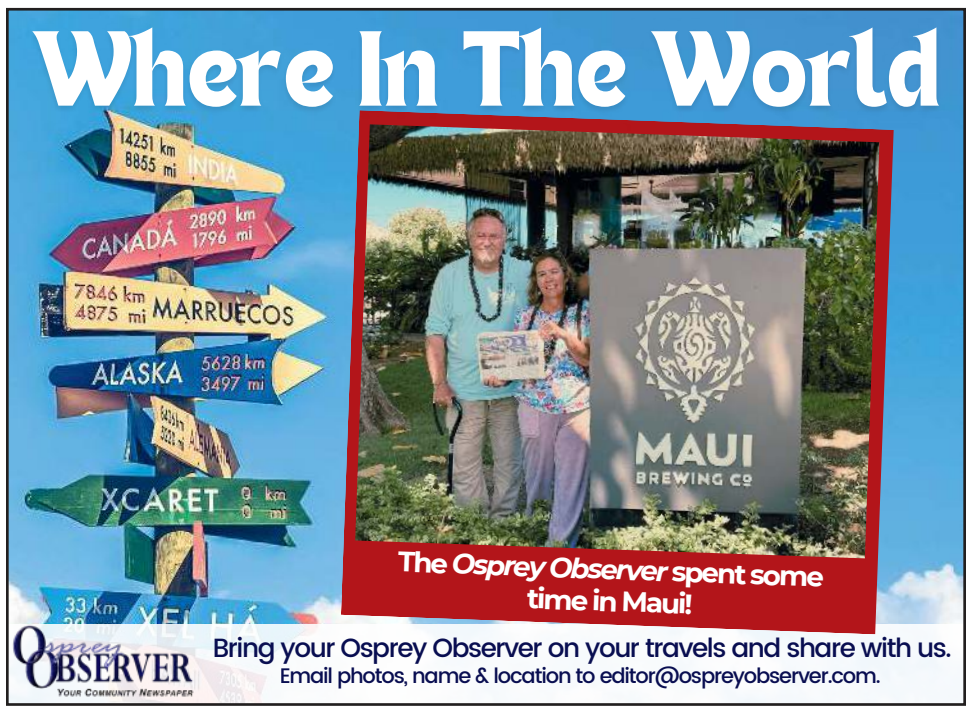
That practical perspective also informs his writing. In What the Pan Remembers, Hernandez reflects on childhood meals with his sister, eating canned ravioli and other seemingly ordinary experiences that became lasting memories.

He hopes readers will recognize pieces of their own lives in his stories and remember the people, places and traditions that have shaped them.

Now settled in Sun City Center, Hernandez continues to cook, develop recipes and share culinary knowledge through his website, The Other Side of the Stove, and his monthly Kitchen Notes column in the News of Sun City Center.

For more, please visit https://theothersideofthestove.com/.





Join us for our
Alzheimer's Support Group for Caregivers

Our support group welcomes families caring for a loved one living with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia.

Available both in person and virtually.
AMBIANCE AT BRANDON
1320 Oakfield Drive // Brandon, FL 33511
3RD TUESDAY OF THE MONTH • 6:30PM
4TH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH • 2:00PM
Please call Jill at 813-607-6880.

To learn more about upcoming support groups, scan below.

Ambiance at BRANDON
ASSISTED LIVING & MEMORY CARE
by Providence Senior Living
Creating the Best Day Possible™
AmbianceBrandon.com
Assisted Living Facility #PENDING



Dine Local OSPREYOBSERVER.COM

1/2 Off
Appetizer with any dinner entree.
Friday & Saturday
6pm-Close
Dine In ONLY
Note Available For To Go
STRANDHILL PUBLIC
10288 Causeway Blvd

10% OFF ENTIRE Purchase
J.E Kicks RESTAURANT & PATIO BAR
COME GET YOUR KICKS
813-643-7777
Only valid with regular menu. With this coupon. Must present before submitting payment. Before tax. One coupon per visit. Not valid with other offers.

LUNCH SPECIALS EVERY DAY
FAMILY MEAL SPECIALS
$49.95
Take Out & Delivery
La Septima Cafe
La Septima Cafe
702 W Lumsden Rd. Brandon
Not Valid with any other discounts, promotions or coupons. No Cash Value.

10% OFF ENTIRE Purchase
SUNFLOWER CAFE
Sunflower Cafe
813-65-SUSHI
Only valid with regular menu. With this coupon. Must present before submitting payment. Before tax. One coupon per visit. Not valid with other offers.

Buy One Get One FREE Smoothies
BETTER BLEND
955 E Brandon Blvd
(Next to BubbaQue's)
Valid at Better Blend - Brandon only. Must present coupon. Equal or lesser value. Limit one coupon per visit. Cannot be combined with other offers. No cash value. Excludes third-party delivery.

Would You Like To Advertise Your Restaurant? Call Us For All The Details
813-657-2418

GASPARILLA BOWL BRINGS HOLIDAY COLLEGE FOOTBALL GAME TO TAMPA

Staff Report



The Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl will return to Raymond James Stadium on Friday, December 18, bringing another postseason college football matchup to Tampa just days before Christmas.

Kickoff is scheduled for 2:30 p.m., with the game broadcast live on ESPN. The bowl, owned and operated by ESPN Events, will feature two teams selected from a pool that includes programs from the Southeastern Conference (SEC), Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and American Conference. The participating teams will be announced later in the season.

The annual event has become a holiday-season tradition for Tampa Bay football fans while also providing an opportunity for local businesses, families and fan groups to gather for pregame tailgates, holiday parties and other celebrations surrounding the game.

Last year's Gasparilla Bowl featured a dominant performance by NC State, which defeated Memphis 31-7. The Wolfpack jumped to a 31-7 halftime advantage and went on to earn its first bowl victory since 2017.

NC State linebacker Caden Fordham was named the game's Most Valuable Player after recording 13 tackles, 1.5 tackles for loss and a 55-yard interception return. He became the first defensive player in Gasparilla Bowl history to receive MVP honors.

The NC State defense held Memphis to seven points, marking the second-lowest scoring output in Gasparilla Bowl history. The Wolfpack also established a bowl record by scoring 31 points in the first half.

