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24 YEARS Osprey OBSERVER Your Community Newspaper POSITIVE NEWS

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CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS

ZION VILLAGE OPENS DOORS FOR LOW-INCOME SENIORS IN RIVERVIEW

By Olivia Clark





Pastor Karen Jackson Sims, Commissioner Gwen Myers and community partners cut the ribbon at the grand opening of Zion Village Apartments.

Community leaders, housing advocates and faith partners gathered on February 24 to celebrate the ribbon cutting of Zion Village Apartments, a new 75-unit affordable housing community for low-income seniors in Riverview.

Located at 5836 Zion Village St. in Riverview, the 4-story development sits on approximately 2 acres owned by Mt. Zion AME Church of Riverview. The complex offers 650-square-foot, one-bedroom apartments for residents ages 55 and older earning 70 percent or less of the area median income. Units are leased at below-market rates and include energy-efficient appliances, a washer and dryer and granite countertops. Amenities include a fitness center, library, movie room, clubroom and outdoor pavilion.

The development spans more than 69,000 square feet and was designed to provide safe, accessible housing that allows seniors to age in place. Several units are reserved for residents earning between 30-60 percent of the area median income.

The project represents a partnership between Hillsborough County, the Tampa Housing Authority, Smith & Henzy Affordable Group, Mt. Zion AME Church of Riverview and Adonai's Second Chances Inc. Hillsborough County contributed $6.8 million toward the development.

"Fourteen months ago, we gathered in this place to celebrate the groundbreaking of Zion Village," said Pastor Karen Jackson Sims of Mt. Zion AME Church of Riverview. "And 14 months later, we are celebrating that we have residents living in the building."

Pastor Sims shared that one new resident had previously been homeless and sleeping in her car.

"From sleeping in her car to having a roof over her head," Pastor Sims said. "They have a home now because of you."

Commissioner Gwen Myers, who chairs the county's Affordable Housing Committee, emphasized the county's commitment to housing initiatives.

"When someone has a vision and they come to us with a project, we say, 'Let's find a way to make it happen,'" Myers said.

The Rev. Alicia Scott-Ford, field office director for the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development in Jacksonville, highlighted the growing need for senior housing.

"By 2030, one in five Americans will be over the age of 65," the Rev. Scott-Ford said. "Developments like Zion Village ensure seniors can remain active and supported in the communities they helped build."

FK Architecture, the architect of record for the project, has helped set a new benchmark in Florida with the design of more than 5,000 affordable housing units across the state.

With the ribbon cut, Zion Village officially opened its doors, adding 75 much-needed affordable units for seniors in Riverview.

SWIM, BIKE, RUN: HEROES INDOOR TRIATHLON RETURNS TO SPURLINO FAMILY YMCA THIS MARCH

By Olivia Clark



Participants gather at the finish line following a Heroes Indoor Triathlon at the Spurlino Family YMCA in Gibsonton.

The Spurlino Family YMCA at Big Bend Road will host its fourth annual Heroes Indoor Triathlon on Sunday, March 29, beginning at 7 a.m. The event is open to the public and welcomes participants of all fitness levels.

"This will be our fourth year," said Athena Reed, wellness director at the Spurlino Family YMCA. "This was started as a wellness challenge for our members."

The indoor triathlon format offers a structured yet approachable way for individuals to test their endurance in a supportive setting. Participants will complete a 10-minute swim in the YMCA's lap pool, followed by a 30-minute bike ride in the indoor cycling room and a 20-minute run on treadmills. Athletes are allowed 10 minutes to transition from swim to bike and five minutes to transition from bike to run. Volunteers will be stationed at each segment to record laps and mileage, ensuring accurate results for every competitor.

The event is capped at 32 participants, with eight competitors in each of four wave times to maintain a smooth flow throughout the morning. Waves begin at 7:15 a.m., 7:45 a.m., 8:15 a.m. and 8:45 a.m., allowing family members and spectators to easily follow along and offer encouragement.

"There are no divisions; this is an inclusive event welcoming all levels," said Reed.

The triathlon is open to those ages 12 and older. Registration is $40 for members and $45 for nonmembers. All participants will receive a finisher shirt and medal in recognition of their accomplishment.



"Spectators can cheer on their friends and family members during the race," said Reed.

The event begins as early as 7 a.m., creating an energetic start to the day inside the facility. In previous years, local stretch companies and massage therapists have attended to support athletes before and after their race. The triathlon is currently seeking a wellness partner for this year's event and is also looking for two additional volunteers to assist with timing and transitions.

"Volunteers are always welcome," said Reed. For more information or to register, email athena.reed@tampaymca.org.

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ALIGN RIGHT REALTY RIVERVIEW AND SUNCOAST SEEKING NEW AGENTS

By Madeline Gardner



In the market to grow your Tampa Bay real estate career with the help of a professional and dedicated brokerage? Align Right Realty is currently looking for both newly licensed and seasoned agents to join its team, and prospective candidates are invited to apply for work on a part-time or full-time basis. All applicants will be interviewed by Align Right Realty's Riverview and Suncoast broker, Lisa Tackus.

"As the broker owner, I like to meet with everybody, which is also a unique thing, [as] a lot of brokerages may just have a trainer or a recruiter do the interviews and [the applicants] mostly don't ever get to meet the broker," said Tackus. "I pride myself that that's something for the last almost seven years that I've continued to do."

Once welcomed to the team, Align Right Realty offers training sessions, available both in-person at the Riverview and Suncoast offices as well as over Zoom. The program first begins with core training, which breaks down how to run a real estate business, and then a prospecting tier, which explains how to earn a business. The third tier concentrates on the social media and technology necessary to innovate and manage a real estate business. Roughly every month, Tackus also hosts a development series, which includes visits from business brokers and commercial real estate experts.

"We're here to provide primarily their training, their technology, their marketing, their branding and, most important, the culture to help them run their business and meet the highest potential that they want to go," said Tackus.

Realtors affiliated with Align Right Realty have access to partnerships with local chamber members, plumbers, roofers, home inspection companies and tax attorneys. Agents are also granted 24/7 access to the brokerage's resources, from copiers to open-house signs and balloons. And the brokerage fosters camaraderie between agents by hosting potlucks, bowling outings and monthly coffee meetups. Tackus ensures her agents receive all the attention and assistance they require to manage successful businesses.

"They have the opportunity to earn 100 percent of their commission here but also get all the support they need," said Tackus. "... We've created an environment where you can get the most resources and earn the most money, and that's something that we're going to continue to do and grow this year."

If interested, prospective applicants should call the Riverview office at 813-563-5995 or email admin@alignrightriverview.com. The Align Right Realty Riverview office is located at 11962 Balm Riverview Rd. in Riverview, and the Suncoast office is located at 410 S. Ware Blvd., Ste. 310, in Tampa.

BRANDON COIN CLUB CELEBRATES 20 YEARS WITH SPRING COIN SHOW

By Brian Bokor



The Brandon Coin Club will host its Spring Coin Show on Saturday, April 11, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, 3315 S. Bryan Rd. in Brandon. Admission and parking are free.

The club has hosted regular coin shows in the Brandon area for years, helping keep the local collecting community active and engaged in the hobby.



"The Brandon Coin Club has been hosting regular coin shows for almost 20 years, with a brief two-year break during COVID," said Derek Spalding, bourse chairman of the Brandon Coin Club.

"We are grateful for the hospitality of St Andrew's United Methodist Church letting us use their facilities two years in a row for our shows," Spalding said.

The event will feature more than 40 dealer tables offering coins and collectibles for collectors of all experience levels. Professional coin grader ICG will be in attendance, and attendees can participate in free door prizes.

A highlight of the show is the raffle of a GSA Carson City Morgan silver dollar, a highly sought-after 19th-century coin prized by collectors.

"The Morgan being raffled has a special place in our hearts," Spalding said. "Its significance comes from the remarkable condition of the coins and the coveted Carson City mint mark, which together make it one of the most desirable and story-rich Morgan dollars a collector can own."

Beyond the raffle, Spalding said the hobby itself is seeing renewed growth, particularly among younger collectors.

"We are seeing growth in coin collecting as a whole primarily driven by digital mediums," he said, noting that private marketplace apps are drawing younger collectors and families into the hobby.

For those who have inherited coins, he recommends organizing them by denomination and year before bringing them to the show.

"Organize the collection if it's not already. By denomination and years are a good start," he said, adding that while valuable coins do surface, many inherited pieces are common and worth modest amounts.

As discussions occasionally surface about eliminating the penny, Spalding said such headlines can temporarily influence the market.

"At some point, that will die down, and the cents that have always been collected will continue to shine, such as the 1909-S VDB Lincoln cent," he said, noting that billions of pennies remain in circulation and will continue to do so for decades.

"It's really a fun day to meet new people and see some interesting coins," he said.

The doors open at 9 a.m., and the event runs until 3 p.m. Contact Spalding at dspalding2015@gmail.com.

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BURNS WINS SUPERINTENDENT'S WINTER BREAK READING CHALLENGE

By Jane Owen



Burns Middle School was presented $500 for books for its media center on January 26 after winning the Superintendent's Winter Break Reading Challenge.

On January 26, the first day of 'Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!', Burns Middle School was awarded as being one of three winners in the district of the Superintendent's Winter Break Reading Challenge. They earned a Reader Leader trophy, a Benny the Bean plushy from the online reading motivation platform Beanstack, and $500 for new library books.

Superintendent Van Ayres expressed gratitude for Burns Middle School's accomplishment.

"I am incredibly proud of the students at Burns Middle School for being named a winner of the Superintendent's Winter Break Reading Challenge. Their commitment to reading over the winter break shows a true love of learning and a dedication that extends beyond the classroom. Congratulations to these students, their families and their teachers for making literacy a priority and for representing our district so well," Ayres said.

The other two winners of the challenge were Lincoln Elementary Magnet School and Jefferson High School.

Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! took place from January 26-30. It is designed to raise awareness about the importance of reading and to inspire Florida's students and families to make reading part of their daily routines.

Burns Middle School media specialist Jeanette Stratton was thrilled with the recognition for her students. Stratton is proud of her students and plans to use the $500 for popular books, like graphic novels, manga, mysteries and romance.

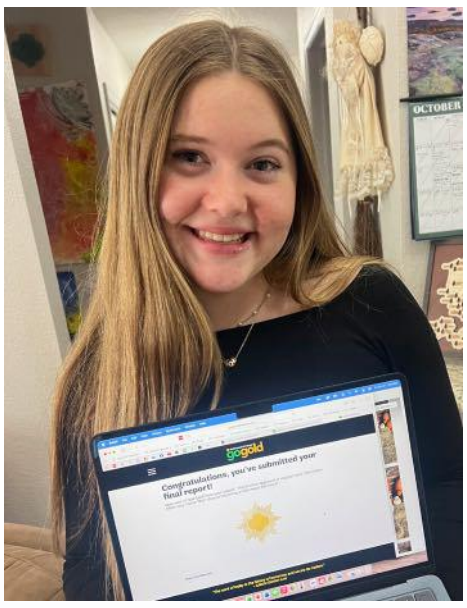
"I am super proud of my students for taking the time to log their reading over break, and extremely proud of the literacy teachers at Burns who have encouraged the use of Beanstack in their classrooms. Without their support, none of this would have happened," Stratton said.

Hillsborough County Public School students logged nearly half a million minutes of reading over the winter break. Compared to the 2024-25 winter break, there was a 5 percent increase in the number of schools participating in the Winter Break Challenge, a 244 percent increase in the number of students participating in the Winter Break Challenge and a 330 percent increase in the number of minutes reading during the Winter Break Challenge.

To learn more about Beanstack, visit www.beanstack.com. Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! is part of Just Read, Florida!, a statewide initiative. To learn more, visit www.fldoe.org/academics/standards/just-read-fl/.

HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR EARNS GOLD AWARD WITH THE S.H.E.A. PROJECT

Staff Report



Bloomingdale High School junior Shea Polley has earned the Girl Scout Gold Award — the Girl Scouts of the USA's highest honor — through The S.H.E.A. Project, an initiative rooted in sea turtles, healing, empowerment and awareness. By blending her passion for marine life with a desire to uplift others, Polley created a meaningful project that brought comfort, creativity and conservation education to children and families served by the Children's Cancer Center.

A member of Girl Scout Troop 33018, Polley is a third-generation Girl Scout and a third-generation Gold Award recipient, continuing a family legacy of leadership and service. Her project focused on children in survivorship and their siblings, offering moments of joy while teaching lessons that extend far beyond the classroom.

At the heart of The S.H.E.A. Project were 81 sea-turtle-themed 'Shell Buddy Boxes,' each thoughtfully assembled to encourage and comfort young recipients. Every box included a soft stuffed turtle, pop-its, cozy socks, coloring pages, crayons and handwritten notes designed to spark smiles and provide reassurance during difficult days.

In addition to delivering the boxes, Polley led hands-on workshops at the Children's Cancer Center, where children created sea turtle ornaments, bracelets and. During these sessions, she shared information about the seven species of sea turtles and introduced simple conservation actions, such as reducing plastic use and keeping beaches clean, empowering children to make a difference for wildlife.

Polley personally dedicated 150 hours to the project. She was supported by a 26-member volunteer team known as the Clutch Crew, who contributed an additional 262 hours, bringing the total to 412 service hours. Together, they organized donations, assembled supplies and delivered each Shell Buddy Box with care.

Her leadership also extended to advocacy. Polley submitted a proclamation request to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis seeking recognition of April 12 as Florida Sea Turtle Day. Financial support from a Jane Goodall Institute Roots & Shoots grant and a Gulf Youth Ambassador stipend enabled her to invest more than $4,000 into the initiative.

"It feels amazing knowing what I created with the S.H.E.A. project brought smiles to healing children and more attention to protecting sea turtles," said Polley.

Through The S.H.E.A. Project, Polley demonstrated how one young leader — guided by compassion and purpose — can create waves of healing and awareness that touch both hearts and oceans.

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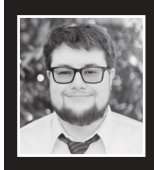
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CR-V GETS WORTHY ALL-TERRAIN EDITION!

By Nitish Rele



Introduced over three decades ago, it has been the best-selling crossover for the last 28 years as well as the top Honda seller since 2017. The Honda Comfortable Runabout Vehicle, or CR-V, as everyone knows it, gets an all-new TrailSport edition. After creating a record with over 400,000 sales in 2024 and last year, we would not be surprised if that number increases drastically again.

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Under the hood of the sixth-gen CR-V hybrid sits a 2.0-liter direct-injection, four-cylinder turbocharged engine that puts out a healthy 204 horsepower and 247 pounds-feet of torque. It is paired with dual electric motors and a lithium-ion battery pack for substantial fuel savings. Its continuous variable transmission shifts effortlessly and quietly. The suspension, handled by a MacPherson strut front and multilink rear, does an admirable job of soaking up potholes and other road unevenness. Conveying tremendous on-center feel and effective feedback is an electric-power rack-and-pinion steering system. Enhanced low-speed traction management serves to aid in navigating bumpy terrain. Drive modes include normal, eco, sport and snow.

The CR-V gains a pleasing and attractive, all-new Ash Green metallic exterior color. Horizontal LED headlights flank a black mesh grille with a silver skid garnish. TrailSport badges can be found in the SUV's front and rear, on the front seat backrests and on the floor mats. Step inside the cozy and roomy cabin (103.5 cubic feet of passenger space) and the driver will face a bigger 10.2-inch digital cluster and a 9-inch infotainment screen. Standard for 2026 are a phone charger, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, all wireless. Extending across the dashboard is a honeycomb mesh with disguised silver air vents. Looking to haul cargo? Just fold the 60/40 seat down with levers in the tailgate. Orange ambient lights throughout and orange stitching on the black seats are a fine touch. The 10-way heated driver and four-way front-passenger power seats, 320-watt audio with eight speakers, push-button start, dual auto AC, tilt/telescopic steering column, hands-free power liftgate/moonroof and sunglass holder come at no extra cost.

Standard safety features include dual front, side and knee airbags, side curtain airbags with a rollover system, vehicle stability assist, traction control, four-wheel antilock brakes with electronic brake distribution and brake assist, three-point seatbelts, front/rear crumple zones, front-seat active head restraints, a tire pressure monitor system and daytime running lights, as well as Honda Sensing, which includes adaptive cruise control, a blind-spot/cross-traffic monitor, collision mitigation brakes, lane keep assist, forward collision and lane departure warnings, traffic jam assist and front/rear park sensors.

If you are looking to traverse rough ground in a compact SUV, then the TrailSport model is a smart and right pick. It is roomy, comfortable, good-looking, practical, fuel-efficient (we earned over 38 combined mpg) and now snazzy with this all-new trim added to the CR-V lineup.

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STAYING ONE STEP AHEAD OF SCAMMERS

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



State Attorney Suzy Lopez.

Susan S. Lopez
Office of the State Attorney
13th Judicial Circuit

Scammers are constantly finding new ways to steal personal and financial information. Keeping up with those threats can feel overwhelming, and being aware is half the battle. That's why the first week of March is dedicated to starting a conversation to keep consumers safe. National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW) is dedicated to having conversations about scams, fraud and consumer rights.

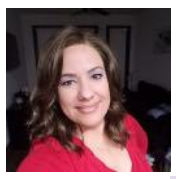
This year's focus is on how to spot and report scams, and how to recover if you become a victim. Scammers and fraudsters often share the same goal of accessing your money or sensitive information. The difference is in how they operate. Scams trick you into willingly giving out money or your personal information, while fraud involves gaining unauthorized access to your assets or accounts.

According to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, there was a significant increase in scam activity in our area last year. In 2025, scammers impersonating law enforcement and other government agencies stole more than $1 million from local residents. Victims were told they had outstanding warrants, had missed jury duty or had urgent account issues and were pressured to pay immediately. Other common schemes included fake PayPal alerts and social media scams designed to appear legitimate.

What steps can you take protect yourself? The Federal Trade Commission recommends blocking unwanted calls and texts to reduce the chances of scammers reaching you in the first place. If you do answer an unknown call, text or email, never share your personal or financial information if you did not initiate the contact. Scammers will often pressure you to act immediately. Take a moment, slow down and talk with someone you trust before making any moves. Remember, honest organizations will not call, text or email you to ask for personal information, like your social security number.

If you believe you have been scammed, report it immediately to local law enforcement and the Federal Trade Commission. If you gave out personal or account information, change your passwords and monitor your credit. If you sent money, contact the service you used to pay the scammers and see if it can reverse the transaction. My office works closely with our law enforcement partners to hold offenders accountable and protect residents in our community. Staying informed and reporting scammers are some of the most powerful tools we have to keep ourselves safe.