"Each year, the Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl continues to elevate its profile in postseason events in college football, and we're thrilled to return to Raymond James Stadium this December," said Scott Glaser, executive director of the Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl and ESPN Events.

Union Home Mortgage, which has partnered with the bowl for several years, will again serve as the event's title sponsor.

"We're excited to continue our partnership with the Gasparilla Bowl and build on the success we've shared over the years," said Bill Cosgrove, CEO of Union Home Mortgage.

Ticket information for the 2026 Union Home Mortgage Gasparilla Bowl will be announced later this fall. Additional information is available at www.gasparillabowl.com

CHAMBER CELEBRATES INSURED AMERICAN FAMILY'S 10 YEARS

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) recently celebrated Insured American Family with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony recognizing the veteran-owned, family-run insurance agency for more than 10 years in business.

Chamber members, community leaders, friends and supporters gathered to congratulate the Insured American Family team on this important business milestone. Guests enjoyed networking, a charcuterie spread, custom desserts, giveaways and the opportunity to learn more about the agency and the services it provides.

Insured American Family provides personalized insurance solutions for individuals, families and businesses, including health, Medicare, life, supplemental, dental, vision and small-business coverage. Licensed in 36 states, the agency works with major insurance carriers to compare available plans and help clients identify coverage options that fit their individual needs and budgets.

BRCC President Amber Aaron welcomed those in attendance and thanked the community for coming together to support a fellow chamber member. She then introduced Insured American Family owner Craig Gruenbaum, who shared more about the company, its history and its commitment to serving clients.

Following the official ribbon cutting, BRCC Ambassador Lawrence Barnes presented a special proclamation recognizing the occasion and declaring the day 'Insured American Family Day.'

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Gruenbaum and the entire Insured American Family team on more than a decade in business and wishes them continued growth and success in the years ahead.





TAMPA ELECTRIC'S MANATEE VIEWING CENTER IS OPEN FOR 40TH YEAR

Staff Report



Tampa Electric's award-winning Manatee Viewing Center opened for the 2026-27 season on November 1 — its 40th anniversary year — welcoming visitors back to one of the Tampa Bay area's most popular destinations.

The cownose rays are now living year-round in the Manatee Viewing Center's touch tank as permanent residents. This avoids stressing the animals when moving them to another home for the summer. During the offseason, the gentle creatures will be available as ambassadors for summer campers.

Other improvements since last season:

• A new shelter provides shade for visitors awaiting tram pickup on the south end of the parking lot.

• Freshwater turtles have a new habitat at the Suncoast Youth Conservation Center, including underwater views.

• The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's fish hatchery is now open to the public.

• New solar-powered charging tables have been installed, to replace a few that were damaged by hurricanes.

• The Tom Hernandez Clean Energy Center will be improved throughout the season.

"The Manatee Viewing Center has always been a special place where people can experience the wonders of Florida up close, and now we're excited to have the rays make their permanent home here, too," said Stan Kroh, manager of Land and Stewardship Programs for Tampa Electric. "Whether you're watching manatees in the wild or getting an up-close look at the rays, it's a chance to connect with nature and see environmental stewardship in action."

Admission and parking are free.

Since the early 1970s, manatees have sought refuge from the cold in the warm water canal at Tampa Electric's Big Bend Power Station in Apollo Beach.

When Tampa Bay's water temperature drops to 68 degrees or below, manatees gather in the canal. Sometimes hundreds of manatees can be seen at once. On one very cold day last season, a record 2,100 manatees congregated in the canal. About 190 manatees have been documented returning to the canal for more than 20 years. One remarkable manatee has returned for more than four decades. The area is a state and federal manatee sanctuary.

The Manatee Viewing Center draws nearly 400,000 visitors each season and has welcomed more than 8.7 million visitors. Admission and parking are free.

The center is open from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily from November 1 through April 15, except Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter, when it is closed. On Christmas Eve, the center closes at 3 p.m. Comfortable shoes and clothing are recommended. Trained service animals are permitted.

For more information, visit the website at www.tampaelectric.com/manatee or call 813-228-4289.

ECHO THRIFT ANNOUNCES BLACK FRIDAY SALE FEATURING 50% OFF

Staff Report



ECHO Thrift is inviting the community to shop local and save big this Black Friday with a storewide sale offering 50 percent off all merchandise at both ECHO Thrift locations on November 27, from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Shoppers are encouraged to arrive early for the best selection of affordable, gently used merchandise and unique finds. ECHO Thrift offers something for everyone, including: gently used clothing for men, women and children, shoes, handbags and accessories, home decor, kitchenware and small appliances, books, puzzles and toy, electronics and seasonal items, vintage and designer finds, including curated ECHO Vintage pieces.

Whether shoppers are searching for everyday essentials, holiday gifts, home furnishings, or one-of-a-kind treasures, ECHO Thrift's Black Friday Sale offers an opportunity to find great deals while supporting a meaningful local cause.

Shopping with Purpose

Every purchase at ECHO Thrift makes a difference in the community. Proceeds benefit ECHO (Emergency Care Help Organization) and support its mission of helping local neighbors in need through emergency assistance, food support, clothing resources and life-stabilizing programs.

By shopping at ECHO Thrift, customers are doing more than finding great bargains. It is helping provide resources and support to individuals and families throughout the community.

The community is encouraged to mark their calendars, spread the word and arrive early to take advantage of these incredible storewide savings.

ECHO Thrift - Brandon is located at 424 West Brandon Blvd. in Brandon. ECHO Thrift – Bloomingdale is located 815 W. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon. For more information, visit https://echothrift.org/.





THE BLOOM EXCHANGE: COFFEE, FLOWERS AND PLANTS COME TOGETHER

By McKenzie Brown



The Bloom Exchange owners Kish and Shannon Patel offer a wide variety of houseplants, fresh flowers, plant care items and a small coffee bar.

For plant lovers and coffee enthusiasts, The Bloom Exchange in Riverview offers a place where two passions come together under one roof.

Located at 13438 Boyette Rd., The Bloom Exchange is a neighborhood plant shop, floral boutique and coffee bar owned by Shannon and Kish Patel. The welcoming space was created as a place where customers can shop for plants and flowers, enjoy a specialty coffee and take a moment to slow down and reconnect with nature.