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



"I'M SPENDING IT ALL IN RETIREMENT" DO I STILL NEED AN ESTATE PLAN?

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



If you're a senior or a boomer, you might be wondering, "If I'm planning to have a blast with my savings during retirement, do I need to bother with an estate plan?" It's a question many ask when they decide to enjoy their hard-earned money while they can. But as any experienced estate planning attorney will tell you, yes, you absolutely still need an estate plan. Let's talk about why an estate plan does a lot more than just handle the cash you leave behind.

It's Not Just About Your Savings

Estate planning isn't just for dividing up what's in your bank account. It's about making sure that if you can't make decisions for yourself, there's a plan in place. Without it, your spouse could hit roadblocks while trying to talk to banks, or your children could get stuck if there's a medical emergency and the doctors need a family member's say-so.

Making the Tough Decisions Easier

What if you get really sick and can't tell the doctors what you want? That's where having an estate plan is a lifesaver. It lets your family step in and make those hard choices quickly, without getting tied up with the courts or government red tape.

What About the House?

Owning a house is pretty common, right? But when you're not here anymore, that house has to go to someone. Without a plan, figuring out what to do with your house, especially if it's gone up in value, can be a nightmare for your children. They could end up in the middle of a long, expensive court process or arguing among themselves about what you would have wanted and your intentions for the property.

An estate plan is like leaving a guidebook for your family; it tells everyone what you want for yourself (if you are incapable of making financial and health care decisions) and who you want to get what you own. That way, you can rest easy knowing you're not leaving your loved ones with a bunch of problems to sort out.

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

Dear friends, read this...

For the past few months, we've been having what some call "back of the envelope conversations" about Medicare and financial planning. But what does that really mean?

It means straightforward. No fluff. No jargon. No wandering through the acres of the financial buzz-o-sphere trying to figure out what matters. Instead, it's a focused conversation built around what actually moves the needle for you.

Because the truth is, most of the noise out there doesn't matter. Very little of it meaningfully improves your life. Our role is to filter it down to the few critical ideas and strategies that do.

That starts with helping you get great — not rationed — Medicare coverage. You've already paid for it. You deserve better. And yes, it's possible to access better care without spending more money.

It also means building retirement income that grows and is protected. Income you won't outlive. Income that inflation and taxes don't quietly erode over time. In many cases, it's possible to generate significantly more income from the same capital — without taking on greater risk.

And legacy planning? You don't need to be ultra-wealthy or write new checks to make a meaningful impact. A few thoughtful adjustments can create real, lasting results.

That's what a back of the envelope conversation is: clear, practical, and centered entirely on you.

No pressure. No nonsense. Just an honest discussion about what's possible.

You make the coffee or tea. We'll bring the envelope.

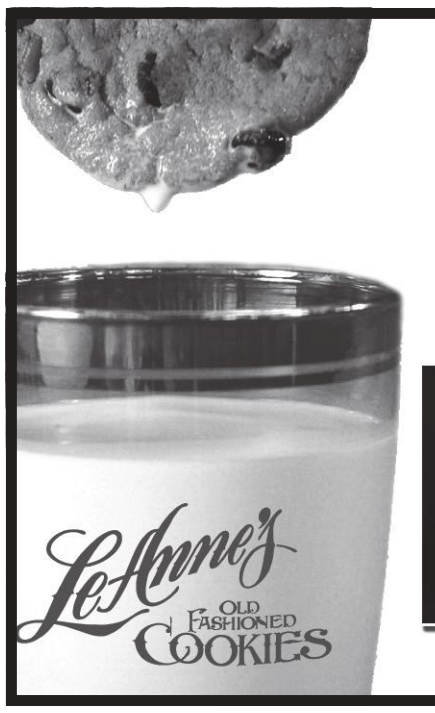
Let's talk.

J Johnson,
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Certified Financial Planner™
813 477-7642



Elaine Johnson,
RN, BN
Medicare Specialized
813 450-6473

(J is the founder of Johnson Brothers & Kurios, Inc, est 1995 and affiliated with Sequent Planning, LLC, a national RIA and Elaine is a partner of MedEdSeniorSolutions.com and connected to one of the nation's largest Medicare IMOs. They make their home in Brandon, Fl.)



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FRIENDS OF THE POOR WALK: FAMILY FUN TO SUPPORT NEIGHBORS IN NEED

Staff Report



The first annual St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP) Friends of the Poor Walk will raise much-needed financial assistance for families in the Brandon, Valrico, Riverview, Gibsonton and Ruskin areas. The walk takes place on Saturday, March 28, at St. Stephen Catholic Church in Riverview. Families and friends of all ages are welcome to register to participate in the walk to show their support for people in need. In addition to the walk, the event will include games, raffles and food vendors.

The nonprofit organization raises and distributes aid that alleviates suffering, including financial assistance for rent and utilities, food pantries, thrift stores and personal attention as volunteers meet with and listen to neighbors to help guide them.

Last year, over 2,000 families were helped with shelter, utilities and critical household needs with the organization distributing over $620,000.

While the event takes place on the campus of St. Stephen, the Friends of the Poor Walk supports an even wider footprint of the community. The St. Vincent de Paul East Hillsborough County District is made up of volunteers from SVdP conferences located at St. Anne, Prince of Peace, St. Stephen and Nativity Catholic churches. All conferences are run entirely by volunteers who promote the dignity of their neighbors, serving everyone regardless of creed, color or national origin.

"We are looking forward to this being a family fun event that will grow for future years to come," said Denise Essex, president of the SVdP St. Stephen Conference. She added, "All money raised from walker registration, donations and sponsorships will go back into the community to help our neighbors."

Learn more about the event and register to walk or sponsor at https://svdpfopwalkehd.org/. Sponsors and food vendors wishing to support the event onsite can email fopwalkehd@gmail.com.



SYLVIA THOMAS OFFERS SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER FAMILIES

By Emily Harper



For the past 25 years, the Sylvia Thomas Center has kept the 'forever' in 'forever families' by supporting adoptive and foster families in Hillsborough County. Over the years, the center has impacted the lives of over 6,000 families in our area, and each year it actively touches 500-600 families.

The Sylvia Thomas Center provides assistance through case management, support groups, training, respite activities and advocacy. This ensures families in the area are supported with their needs.

There are support groups for both parents and children. For parents, Sylvia Thomas offers a group called Parents Empowering Parents Talk. There, virtually, on the third Thursday of each month, adoptive or foster parents chat with one another about their experiences, providing fellowship and guidance.

On February 23, the organization started a book club for parents. In the months of March and April, parents will dissect a book, The Simple Guide To Understanding Shame in Children, as another way of connecting adoptive parents. Following the conclusion, parents will have the opportunity to join the next book club in June.

"We find that the best thing that we can do is connect adoptive parents with other adoptive parents," said the CEO, Mary Ann Kershaw.

As for the children, they meet on the third or fourth Thursday of each month to converse with others their age who share similar journeys. There they are served pizza while making crafts and doing other interactive activities. Those ages 5-10 have a group named Forever Friends Kids Club, ages 11-15 have Tween Squad and ages 16-17 have Teen Scene.

In addition, coming up on Monday, March 16, the Sylvia Thomas Center is having a 'Community Service Day' for those ages 14-17. On this day, teens who are in need of community service hours are invited to come do volunteer work.

The Sylvia Thomas Center is always accepting any donations to support the families and the lives of their children. Its office is located at 500 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Brandon, and its website is https://sylviathomascenter.org/, where any additional information about its programs can be found.

A LIFE OF SERVICE: NARAN PATEL MARKS 40 YEARS AS A LION

By McKenzie Brown



Naran Patel, serving our community for 40 years.

For more than 40 years, one dedicated Lion, Naran Patel, has lived out the spirit of service through membership in the world's largest humanitarian organization. With a global reach spanning 205 countries, Lions Clubs International members, called Lions, serve wherever help is needed, from hospitals and senior centers to communities shaken by hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes and famine. Backed by 1.35 million members and 45,000 clubs worldwide, the work is vast, practical and deeply human.

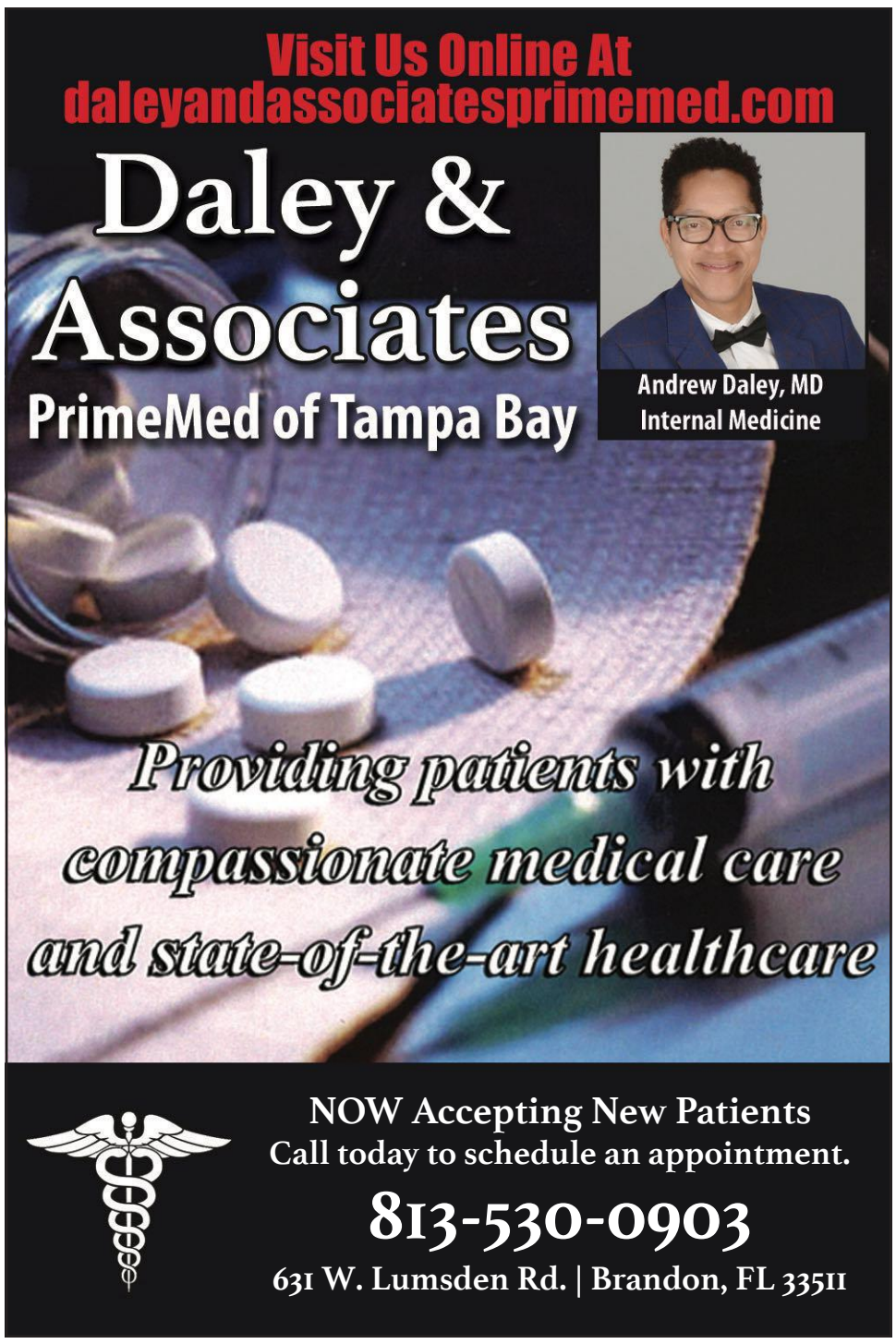
A major focus of Lions' service is vision. Through vision programs and eye screenings in local schools, Lions help children see the board and seniors read the page. They provide eye exams and free glasses to those in need while also addressing hearing loss and working to prevent diabetes in order to protect eyesight in the long term. Lions raise donations from the public with a simple promise: that 100 percent of the funds raised are returned to the public through service. Beyond health, Lions promote peace by encouraging youth creativity and reflection through the annual Peace Poster Contest. And this only scratches the surface. When seniors need support or a neighbor needs a hand, Lions are there, ready to serve wherever and whenever help is needed.

For Patel, this lifelong commitment began in 1972, when he joined the Woodridge Lions Club in Woodridge, Illinois, invited by a local friend. His first challenge was a joyful one: building a Lions float for the village parade. With the help of his three young sons, he designed a memorable float and matching Lions costumes, turning service into a family affair. Years later, his dedication took him on a 600-plus-mile bike ride from the Grand Canyon to Nogales, Mexico, raising over $5,000 for Arizona Lions by stopping at local clubs along the way.

His service also became a way to honor love and loss. Ten years ago, after the passing of Patel's wife, Hansa, a fellow Lion with the Rincon Lions Club in Tucson, Arizona, he donated the entire contents of their home in her honor, raising over $3,000 for humanitarian projects.

Today, he is proud to serve with the Fishhawk Lions Club as a Lions Tamer, a role his wife once held as well. The invitation stands open to the community to visit and attend a meeting.

Fishhawk Lions Club meetings take place on the first Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. at Grace Community Church, located at 5708 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Lithia.







SMALL BUT MIGHTY HEROES HOSTS DANCING FOR HEROES GALA

Staff Report



Small But Mighty Heroes (SBMH) proudly announces its annual Dancing For Heroes Gala, taking place on March 27, 2026, from 6-10 p.m. at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview.

Dancing For Heroes is the signature awareness and fundraising initiative supporting SBMH's trauma-informed emotional and mental health programs for children impacted by pediatric cancer, their siblings and their parents. SBMH exists to support these families, fostering healing, resilience and hope through diagnosis, treatment and loss.

The gala is more than a performance event — it is an evening of storytelling, tribute and community unity. Local leaders and community 'celebrity' dancers train in Latin and ballroom styles and perform in honor of a child currently in treatment or a survivor, or in memory of a fallen hero. Each dance represents a family's journey and serves as a powerful reminder that no one fights alone.

Funds raised during the evening directly support SBMH's year-round trauma-informed programming, including:

- Emotional and mental health support initiatives.
- Grief and bereavement programming for parents and siblings.
- Community-based healing and connection programs.
- Ongoing resources for families navigating pediatric cancer.

Tickets, donations and sponsorship opportunities are available at https://givebutter.com/c/blsntu.

Community members, corporate partners and local leaders are invited to attend and stand in support of families facing pediatric cancer.

Together, we dance for the heroes — and for the families who carry their light forward.

For additional information, please visit the ticket link above or connect with Small But Mighty Heroes online.

Dancing For Heroes is a trauma-informed movement and grief-support program created to serve families impacted by pediatric cancer. Through structured Latin and ballroom dance sessions, the program provides parents, siblings and caregivers with a safe space for emotional expression, peer connection, stress reduction and healing through embodied movement. The initiative addresses the often-overlooked mental health impacts of childhood cancer, including anticipatory grief, caregiver burnout, isolation and bereavement.

Together, the program and gala create a full-circle model of impact:

- The program provides direct healing and mental health support.
- The gala amplifies awareness, builds community engagement and generates the resources necessary to sustain and expand services. For more information, visit the website, www.smallbutmightyheroes.org.





LOCAL VET HOSTS FIRST AFTERNOON TEA FOR WOMEN VETERANS

By Mylena C. Ferman

Women veterans are cordially invited to join the first Afternoon Tea for Women Veterans at Veterans Memorial Park, located at 3602 N. U.S. 301 in Tampa.

On Friday, March 20, From 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m., women veterans will be in for an afternoon of fine tea, fun games and friendship. Guests will also learn about various resources available for women veterans. The dress code is garden-party elegance, so be sure to don your favorite floral or spring-colored outfit, hat/fascinator and comfortable shoes.

Jeans, and husbands, are not allowed at this event.



A women's tea social that Lois-Stine Cato organized at Grace Family Church in Ybor.



While future events may be open to spouses, Lois-Stine Cato, organizer of the event and a retired Air Force veteran, explained that this event is exclusively for women veterans.

"It allows us to let our hair down and be ourselves when we don't have men around," she said.

Cato's ultimate goal is not only to create a space that invites sisterhood but also to share information about retreats and spaces where women veterans can relax. As a veteran herself, she wants others to take advantage of the resources available to them.

According to a study published in 2023 by The Journal of Health Services and Research, women veterans are more likely to be screened with probable depression, anxiety and PTSD than their male counterparts are.

"Depression, PTSD, mental trauma, and anxiety is something that women veterans have experienced or are still experiencing because of their service to the military," Cato said, "If there's resources that we can take advantage of to help us to not commit suicide, to not be depressed all the time, why not share?"

Nearing retirement in her civilian life, Cato has found herself curious about meeting other women veterans in the area. After joining some women veteran events, like coffee socials and a retreat with Women Veterans Ignited, she has decided to put her skills as a hostess to good use and organize the upcoming tea party. In the future, she hopes to make this event annual and connect with people to create a monthly newsletter with aggregated information for women veterans.

The Afternoon Tea for Women Veterans is free to attend. To find out more about the event and RSVP, please contact lois-cato@yahoo.com no later than Tuesday, March 10.







WARM YOUR HEART AND YOUR APPETITE AT SEEDS OF HOPE'S SOUP FOR THE SOUL FUNDRAISER

By Marie Gilmore



A bowl of soup can do more than warm the body — it can change lives. On Sunday, March 29, Seeds of Hope will host its annual Soup for the Soul fundraiser, a student-led community event dedicated to fighting childhood hunger in the local area.

The ticketed event will take place at Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale, located at 710 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon. Guests will enjoy unlimited soup prepared by local celebrity chefs and restaurants, along with salad, fresh bread, beverages and dessert — all for $25 per person. There is a limit of 200 guests with open seating from 5-7 p.m. Soup for the Soul directly benefits Seeds of Hope's Backpacks of Hope program, which provides more than 170 backpacks of food each week to elementary students and their families facing food insecurity. The program is supported by student volunteers from Barrington Middle School, who pack food weekly and play a leading role in organizing and running the event.



What makes Soup for the Soul especially meaningful is that students serve as the hosts, waiters and event staff, gaining valuable leadership experience while learning firsthand the importance of giving back. Organizers said guests often leave inspired by the students' enthusiasm and commitment to helping others.