The shop carries a wide selection of houseplants, ranging from beginner-friendly varieties to unique tropical plants sought after by experienced collectors. New selections arrive regularly, including monthly restocks, giving customers a reason to return and discover something different.

Customers can also find everything they need to care for their plants, including pots, planters, specialized soil, plant-care tools and other accessories.

Fresh flowers are another highlight at The Bloom Exchange. Fresh-cut flowers arrive each weekend, with grab-and-go bouquets and arrangements that change with the seasons. Customers can also build their own floral selections or choose from specialty Bloom Boxes, which pair coffee with a mini floral arrangement displayed in a glass vase.

At the coffee bar, visitors can enjoy hot or iced specialty drinks made with beans from local Banyan Coffee Co. The menu includes Americanos, cappuccinos, lattes and mochas, with options for syrups and alternative milks. A selection of TeBella teas is also available, including Florida Orange Blossom, Moroccan Mint, Pumpkin Chai, Masala Chai and Sweet Banana Crème.

The Bloom Exchange is also preparing to offer creative workshops designed to bring the community together. Upcoming classes will include floral arranging, terrarium building and other plant-inspired projects. The workshops will give participants an opportunity to learn something new while creating something they can take home.

"The Bloom Exchange was created to share our love for plants, flowers and creativity," Shannon said. "We wanted to build a warm, welcoming space where plant lovers can share plant tips, exchange knowledge and inspiration and celebrate the joy of greenery."

The shop is open Wednesday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. It is closed Monday and Tuesday. For more information, email fhbloomexchange@gmail.com.

LOCAL VETERANS SUPPORT WOMEN MONUMENT WITH $500 DONATION

Staff Report



KeishaMarie Douglas with Roland Tiso, Jr., and Connie White

A weekly gathering of local veterans recently became an opportunity to support an important piece of Hillsborough County veterans' history.

At the October 28 breakfast meeting of Bob's Vets Brandon, Valrico resident, veteran and author Roland Tiso presented a $500 check to Connie White, one of the local veterans helping lead fundraising efforts for the Women Veterans Monument planned for Hillsborough County's Veterans Memorial Park.

The monument is being created to honor the women who have served in the United States military. A dedication ceremony is planned for June 2027.

Tiso, who has previously shared his experiences as a veteran and author with the local community, is currently completing his second book, *Soldiering in Hard Times*. His $500 contribution came as an advance connected to the book and was donated in support of the monument project.

White and the fundraising team at AMVETS Post 44 have also been actively working to raise awareness and financial support for the monument. The group received another check during the October 26 monthly meeting of the Veterans Council of Hillsborough County. Veterans Council President Joe Muhlberger was on hand for the presentation.

The support reflects the strong network of veterans and community members working together to recognize the contributions of those who have served.

Bob's Vets Brandon is approaching its eight-month anniversary and has become a regular gathering place for veterans, active-duty service members and community supporters. Hosted by KeishaMarie Douglas, Bob's Vets Brandon meets every Wednesday at 7 a.m. at Bob Evans, located at 10119 Horace Ave. in Brandon.

The informal weekly breakfast provides an opportunity for veterans to connect, share experiences and hear from guest speakers and local organizations. There are no membership fees, dues or attendance requirements, and veterans and community supporters are welcome to attend.

KeishaMarie's Veterans Wing Women, which has also been active in supporting local veterans, recently received nonprofit status.

With the Women Veterans Monument now moving toward its planned 2027 dedication, local veterans continue to demonstrate that service and community support extend well beyond military duty.





Christian Voice



Grace Notes

When Your Sacrifice Crawls Off the Altar
By Debora Coty

Someone recently asked me, "Are altar sacrifices still expected of Christ-followers today?"

The answer is yes, but in a different form than biblical times: sacrificial giving.

A little digging revealed King David's insight while seeking a suitable place to build an altar to ask Jehovah's forgiveness via an animal sacrifice for a rotten sin David had committed (aren't we glad that because of Jesus' blood sacrifice on the cross we don't have to do that anymore?).

David inquired about a certain piece of real estate. The submissive owner offered the land to his king for FREE, and wood and oxen (to sacrifice) too.

King David wisely replied: "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the LORD or offer a sacrifice which costs me nothing," (1 Chronicles 21:24).

Note: If it costs you nothing, it isn't a real sacrifice. It's worthless. It means zilch.

I let those sobering thoughts percolate. Maybe my own sacrificial giving is too easy. Most of the things I do for the Lord cost me nothing. I do them because I like doing them. I turn down things that I don't like doing because they're too time-consuming, difficult or energy-draining.

They cost me too much.

Then a friend asked if I would spend the afternoon with her live-in 91-year-old mom while she worked. Now, this may not sound like a sacrifice to you, but because of my chronic nighttime insomnia and afternoon naps being necessary to keep (barely) functioning, it's a big deal to me. Skipping my nap would mean a blossoming migraine and terminal irritability.

Yikes. My sacrifice was trying to crawl off the altar. I felt the Holy Spirit's elbow jab: It's not a sacrifice if it costs you nothing, Deb.

So, I went granny-sitting. And the Almighty blessed my socks off with a wonderful afternoon of fellowship with the perkiest and godliest sweetly ripened gal ever.

I guess my sacrificial parameters aren't set in stone after all. And that's a good thing, because Papa God is pleased when we don't allow our living sacrifices to crawl off the altar.

"Do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased," (Hebrews 13:16 NASB).

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.

TEACHING: BOTH EXHILARATING AND FRIGHTENING!



"We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago," (Ephesians 2:10).

Teaching is an interesting phenomenon. I really enjoyed it in the classroom when I was a young man, working with exceptional student education. Later, I taught adult ed. and led small groups in church. I also have fun speaking at retreats and workshops as a spin-off from the books I write.

But what's happening now with the community men's Bible study here in North Carolina is a serendipitous highlight in my life, something neither planned for nor expected, at the same time both exhilarating and a little bit frightening.

I always return home with a tight knot in my stomach because A) I care so deeply for these guys, B) I am conscious of how important this is and C) I second-guess nearly everything I do!

I believe that God is trusting me with something special, and I want to be as good as I can. And that means pointing people toward Jesus. Or, as John the Baptist put it, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Currently, we're reading Ephesians, where Paul writes that we are all citizens together and covered by the same covenant promises. And along with our membership in God's household comes responsibility. Not rule-keeping obligations but the opportunity to join in with God's initiatives of mercy, grace, goodness, reconciliation, healing, justice and more.