Community members and businesses are also invited to support the event through sponsorships. Sponsorship levels range from $100-$500 and help fund anywhere from 10-50 weekend food backpacks for students in need. In addition, Seeds of Hope is seeking gift basket donations valued at $50 or more for raffle prizes, which help generate additional funds while promoting local businesses.

"This is truly a feel-good event," said Leda Eaton, president of Seeds of Hope. "Guests enjoy great food, support local students and make a direct impact on hunger right here in our community."

Tickets are available now, and organizers encourage residents to act quickly due to limited capacity. For more information about tickets, sponsorships or donations, contact admin@sohopefl.org or visit Seeds of Hope's website at https://sohopefl.org/.

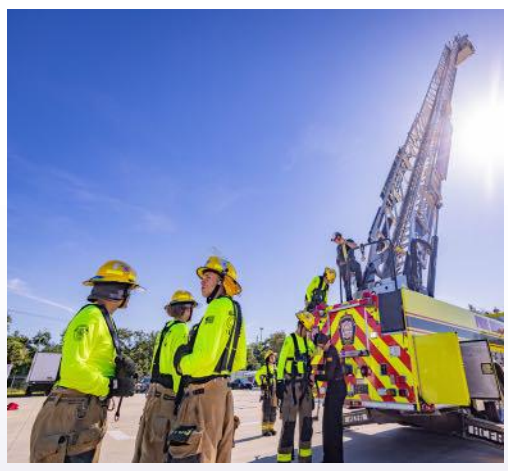
It's a night of comfort food with a powerful purpose — one that promises to warm both hearts and souls.

YOUTH TAKE LEAD AT HILLSBOROUGH SUMMER FIRE ACADEMY

Staff Report

Many teenagers have imagined working as a first responder fighting fires, saving lives and being recognized as a community hero. And parents have dreamed of seeing their son or daughter in uniform, working in a noble profession.







Those dreams can come true through the Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Foundation's 2026 Alan D. Anderson Summer Youth Fire Academy, where students will learn all about the role of being a firefighter.

Hillsborough County students ages 14-18 have until Friday, March 27, to apply for the two-week summer program.

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue instructors will teach students hands-on lessons and detail the multiple roles that firefighters have in their jobs.

The program curriculum includes fire ground operations, use of firefighting bunker gear, aerial ladder climbs, search and rescue, forcible entry, rappelling and knots, water safety, CPR, first aid and the history of the fire service.

Applicants must be high school students or graduating seniors between the ages of 14 and 18. A panel will review applications and make final selections based on class size.

The 2026 academy will be available from Monday, June 8, to Friday, June 19. A mandatory orientation will be held on Saturday, May 23.

The academy is a free program, courtesy of the Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Foundation. Lunch, snacks, water and sports drinks are provided each day, in addition to uniform shirts, pants, boots, a belt and a hat. Transportation is not provided.

Applicants must submit their applications by 5 p.m. on March 27. Along with the application, students must submit a personal essay and include two letters of recommendation. Only virtual applications are accepted.

Learn more and apply virtually by visiting www.hcfl.gov/syfa.

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APOLLO BEACH HOSTS FLORIDA BIRDING AND NATURE FESTIVAL

By Libby Hopkins



Florida Birding and Nature Festival returns to Apollo Beach from Thursday through Sunday, April 9-12.

Nature lovers and bird enthusiasts will come together from Thursday through Sunday, April 9-12, in Apollo Beach for the annual Florida Birding and Nature Festival. This four-day event will feature field trips, boat excursions, seminars by experts, nationally renowned keynote speakers and a free nature expo.

"Previously scheduled to coincide with the peak of fall migration, it now coincides with the peak of spring migration," said Ann Paul of the festival. "More than 180 species have been observed during previous festivals, and the new dates are expected to be even more productive for birders."

Most of the festival's activities will be held at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Suncoast Youth Conservation Center in Apollo Beach.

Organizers decided to move the festival to April after Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused widespread damage and disrupted lives along Florida's west coast in 2024. The festival is sponsored by Tampa Electric Company, the FWC's Suncoast Youth Conservation Center and Hillsborough County's Conservation and Environmental Lands Management/Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program. "We invite the community to come celebrate the wonders of the birds, wildlife, and natural lands that we enjoy in West Central Florida," Paul said.

The field trips, led by knowledgeable guides and, in some cases, the managers of the nature habitats visited, include walking, wagon, boat and kayak trips and bus tours of Central Florida birding hot spots. Some field trips explore sites normally not open to the public.

"Destinations include Egmont Key, the Cross Bar Ranch in Spring Hill, Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, Fort DeSoto Park, Coffeepot Bayou, the Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary and the Lower Green Swamp Nature Preserve," Paul said. "The keynote talks will be held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Sun City Center and include a buffet dinner."

Friday evening's keynote speaker will be Leslie Kemp Pool, an associate professor at Rollins College and the author of Saving Florida: Women's Fight for the Environment in the Twentieth Century.

Saturday evening's speaker will be Hilary Flower.

"It explores the success of the endangered Everglades kite, which learned to forage for invasive snails," Paul said. "The raptor has expanded its range into Central Florida, and Flower also will lead a field trip to Lake Tohopekaliga, where it is commonly seen."

A free Nature Expo on Friday, April 10, and Saturday, April 11, at the Suncoast Youth Conservation Center will feature displays from numerous environmental organizations and nature-related businesses. Visit www.floridabirdingandnaturefestival.org.

SARA BOGUE NAMED FIRST FEMALE DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY'S HISTORY

By Nick Nahas



Photo Courtesy Of Hillsborough County
Sara Bogue

On February 26, Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) announced that Sara Bogue was named director of athletics, making her the first woman to serve in that role in district history.

"It is an extraordinary honor and responsibility," said Bogue. "I am proud to represent women in athletic leadership and hopeful that this milestone reflects the continued progress and opportunities available to women in sports. As the mother of a 10-year-old daughter, this role carries even greater meaning. If she — and other young girls across our district — grow up knowing they belong in any space they choose to pursue, including athletics, that's something I'm proud of."

Bogue, who has served in Hillsborough County for the past 20 years as a teacher, coach and assistant principal, replaces Lanness Robinson, who was named executive director of the Tampa Bay Sports Commission in December 2025.

She began her career with the district as a P.E. teacher at Newsome High School, where she was also the varsity girls basketball coach and was named Western Conference Coach of the Year. She later became an assistant principal for student affairs at Lennard High School and Bloomingdale High School. She will oversee athletics at both the high school and middle school levels for the county.

"I am incredibly excited to expand my impact and serve more students, coaches and schools across the district," said Bogue. "Athletics has the power to shape character, build leadership and open doors of opportunity for young people. Being in a position to help strengthen and elevate athletic programs on a broader scale is both energizing and meaningful. I look forward to collaborating with school leaders and coaches to continue creating positive, life-changing experiences for our student athletes."

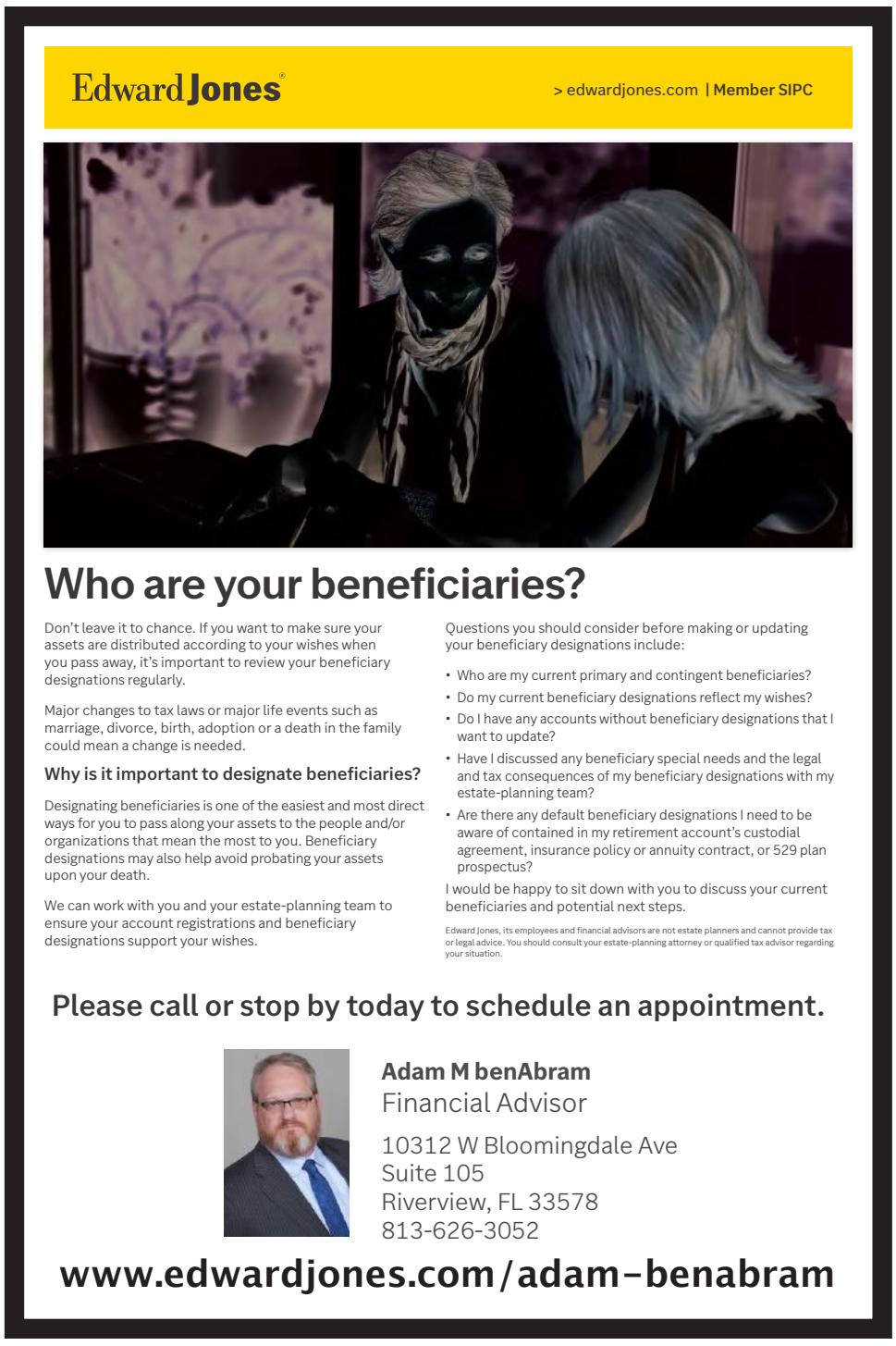
Most recently, she served as assistant principal for administration at Bloomingdale High School, overseeing athletic programs, facility operations and campus safety and security. She led Bloomingdale to its first-ever Vernon Korhn Athletic Program of the Year award.