Jesus is a catalyst who, in a sense, activates and releases the power and the purpose of our spiritual nature. We become, as Paul points out, "God's masterpiece, recreated in Jesus so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

Jesus accepted pretty much everyone without being judgy — but he also said, "By their fruits you shall know them." Jesus invites us to live our salvation out loud and to join in with God's good work.

Like all good lessons, this one ended too soon. But we will pick it up again next week ... and if I didn't completely blow it this time, I suspect that the guys will be back!

— 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.



PLANT CITY COMMUNITY CHORALE PRESENTS 'THE HEARTH WITHIN: MUSIC OF RENEWAL, LIGHT & HOPE'

By Libby Hopkins



The Plant City Community Chorale invites the community to an inspiring and delightful concert, 'The Hearth Within: Music of Renewal, Light & Hope,' to be held on Sunday, December 6, at 5 p.m. at Saint Clement Roman Catholic Church, located at 1104 N. Alexander St. in Plant City.

This year's program, themed around peace, reflection, and celebration, offers audiences an inspiring journey through diverse musical traditions. The carefully curated repertoire bridges meditative sacred compositions with joyful seasonal classics. Highlights of the evening include the contemplative beauty of "Healing Light: A Celtic Prayer" and Johannes Brahms' evocative choral setting of "In Stiller Nacht." Audiences will also experience the tender warmth of "Lo, How A Rose / The Rose" and the triumphant jubilation of "Joy to the World" plus classics such as "O Holy Night" and "Love's Pure Light (Silent Night)."

Under the direction of Coleman Flentge, the Plant City Community Chorale brings these diverse works together into a cohesive musical narrative that invites you to step away from the holiday rush and experience the peace and joy of the season.

Tickets are $25 (cash, debit cards and credit cards accepted) and are available at www.pccchorale.org, www.facebook.com/pccommunitychorale/, from any chorale member or by texting 727-424-9661. Tickets are $20 when purchased from a chorale member in advance. Tickets may also be purchased at the door on the night of the concert. Children 12 and younger are free.

Interested in supporting your local chorale with a sponsorship or donation? Visit its website, www.pccchorale.org.

IMPACT GAME NIGHT COMBINES FUN WITH A MEANINGFUL CAUSE

Staff Report



Impact Program Inc. Executive Director Angie Kagey invites the community to its annual Designer Purse Game Night Thursday, December 3 at The Regent in Riverview.

The Impact Program Inc. will host its popular Purse Game Night with a twist on Thursday, December 3, offering an evening of bingo, trivia, games, prizes, food and fellowship while raising funds to support local youth and families.

The event will take place from 6-9 p.m. at The Regent, located near Winthrop at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview. Doors open at 6 p.m., with games beginning promptly at 7 p.m.

Tickets are $55 per person and include food and beverages, as well as everything you'll need to enjoy a night of fun games! The event is alcohol-free. Guests who want additional chances to win can purchase additional game packs.

Participants will have the opportunity to win designer purses along with other prizes. The evening will also feature raffle opportunities and a silent auction, giving guests additional ways to participate while supporting Impact's programs.

"Impact has been serving the community for the past 23 years and is supported by businesses, individuals, civic and other organizations," said Angie Kagey, executive director of Impact. "The overwhelming support of the community allows our staff and volunteers to continue to make an 'Impact' in the lives of students and parents."

All proceeds from ticket sales and silent auction items will benefit Impact Program, a nonprofit youth development organization focused on educating, equipping and empowering young people to make positive life choices and avoid high-risk behaviors.

For more than two decades, Impact has provided classroom education and presentations for teens, parents, teachers and other youth leaders. Its programs emphasize healthy lifestyles and relationships while providing young people with information and resources to make informed decisions.

Funds raised will help support Impact's ongoing programs throughout Hillsborough County, including classroom education and presentations for parents and students.

Organizers encourage residents to gather their friends and enjoy a night out while supporting a local organization dedicated to strengthening youth and families.

Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available through Impact Program. For questions, contact Kagey at akagey@whatisimpact.com. More information about Impact and its programs is available at www.whatisimpact.com.

DIRECTORY OF LOCAL BUSINESSES

ASPHALT SEALCOATING
Residential & Commercial
Sealer Hand-Applied
Cracks and Pot Holes Filled
Veterans' Discounts
Free Quotes
(813) 394-0915
SULLIVAN ASPHALT SEALERS
30 years of serving customers!

LAWN CARE
DML PROPERTY SOLUTIONS LLC LAWN CARE SERVICES
Full-Service Lawn Care & Property Maintenance
Irrigation Repair & System Maintenance
Landscape Design & Install
Property Cleanouts, Junk Removal & Equipment Hauling
DML Property Solutions, LLC
@dml_property_solutions_fl
863-602-5217 | www.dmlproperty.com

HEAT & AC
BROWN COMFORT SYSTEMS
HEATING & AIRCONDITIONING
SERVICE YOU CAN TRUST
Residential & Commercial
Installation & Repair
Commercial Refrigeration
(813) 671-2555

NOTARY
Mobile & Online Notarization
Wills & Trust Notarization
Power of Attorney
Real Estate Closing
Apostille Services
DMV & Vehicle Titles
Minor Travel Consent Forms
Passport
Marriage License
Estate Planning
Loan Signing Services
Angie Anderson
813-212-2268
angie@stellarnotaryservices.net
www.stellarnotaryservices.net

PEST CONTROL
TNT termite pest control
Residential and Commercial
(813) 468-8574
TNTtermiteandpestcontrol.com
LOCAL & FAMILY OWNED
"DYNAMITE CUSTOMER SERVICE"

LANDSCAPING
Dave The Garden Guy
Landscape Design & Consultation
Help With Your Existing Garden
Small Garden Projects
Irrigation Repair
$10 OFF
SERVICE OVER $100
813-416-0656
Local Resident

Osprey Observer
Your Community Newspaper
Advertise in this directory for just $50 per ad, or as low as $200 per month ... (INCLUDES ALL 5 EDITIONS)
Call Us Today! (813) 657-2418 or Visit OspreyObserver.com

LEE ROY SELMON'S LEGACY LIVES ON THROUGH THE SELMON EXPRESSWAY

By Nick Nahas



The Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA) celebrated Hall of Fame Buccaneers' player Lee Roy Selmon on what would have been his 71st birthday October 20.

The expressway was named after the Tampa icon in 1999. According to its website, the Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority (THEA) is an independent state agency that owns, maintains and operates four facilities within Hillsborough County: the Selmon Expressway, the Brandon Parkway, Meridian Avenue and the Selmon Greenway.



Lee Roy Selmon, a former Oklahoma football standout, was the first-ever draft pick for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers expansion team in 1976.

Selmon, a former Oklahoma football standout, was the first-ever draft pick for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers expansion team in 1976. During his nine-season NFL career, he earned six consecutive Pro Bowl selections, recorded 78.5 career sacks and helped lead the Bucs to their first NFC Central Division championship in 1979. In 1995, Selmon became the first Buccaneer inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Selmon's commitment to Tampa Bay continued long after his playing career. He served as associate athletic director and later athletic director at the University of South Florida, helping establish the university's football program.

"When I first moved to Tampa Bay, I knew Lee Roy Selmon as a hall of fame football player. What I came to learn was that his impact on this community went far beyond football," said THEA CEO and Executive Director Greg Slater.

THEA commissioned an 8-foot, 800-pound, hollowed bronze Lee Roy Selmon statue along the Selmon Greenway. It depicts him forming the University of South Florida (USF) Bulls gesture with his left hand. It also offers a STEM internship program in his name.

"He was someone who genuinely cared about people and wanted to make a difference in their lives. That is why his legacy means so much to THEA and why we are proud that the Lee Roy Selmon Expressway carries his name," said Slater.

According to its website, THEA carrying Selmon's name is about honoring more than a football legend. It is about celebrating a leader who embodied perseverance, service and a commitment to making his community stronger.

LOCAL CHRISTIAN GROUP RELEASES DEBUT RECORDING ANIMA CHRISTI

Staff Report



Valrico/Brandon-based Christian music group, Musica Deo (Music For God in Latin), just released its debut recording, Anima Christi. This record features two musical renditions (in English and Spanish) of the traditional prayer of the same name, which is a contemplation of Jesus on the cross and a recognition of His passion and might.

"Our recording of the Anima Christi combines elements from traditional and contemporary music," commented Musica Deo's co-founder and musical director, Ramón Martos-García. "If you listen closely, you will notice elements from classical music, ballad, pop, folk and more. I believe that blend of styles captures the essence of our ministry: to create and share with everyone God-inspired music that sounds timeless."

Musica Deo was formed in 2025 by members of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Seffner. The ministry's main members are local residents, Martos (piano/programming) and Milaris Rivera (vocals). They recorded English and Spanish versions of the Anima Christi at the Third Room Studios between July and August. The cover artwork was designed by Martos using an illustration created by Sergey Pykhonin.

"The hands, the cross and the red color or shown on the cover encapsulate the essence of this prayer," Martos said. "They symbolize Jesus' passion. I think it's a perfect representation of the music and lyrics."

Musica Deo's Anima Christi is available for free on most streaming platforms, including Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, iTunes, YouTube Music, etc. People who purchase the record through Bandcamp (Musica Deo's official online store) will receive bonus materials, like an additional instrumental track, sheet music, lyrics/chords sheets and exclusive additional artwork. Proceeds will help fund the group's next recordings.

"My hope is that our music may inspire prayer and awakens a desire to know Jesus," concluded Rivera. "We hope to encourage someone to follow Him, strengthen their faith or simply turn a heart towards God. He will take care of the rest."

Listen to Anima Christi on the following streaming platforms: Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/album/6iPaVAzRVrcCrkBwBA5ANf. Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/us/album/anima-christi-single/6825909333. Amazon: https://music.amazon.com/albums/B0HNTDN5C8?tag=fndcmpgns-20. YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0E1eAm-zPs.



LIBRARY CARD OPENS THE DOOR TO FREE FLORIDA ORCHESTRA TICKETS

By Kelly Wise Valdes



A Hillsborough County library card now offers free orchestra vouchers, along with other cultural freebies across Tampa Bay.

The Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative is partnering with The Florida Orchestra to give residents a chance to enjoy live symphonic music free of charge during the orchestra's 2026-27 season.

The library announced that a limited number of free concert vouchers will be available on a firstcome, firstserved basis at local library branches beginning this month. Each person may receive up to two vouchers while supplies last.

The Florida Orchestra, founded in 1968, performs more than 100 concerts each year and serves as one of the region's major cultural institutions. Library officials expect interest in the vouchers to be high and encourage early pickup at any Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative location.

Library officials said the partnership supports its mission to expand access to the arts and create new opportunities for cultural engagement. The Florida Orchestra's 2026-27 season includes a mix of traditional masterworks, contemporary pieces and special event concerts intended to appeal to both longtime patrons and new audiences.

Residents can claim vouchers by visiting any participating Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative location. Library staff will distribute them until all are claimed, with no reservations or holds permitted.

In addition to the new orchestra vouchers, library cardholders can also take advantage of the county's popular Discovery Pass program, which provides free onetime admission to a variety of local museums and attractions. Participating venues include the Tampa Bay History Center, Glazer Children's Museum, Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, American Victory Ship & Museum, Florida Holocaust Museum, Imagine Museum of Contemporary Glass Art, Tampa Museum of Art, Henry B. Plant Museum and others. Reservations are digital, limited in number and typically valid for a seven-day checkout period.

Residents seeking more information about free cultural programs, museum access or voucher availability can visit their local library or check the library system's website at www.hcplc.org or call 813-273-3652. You can also contact the library via text messaging at 813-352-1603.

SENIORS VS. CRIME VOLUNTEERS HELP PROTECT LOCAL SENIORS FROM SCAMS

By Libby Hopkins



Seniors vs. Crime is a special project of the Florida attorney general that began in 1989 as a crime prevention program using senior volunteers to educate their peers and encourage them to take an active role in their own protection. Today, the statewide organization provides services to senior victims while continuing its educational outreach.

The primary mission of Seniors vs. Crime is to reduce the victimization of senior citizens who are targeted for specific crimes and scams based on their age.