"Bloomingdale has always been more than a workplace — it is truly a family," said Bogue. "The culture of support, unity and shared purpose is something I will always treasure. I will deeply miss our coaching staff. They lead with heart and selflessness every single day. Most of all, I will miss the students. Their energy and spirit have been a daily reminder of why this work matters."

"I am deeply thankful to everyone who has supported, mentored and encouraged me throughout my 20 years with HCPS," said Bogue. "This journey has been built on relationships, teamwork and shared commitment to students. I look forward to honoring that foundation as we continue moving athletics forward together."







TEA WITH A TWIST: FAMILY PROMISE LAUNCHES EVENT TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

Staff Report



Family Promise of Hillsborough County will host its first-ever fundraising gala, Tea With a Twist, on Saturday, March 28, from 2-5 p.m. at New Hope Church. Designed as a stylish yet meaningful afternoon, the event blends tea, fashion and community connection while raising critical funds for families experiencing homelessness in Hillsborough County.

The inaugural gala marks a milestone for Family Promise of Hillsborough County, an organization dedicated to empowering homeless and low-income families with children to achieve lasting independence. Unlike a traditional evening gala, Tea With a Twist offers a relaxed daytime setting featuring tea and refreshments, raffles and the event's standout attraction — a men's fashion show that promises a fun and unexpected spin on the classic tea party.

Organizers said the event is about more than elegance and entertainment. As the organization's first official fundraiser, the gala serves as a call to action for the community to rally around families in need.

"We believe that no child should have to sleep in a car or on the street," said Edwina Reddick, executive director of Family Promise Hillsborough. "This event is about raising awareness, building community and inspiring generosity."

All proceeds from the gala will directly support Family Promise's programs, which provide shelter, case management and supportive services to help families regain stability and move toward permanent housing. Funds raised will assist families across Hillsborough County as they work to overcome financial crises and housing instability.

The event is open to the public, and both individual tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available. Those unable to attend can still support the mission through online donations, which are tax-deductible. Family Promise of Hillsborough County Inc. is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Community members are encouraged to attend, sponsor or donate and to help spread the word by following Family Promise on social media. Updates and additional information can be found on Instagram @familypromiseofhi, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/familypromisefl and on Twitter @FamilyPromise1.

Tickets, sponsorship details and donation options are available at the website www.familypromisefl.org/.

EASYBRIDGE IN SUN CITY: LEARN BRIDGE THE FRIENDLY WAY

By McKenzie Brown

If you have ever watched a game of bridge and thought, "That looks interesting, but intimidating," the Duplicate Bridge Association of Sun City Center has good news for you. Help is on the way, and it comes with a friendly face and a low-pressure learning style.



Kathy Smith, a Life Master bridge player and certified American Contract Bridge League game director, is launching a new beginner series called Easybridge. True to its name, the program is designed to make learning duplicate bridge approachable, social and even fun. No experience is required, just a willingness to learn and enjoy the process.

Classes began on January 29 and will meet from 1-4 p.m. for 15 consecutive weeks. Sessions will be held in the Horizon Room of the Atrium Building at 947 N. Course Lane in Sun City Center. To help newcomers ease into the game, the first four weeks are completely free. After that, classes cost $4 per session for Sun City Center residents and $5 for nonresidents, making it an affordable way to pick up a new skill.

What sets Easybridge apart is its supportive atmosphere. These classes are not about pressure or perfection. They are about learning together, asking questions and building confidence at the table. Sample dealer hands will be provided so students can immediately practice what they learn, turning concepts into real play rather than abstract rules.

Bridge has long been known as a game that sharpens the mind while creating strong social connections, and Easybridge aims to deliver both. Whether you are looking for a new hobby, a mental challenge or a way to meet new people, this series offers a welcoming entry point.

Registration is now open, and spots are expected to fill quickly. To sign up or request more information, email Smith at kathjosmith@gmail.com. Pull up a chair, shuffle the cards and discover how easy bridge can be.

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INNOVATION WITH GUARDRAILS: OUR APPROACH TO AI

By Superintendent Van Ayres

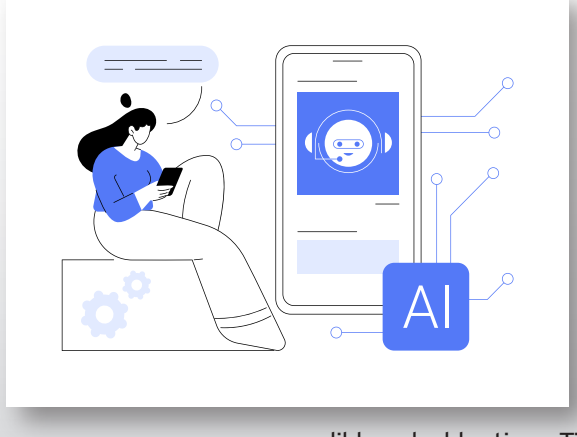


A Letter From The SUPERINTENDENT of Hillsborough County Public Schools

Van Ayres

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping every part of our lives, and education is no exception. Everywhere you turn, AI is sparking new ideas, new possibilities and important conversations about the future of learning.

AI and other emerging technologies are here to stay. As a public school system serving more than 200,000 students, we have a responsibility to approach this moment with both enthusiasm and caution. That means taking the time to understand the technology, evaluating tools carefully and putting strong guardrails in place to protect students and support teachers. Clear policies, meaningful training and an unwavering commitment to privacy and safety will guide every decision we make.



But let me be equally clear: AI will not replace the heart of our schools.

It will not replace the teacher who notices a student's frustration before a single word is spoken.

It will not replace the counselor who offers reassurance and direction.

It will not replace the principal who knows every student by name and celebrates their success.

AI will not be used to make highstakes decisions about students. We will not allow it to override a teacher's professional judgment and will not adopt any tool that compromises student data, increases screen time or detracts from meaningful instruction.

AI is a tool, nothing more. When used responsibly and thoughtfully, it can streamline administrative tasks, support lesson planning and give teachers back something incredibly valuable: time. Time to connect, to inspire and to teach.

Education will always be human work. Technology should enhance that work, not redefine it.

EVENTS, FUNDRAISERS, GENEALOGICAL MEETINGS & IMPACT'S GOT TALENT

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Raptor Center Of Tampa Bay Fundraiser

Join Raptor Center of Tampa Bay for its annual fundraiser at Three Bulls Tavern & Brewery on Saturday, March 14, from 1-4 p.m. You will get to meet the people of the raptor center, animal ambassadors and learn about the ways it is trying to save the environment. Three Bulls is donating 15 percent of sales to the Raptor Center of Tampa Bay and will match the donation, so please come out and enjoy great food and drinks and learn about the rehabilitation center in your area and how you can help. Visit www.raptorcenteroftampabay.org. Three Bulls Tavern & Brewery is located at 4330 Bell Shoals Rd.

Music Bingo Fundraisers

Get ready for an evening of fun and excitement at Bullfrog Creek Brewing Co., located at 3632 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Lithia. Enjoy a variety of musical genres as you play five games of music bingo on Thursday, March 26, starting at 6:30 p.m. The event is sponsored by Giddings Law Group and will benefit Seeds of Hope and Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale. Alongside bingo, there will be raffle prizes and silent auctions.

Lennard High School Bingo And Beats Fundraiser

Lennard High School Music Boosters are hosting a 'Bingo and Beats' Fundraiser on Monday, March 30, at Salty Shamrock, starting at 7 p.m. Be sure to visit https://saltyshamrock.net/ to reserve your table. Prizes will include gift baskets, gift certificates and lottery tickets, and there will be a cash 50/50 drawing. The band and orchestra students at Lennard are an incredibly talented group of young musicians who really need the community's support to help with uniform cleaning, instrument repair, transportation to events, etc. Salty Shamrock is located at 6186 U.S. 41 in Apollo Beach.