"Even though we were retired, we wanted to stay active and looked for ways to make a difference in our community," said Rosanne Pogash. "We read about a group that was charged with helping people who might have been scammed or who have had disputes with businesses, contractors or salespeople and needed some help in resolving issues. That led us to volunteer with a statewide group, Seniors vs. Crime."

Rosanne and her husband, Bill Pogash, wanted to help people who had lost, in some cases, thousands of dollars by assisting them in settling disputes and recovering their money.

"Individuals contact Seniors vs. Crime by completing an online complaint form at www.seniorsvscrime.com or calling 800-203-3099, and those forms are distributed to one of the Seniors vs. Crime offices located across the state," Rosanne said. "Our Region 2 Office is in Sun City Center at 946 Cherry Dr., Ste. A, next door to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's substation. Our office is staffed on Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to Noon, and walk-ins are always welcome."

The Pogashes say the most rewarding part of volunteering is helping people receive restitution after they have been wronged.

"We act as an intermediary between the complainant and the company," Rosanne said. "In many cases, after we represent that we are volunteers for a special project of the Florida attorney's office, reputable businesses or individuals usually want to help resolve any issues. We can help after the complainant has been stonewalled by the other party and just needs some help in getting to the right person to resolve the dispute."

The couple also provides outreach presentations to seniors, church groups, clubs, homeowners and condo associations, and senior centers. They share information about current scams and strategies to avoid becoming victims.

"We feel that if we can get to these groups and explain scam prevention strategies, we can reduce the number of people needing help resolving disputes," Rosanne said. "Our experience in giving these presentations is that we learn from each other and get our point across much better by hearing from the audience who share their own experiences."

To learn more, visit www.seniorsvscrime.com.

ELEVATED REALTY
RAISING THE STANDARD
REAL SUPPORT.
REAL OPPORTUNITY.
REAL GROWTH.
READY TO ELEVATE YOUR REAL ESTATE CAREER?
A BROKERAGE BUILT TO HELP YOU GROW.
100% COMMISSION OPPORTUNITIES
Keep more of what you earn.
TRAINING & MENTORSHIP
Hands-on education, mentorship and support.
TECHNOLOGY & LEAD RESOURCES
Access the systems you need to work smarter.
HANDS-ON BROKER & ADMIN SUPPORT
A collaborative culture with a hands-on broker and admin support.
LISA TACKUS
BROKER/OWNER
More support. More opportunity. More room to grow.
813-563-5995 success@elevatedrealtyfl.com ElevatedRealtyFL.com
Scan to learn more!

BROKEN MIRROR?
BENT WHEEL?
WE'VE GOT THE PART YOU NEED — AT A PRICE YOU'LL LOVE!
LARGE INVENTORY OF QUALITY USED PARTS
Foreign Cars • Domestic Cars • SUVs • Light Trucks
813-689-8131
3159 E. State Road 60, Valrico
Locally owned and ready to help you get back on the road!
BRANDON AUTO SERVICES

CUSTOM HAIR
For the hair you've always wanted!
Since 1969
Thin Hair?
• FREE CONSULTATION!
• EUROPEAN HUMAN HAIR TOPPERS, WIGS & BLENDS
• NON-SURGICAL BONDING options for active men & women
• Chemotherapy and Alopecia Specialists
• Largest In-Stock Selection in Tampa Bay
• Non-Surgical Hair Replacement for Men
CALL & MENTION COUPON CODE OSPREY FOR $50 OFF YOUR FIRST WIG!
Offer expires 11/30/26.
CLEARWATER MALL 727-725-1052
BRANDON 813-651-9484
TAMPA 813-932-5327
customhairtampabay.com • APPOINTMENT ONLY PLEASE

La Septima Cafe
A TASTE OF OLD YBOR
Brandon's first authentic Spanish Restaurant
The Holidays are about Family, so Leave the Cooking to Us!
ORDER from Our Catering Menu!
Lechon Asado Family Meal (Feeds 4-6 ppl)
Includes Slow roasted marinated pork, rice, black beans, yuca or plantanos, salad, bread and a 2 liter soft drink.
SPECIAL! $54.95
Take Out Only
Special through 12/30/2026
We are closed Thanksgiving Day
Be sure to pick up your order the day before on Wednesday Nov. 25th by 7:30pm.
702 W. Lumsden Rd., Brandon • 813-685-0502 • www.laseptimacafe.com
Mon. - Sat. 11am. - 8pm. • Closed Sunday

HOLIDAY FUN ARRIVES AT BASS PRO FOR A SEASON OF FAMILY MEMORIES

By Marie Gilmore



Santa Claus has arrived at Santa's Wonderland at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's, bringing holiday traditions, festive activities and opportunities for families to make Christmas memories.

Santa made his grand entrance at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's locations across the U.S. and Canada on Saturday, November 7. Santa's Wonderland officially opened the following day, November 8, and will continue through Christmas Eve with free studio-quality photos with Santa, kids' crafts and holiday giveaways.

Since 2008, Santa's Wonderland has become a beloved holiday tradition, providing millions of free holiday photos and creating countless happy memories for children and families.

Families visiting Santa's Wonderland can receive a free 4-by-6 studio-quality photo with Santa, along with a free shareable video. Additional photo packages are available for purchase, with CLUB members receiving 20 percent off.

Visitors can also enjoy special holiday giveaways during weekday visits while supplies last, including Santa Ornament Crafts through Friday, November 27, and Bass Sticker-By-Number Sheets from Monday, November 30, through Friday, December 18.

Children can embrace the holiday spirit with festive crafts and interactive activities before dropping off a letter in Santa's mailbox. Those who include an email address with their letter will receive a merry message back from Santa.

Families can make free reservations up to seven days in advance by visiting www.basspro.com/santa or www.cabelas.com/santa. Walk-ins are also welcome and will be accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis.

At 5 p.m. on Tuesdays through December 22, families can enjoy story time with Santa and Mrs. Claus as they read Christmas classics. Following story time, Santa will take a photo with participating families. Separate reservations are required and open seven days in advance.

Families can also gather for breakfast with Santa and his helpers at 9 a.m. on Saturday, December 5. Reservations are required, with a maximum of four individuals per family. Each family will receive a free Santa hat cup and a 4-by-6 photo. Reservations open Saturday, November 28.

Bass Pro Shops Brandon is located at 10501 Palm River Rd. For reservations and additional information, visit www.basspro.com.

BUSINESS PANELS HELP STUDENTS EXPLORE CAREER PATHS

By Brian Bokor



High school seniors across East and South Hillsborough explored jobs and training options through Future Career Academy Business Panels held at their schools. The events brought local employers and community partners into schools to help students plan for life after graduation.

Workforce Development Partners organized the panels as the first major Future Career Academy experience of the 2026-27 school year. The program helps graduating seniors learn about jobs, training and career paths available within their communities.

East Hillsborough's schedule included Newsome, Bloomingdale and Spoto high schools on October 14. Brandon, Riverview and Pepin Academies' Riverview campus followed on October 15.

South Hillsborough's schedule included East Bay, Lennard and Morgan high schools on October 28. Sumner and South County Career Center followed on October 29.

At Riverview High School, the October 15 panel brought together representatives from health care, construction, banking, utilities, retail, public safety and other career fields. Students also learned about apprenticeships, which combine paid work with training.

Health care and banking were represented by Julie Linde of BayCare and Kendra Dock of Regions Bank. Fred Lay of Construction Service Inc. and Will Fike of Mattamy Homes represented construction.

Other panelists included Stephen Foster of TECO, Donnie Fesser of Publix and Billy Wilkerson of Hillsborough County Public Schools Apprenticeships. Deputy Cumba represented the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, while Wendy Foster represented MacDill Air Force Base.

The discussion addressed questions many seniors face, including what jobs are available after high school, whether employers provide training and how a first job can lead to a career. Speakers also discussed starting positions and opportunities for advancement.

At Riverview High School, English teacher Christina Friend handed out "Business Panel Bingo" worksheets. Students identified industries, starting jobs, career growth opportunities and companies offering training or hiring workers with a high school diploma.

The activity encouraged students to consider benefits beyond pay, including paid time off, retirement savings, tuition assistance, health insurance, mentoring, apprenticeships and extra pay for bilingual skills. Students also considered workplace expectations such as good attendance and a positive attitude.

Each student developed a question for a panelist and shared the most important thing they learned and whether a company or career interested them. Afterward, students could speak with guests and ask additional questions.

The panels began a three-part series of career experiences. Business tours were planned for January and February. Visit www.workforcedevelopmentpartners.com.





THE OSPREY OBSERVER

Eye *on* Business

EDITED BY Jenny Bennett

SUBMIT BUSINESS NEWS & PRESS RELEASES

Send to **Business Editor**
116 E. Bloomingdale Ave., Brandon, FL 33511
or email **jbennett@ospreyobserver.com**
DEADLINE: 15TH OF EACH MONTH

Valrico Edition November 2026 Vol. 23, Iss. 11

Jeff's Bagel Run Opens In Bloomingdale Square



Jeff's Bagel Run is a scratch bakery, specializing in New York-style bagels, with everything made in house. It has a wide variety of bagel flavors and cream cheeses, including seasonal favorites like pumpkin chocolate sprinkle bagels and pumpkin spice cream cheese. It celebrated its recent opening with a ribbon cutting from the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce. The store is located in Bloomingdale Square at 875 E. Bloomingdale Ave., Ste. 613, in Brandon and is open daily until 2 p.m. For more information, visit its website at www.jeffsbagelrun.com.

Floating Springs Celebrates One-year Anniversary

Floating Springs Acupuncture & Wellness is celebrating its one-year anniversary. It is a peaceful, welcoming space designed to help you slow down, reconnect with your body and support your overall well-being. If you've never experienced acupuncture or wellness care before, your first visit begins with a private consultation. It takes time to listen to your concerns, learn about your health history, lifestyle and wellness goals; and answer any questions you may have. This personalized conversation helps it understand your individual needs and develop an approach that is right for you.

Floating Springs Acupuncture & Wellness is located at 500 Vonderburg Dr. W., Ste. 214B, in Brandon. For additional information, call 813-535-0693 or visit its website at https://floatingspringsacu.com/.

PipeFlow Solutions Provides Solutions With Minimal Disruption

PipeFlow Solutions, a Florida-based underground infrastructure and trenchless pipe rehabilitation company, is proud to provide residential and commercial customers throughout Florida with innovative solutions for repairing and restoring damaged piping systems.

With one of the company's co-founders based locally in the FishHawk community, PipeFlow Solutions has strong roots in the Tampa Bay area while proudly serving residential, commercial, multifamily and municipal customers throughout the state of Florida.

PipeFlow Solutions specializes in modern trenchless technologies that allow aging or damaged pipes to be rehabilitated with significantly less excavation, property damage and disruption than traditional pipe replacement methods. From a homeowner experiencing sewer line problems to complex commercial and municipal pipe rehabilitation projects, PipeFlow Solutions is proudly serving the state of Florida and helping customers extend the life of critical underground infrastructure.

For additional information visit its website at www.pipeflowsolutions.com or call 973-391-3841.



Walk the Walk Professional Pet Care celebrated a ribbon cutting with the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce. Visit www.walkthewalkppc.com for information.

Zoom Locksmith

Losing the only key to a modern car can feel like a tow-truck problem. Zoom Locksmith, a family-owned mobile locksmith serving Brandon, Riverview and the wider Tampa Bay area since 2018, said most drivers have more options than they think. The company's free guide walks drivers through the first steps: Search before paying for a new key (retrace your steps, call the places you visited, check your rideshare app); look through the car windows, since keys locked inside make it a simpler lockout job; and check whether your auto policy or roadside plan helps with key replacement. The full checklist is available for free in English and Spanish at www.zoomlocksmithnow.com/blog/lost-car-keys-no-spare-tampa.

Zoom Locksmith is insured and background-checked. Call 305-528-1358 or visit www.zoomlocksmithnow.com for additional information.



BRIDGEWATER LANDING

55+ LIVING MADE FOR YOU

COMFORT. CONVENIENCE. COMMUNITY.

RIVERVIEW, FL

ACTIVE ADULT LIVING 55+



Bridgewater Landing offers a welcoming 55+ community where comfort and convenience come together.

Thoughtful Features.
EVERYDAY COMFORT.