Impact's Got Talent

The Impact Program is now seeking talented students to audition for its annual Impact"s Got Talent event, scheduled for Friday, April 24, at 6:30 p.m. at Fellowship Baptist Church, with the grand-prize winner receiving $250. Auditions are open for grades K-12, including vocalists, actors, dancers (solo, duets and groups), musicians and anything else that sounds fun and entertaining. All acts must be under three minutes. Auditions will be held on Sunday, March 29, from 1-5 p.m., at Dance Quest International, located at 853 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Brandon. To schedule your audition, contact Jennifer Crum at crummiej2@gmail.com or 863-661-3236.

All ticket sales benefit the Impact Program, which promotes healthy lifestyles and relationships to teens, parents, teachers and other youth leaders through classroom education.

Fellowship Baptist Church is located at 13515 U.S. 301 in Thonotosassa. For more information, visit www.whatisimpact.com.

Shred-a-thon

Bring your confidential documents for shredding in a safe and secure manor to Bloomingdale Golfers Club, located at 4113 Great Golfers Place in Valrico. The free community Shred-a-thon will take place on Saturday, March 28, from 9-11 a.m. and is sponsored by realtor Mary West; contact her at mary.west@kw.com or call 813-763-9378. Please do not try shredding metal, lighters, trash or heavy plastics.

South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting

A South Bay Genealogical Society meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 17, at the South Hillsborough Elks Lodge No. 2672, located at 1630 S. U.S. 41 in Ruskin. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., there will is an optional roundtable discussion, followed by a sit-down luncheon at 12 Noon. Following the luncheon at 1 p.m., its guest speaker will be April Min. Min's presentation will be 'Forensic Genealogy.' The cost to attend is $18 per person. Call Vicki at 360-608-1647.

Apollo Beach Woman's Club Fundraiser And Scholarship Application

Save the date! The next big Apollo Beach Woman's Club (ABWC) event, Music of the Motown Era, will groove into Southshore Falls Clubhouse on Saturday, March 28, from 4-7 p.m. Proceeds will once again benefit scholarships.

Scholarship Applications for 2026 are now open. Applicants must meet ABWC's criteria, attend East Bay or Lennard High School, be accepted at a Florida college or university and demonstrate financial need. For more details or to find out more about the Apollo Beach Woman's Club, at www.apollobeachwomansclub.com.

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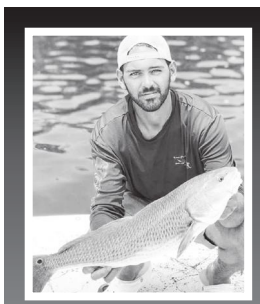


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SUN COAST SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION TO HOST GOLF TOURNAMENT BENEFITING LOCAL NONPROFIT FORGOTTEN ANGELS

By Libby Hopkins



The Sun Coast Scholarship Foundation, a new nonprofit, is committed to enhancing access to quality education for students facing financial challenges. Through its scholarship programs, it aims to empower students by providing them with financial resources to pursue higher education, thus enabling them to achieve their academic aspirations and contribute positively to their communities.

The Sun Coast Scholarship Foundation was born from a shared dream between Dr. Sterling and Rosa Jasper, two first-generation college graduates who experienced firsthand the transformative power of education, mentorship and opportunity.

"With every degree earned, career milestone reached, and door opened, we knew our success was never meant to end with us, it was meant to begin with others," said Dr. Sterling Jasper.

Recently relocated to the Tampa area, the Jaspers bring with them decades of experience as a business owner and social worker respectfully. Their years of public service has allowed them to witness firsthand the challenges faced by at-risk teens striving to build a brighter future.

"Motivated by these experiences, we have launched our new nonprofit organization, dedicated to helping youth transition successfully into college, careers and adulthood," Dr. Sterling Jasper said.

To kick off its mission, the organization will host a celebrity golf tournament on Friday, June 19, at River Hills Country Club, located at 3943 New River Hills Parkway in Valrico.

"All proceeds will benefit Forgotten Angels of Florida, an organization whose mission closely aligns with ours," Dr. Sterling Jasper said, "mentoring and guiding teens who often feel overlooked as they enter adulthood."

Forgotten Angels is a nonprofit which operates more as a family to benefit children aging out of the foster care system, young adults who have aged out, at-risk teens and recently released incarcerated youths.

The Jaspers hope to bring awareness to their nonprofit and the work they are doing.

"Our vision is to create a legacy of opportunity, one that doesn't stop at scholarship awards but stretches into careers, leadership and lives filled with purpose," Jasper said. "Through education, mentorship and selfless service, we are committed to uplifting the next generation so they, too, can rise and reach back."

Visit www.thesuncoastscholarshipfoundation.org. The foundation is located at 867 W. Bloomingdale Ave., #6104, in Brandon.









DASH MICROTRANSIT HITS MILESTONE MARKS 100,000 PASSENGERS WITH TAMPA PROGRAM

Staff Report



The Tampa Downtown Partnership is celebrating a milestone worth swooning over as its DASH microtransit program officially surpassed 100,000 passengers served since launching in October 2023. The achievement highlights how the innovative service is not only easing transportation challenges but also reshaping the everyday downtown experience for residents, workers and visitors alike.

Designed as a convenient, affordable and friendly way to get around, DASH has quickly won over the downtown community. More than just a ride, the service pairs reliable hub-to-hub transportation with personable driver ambassadors who bring a local touch to every trip. Riders can expect more than directions — from restaurant recommendations to tips on local events, drivers help connect passengers to the pulse of downtown.

From date nights along Water Street to workdays stretching into Tampa Heights, DASH offers an appealing alternative to navigating traffic, searching for parking or relying on GPS. The program's success reflects a growing appetite for transportation options that are both practical and personable.

"Reaching 100,000 passengers is more than a number. It's proof that DASH is strengthening connectivity across downtown Tampa," said Kenyetta Hairston-Bridges, president and CEO of Tampa Downtown Partnership. "Every ride represents a meaningful connection, whether it is to work, a restaurant or an event. Our driver ambassadors do more than transport passengers. They help connect people to the heartbeat of our city, supporting local businesses and reinforcing our mission to create a more accessible, vibrant and interconnected downtown."

Of the 100,000 passengers served, DASH has recorded more than 70,000 individual rides, underscoring its role in reducing congestion and encouraging efficient movement throughout downtown. By offering an alternative to single-occupancy vehicle trips, the service helps alleviate traffic while strengthening links between key destinations.

Through congestion reduction, business support and improved mobility, DASH continues to play a meaningful role in Tampa's growth and livability. This Valentine's Day, Tampa Downtown Partnership is celebrating the riders and driver ambassadors who made the milestone possible — and looking ahead to many more shared rides across the heart of the city.

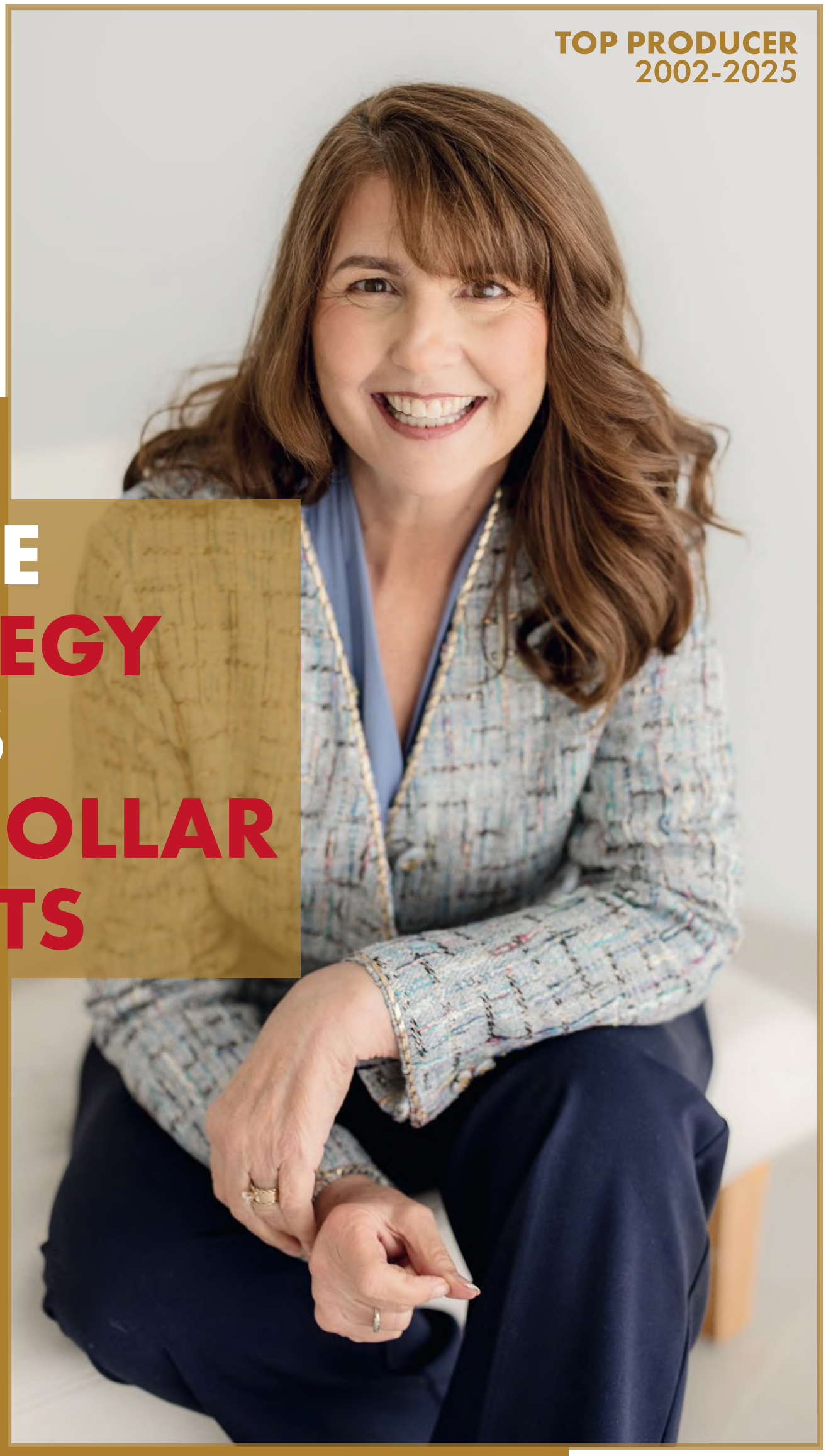
For more about DASH, visit the website at www.tampasdowntown.com/dash.