- FULL SIZE WASHER & DRYER IN EVERY HOME
- WATER INCLUDED
- 1 & 2 BEDROOM OPTIONS AVAILABLE
- ACTIVE 55+ COMMUNITY
- CONVENIENTLY LOCATED IN RIVERVIEW, FL

SCHEDULE YOUR TOUR
and discover your new home at Bridgewater Landing!

813-934-2204
bridgewaterlandings.com
5790 Stockport St #102
Riverview, FL 33578

Comfort. Community. Connection.

Live the lifestyle you deserve.

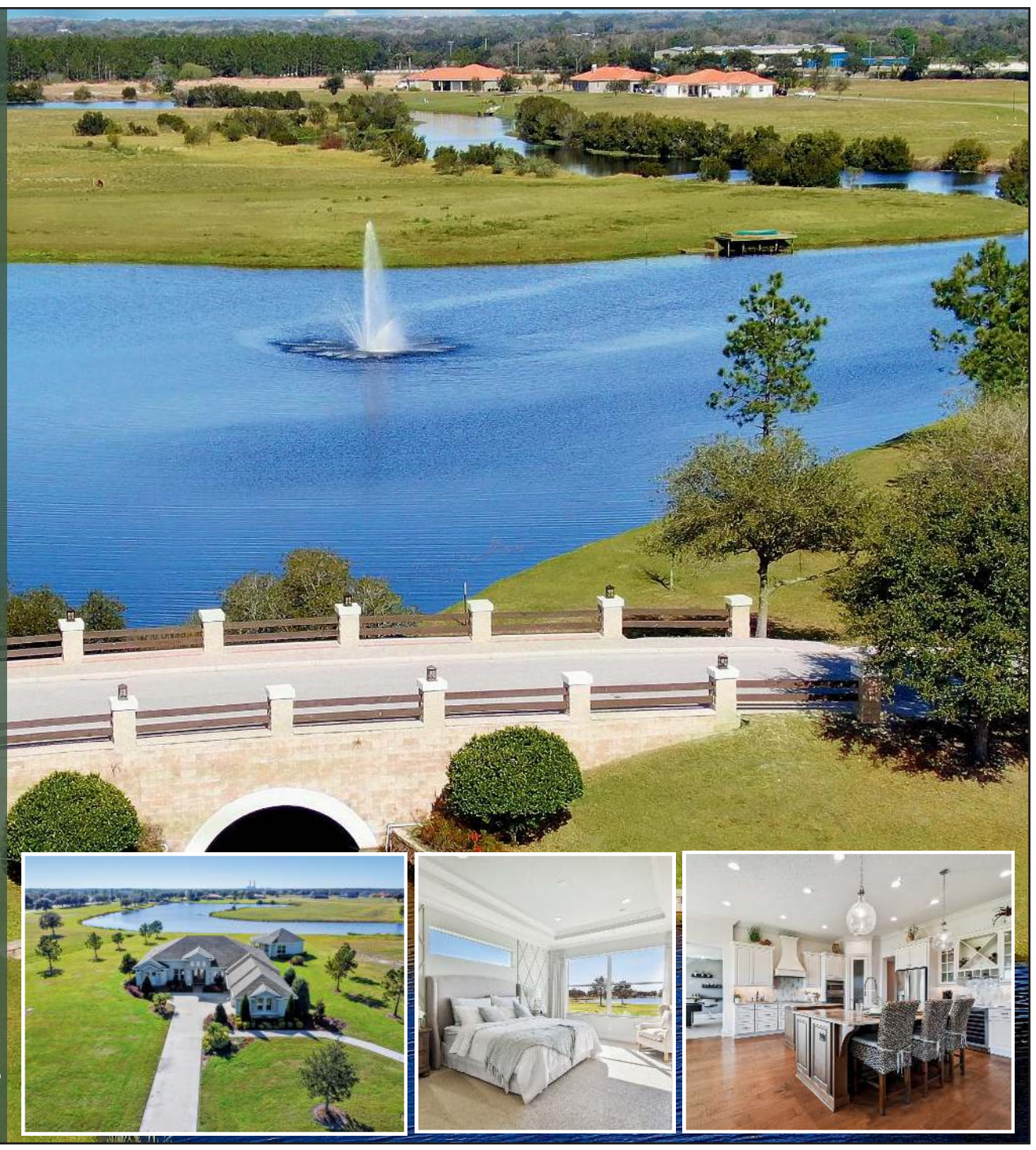
EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

SH
SUNRISE HOMES
building a brighter tomorrow

Final Opportunity in Lake Toscana

Now **ONLY 4** left.
$50,000 off your design selections*
1/2 acre lots, semi-custom homes, lake or conservation views on every lot

813-934-2206
Visit Our Model Home
5333 Lake Venice Dr Wimauma, FL 33598



Happy Thanksgiving!

Oh what a year! Real estate has been a rollercoaster and because of you, our customers, who continue to support us, we thrive in good & bad markets! We appreciate the opportunity and are grateful for the blessing of family, friends & a community that we love!

With gratitude!



Brenda

BRENDA WADE
KELLER WILLIAMS SOUTH TAMPA
Top Producer
2002 - 2026



REALTRENDS TOP 50 TEAM!



2900 W BAY TO BAY BLVD #1401



3011 W NORTH B ST



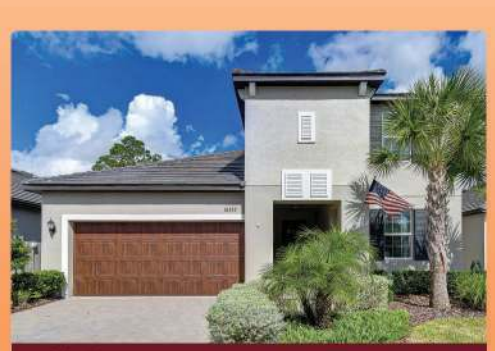
111 N 12TH ST #1704



6410 91ST AVE E



5125 PALM SPRINGS BLVD



10577 BANYAN BREEZE BLVD



901 WOODVIEW DR



35651 BUTTONWEED TRL



19914 BLUFF OAK BLVD



Office: 813-655-5333 | Direct: 813-924-8677 | Brenda@BrendaWade.com
www.BrendaWade.com