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TAMPA THEATRE PLANS $30 MILLION UPDATE TO 100-YEAR-OLD LANDMARK

Staff Report



Tampa Theatre today announced significant progress on its transformative Second Century Campaign: an ambitious, $30 million capital initiative to restore, enhance and expand one of Tampa's most beloved cultural institutions as it approaches its centennial on Thursday, October 15. The campaign, which is focused on preservation, education and enhanced patron experiences, will ensure that Tampa Theatre continues to thrive as a vibrant hub for arts, entertainment and community engagement well into its next 100 years.

As part of the first phase of the campaign, which totals $24.5 million, Tampa Theatre will fully and authentically restore the historic Duncan Auditorium to its original grandeur. To complete this work, the Duncan Auditorium will be closed from Tuesday, March 10, through the end of September for infrastructure upgrades, restoration of the decorative paint and plaster and preservation of its original fixtures and furnishings.

Other priorities for the first phase include:

• Opening the John T. Taylor Screening Room, a 43-seat microcinema adjoining the historic lobby, creating an intimate space for first-run films and ensuring that film fans will have access to Tampa Theatre even as the historic auditorium undergoes restoration.

• Renovating underutilized space on the Florida Avenue side of the building to create a new, 2-story education wing that will house permanent classrooms and archival storage for year-round learning opportunities in partnership with the University of South Florida, the University of Tampa and other academic and community partners.

"The Second Century Campaign is more than a capital effort, it's a transformational investment in our community's cultural legacy," said John Bell, president and CEO of Tampa Theatre. "By authentically restoring the historic Duncan Auditorium and expanding our capabilities through new spaces, we're confident that Tampa Theatre will continue to educate, entertain, enlighten and unite people for generations to come."

Thanks to the generosity of the community and leadership gifts from Bank of America; Celia and Jim Ferman, in memory of Martha Ferman; Bonnie S. Sonnenfeld; and John T. Taylor, the campaign is currently more than 93 percent of the way toward its first-phase goal. Significant public funding has been provided by the City of Tampa Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), and this project is sponsored in part by the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources, the State of Florida and the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners.

For more on the campaign, visit the website at www.tampatheatre.org.

LOCAL BAR-B-CLEAN RECOGNIZED WITH 'EMERGING FRANCHISE' AWARD

By Emily Harper



Bar-B-Clean Tampa Bay recently was acknowledged with the 'Emerging Franchise' award. Additionally in 2025, the company was recognized as the number one location in the country for the month of December, reflecting their dedication to high-quality service.

"For our company, these accomplishments represent more than growth — they signal that customers and partners value a professional, structured approach to protecting and maintaining their outdoor cooking investments," said owner Jamie Wolf.

Bar-B-Clean has been serving the Tampa Bay, Clearwater, and St. Petersburg communities since 2025 as a full-service grill care company. This veteran-owned business specializes in cleaning, repairs, sales, installations and preventative maintenance. This includes ceramic grills, smokers, pellet grills and regular grills.

Their team currently consists of seven trained professionals who are devoted to delivering consistent premium service along with exceptional customer satisfaction. This is achieved by providing detail-driven services focused on safety and performance.

They assist homeowners, realtors and property managers to ensure clean grills to protect the investment and health of their clients. They ensure that local families enjoy meals on a grill free of grease buildup and harmful contaminants that can lead to carcinogen exposure.

"We are committed to sustainable, long-term growth while maintaining the high standards, professionalism and consistency that define our brand," said Wolf.

Furthermore, Bar-B-Clean offers a membership known as 'GrillWell+' to better enhance long-term grill care. Through this program, members can expect scheduled cleanings, performance checks and preventative maintenance to preserve their grills year-round.

"We differentiate ourselves through specialization, precision and consistency. Grill care isn't an add-on for us — it's our core expertise," stated Wolf when asked how Bar-B-Clean sets itself apart.

Bar-B-Clean believes that "a clean grill is a healthy grill." It emphasizes reliability and respect for customers, and it is committed to educating clients on proper grill care. Its overall goal is to deliver exceptional service and create peace of mind along with confidence for grill owners.

More in-depth information about its services can be found on Bar-B-Clean Tampa Bay's website, along with appointment information, at its website www.bar-b-clean.com/tampabay/.

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KIWANIS CLUB OF BRANDON TEES UP IN SUPPORT LOCAL YOUTH

By Kelly Wise Valdes



The Kiwanis Club of Brandon is gearing up for a highenergy day on the greens as it hosts its annual Terrific Kids Golf Tournament on Thursday, April 16, beginning at 11 a.m. at Buckhorn Springs Golf and Country Club, located at 2721 S. Miller Rd. in Valrico. The muchanticipated event is the club's largest and most essential fundraiser of the year, fueling the youthfocused programs that define its mission. Proceeds from the tournament power initiatives across Eastern Hillsborough County, including Terrific Kids, K-Kids, Builders Clubs and Key Clubs — programs designed to inspire leadership, character and community service among local students.

Club President Dustie Amatangelo said the fundraiser is essential to maintaining the group's long tradition of community service.

"Our Kiwanis Club is a unique organization in that 99 percent of funds raised is reinvested back into the community," said Amatangelo. "We are run by volunteers who give the hearts and working hands to make us strong."

The tournament, described by organizers as the backbone of the club's charitable work, is the only major fundraising event the club holds each year.

The club hopes the community will rally behind this year's event by fielding teams, sponsoring holes or donating goods for raffle baskets. There are many ways the community can support this effort.

"Come out and bring a sponsorship and a team, make a donation, create a beautiful basket that represents your business and donate it. And lastly, become a Kiwanian. We are always looking for good people to join us," said Amatangelo.

This year, the club has set a goal for the golf tournament to support its growing initiatives.

"Our goal this year is to net $20,000 dollars," said Amatangelo. "We had a huge increase for our Project Smile program at Gibsonton Elementary and we will need to cover that cost."

"Our Brandon Kiwanis Club [is a] great organization of wonderful people who share a heart for our children in our local community," said Amatangelo. "Our Terrific Kids Golf Tournament raises the funds we need to help our community build better leaders."

Amatangelo encourages anyone interested to support the cause in any way they can.

"If I had a big ask, it would be twofold: Come help us reach our goal — but even more important, consider becoming a member of our extended family. There is a ton of love to share."

The Kiwanis Club of Greater Brandon, Florida, was established in May 1960 and continues to serve the community, especially its children. The club has served over 100,000 residents and provided more than $2 million to support local charities through its many programs and volunteer efforts.

Register for the tournament and get more info at www.brandonkiwanis.org/events/.





FUELFEST LAUNCHES SECOND TAMPA SHOW AT THE FLORIDA STATE FAIRGROUNDS ON MARCH 28

Staff Report





Cody Walker founder of Reach Out WorldWide (ROWW).

Following record-setting shows in South Florida since 2022, FuelFest is set to open gates for its second annual show at the Florida State Fairgrounds, located at 4800 U.S. 301 N. in Tampa, on Saturday, March 28. Gates for the event are open to the public from 1-8 p.m. Admission tickets start at $35 per person, and kids 12 and under are free.

Now in its eighth year of hosting events globally at Los Angeles and San Francisco, California; Dallas, Texas; West Palm Beach; New Jersey; Chicago, Illinois; Arizona; Tokyo, Japan; and Qatar, the long-awaited return to Tampa is almost here. FuelFest blends enthusiasts' passion for the automotive world with appearances by Fast & Furious franchise stars Tyrese Gibson and Cody Walker and live-action drifting featuring professional drivers, a live concert by MAYDAY! on the SPARQ Festival Stage, a record-setting car show, automotive culture, dozens of custom exhibits, car reveals and more.

This year, the show will feature more than 800 top custom, exotic, rare and exclusive cars and trucks, plus drift ride-alongs by pro drivers, Fast & Furious screen-used movie cars and various interactive fan racing activities and attractions. The Fitment Industries drift pits are open access, allowing fans to get up close to their favorite race cars and see what these amazing machines are all about. FuelFest also features the all-new popular showcase area, C4 Energy Taste of Tokyo, giving fans a Japanese underground car meet vibe with a variety of cars you're likely to see lurking in the streets of Tokyo. Fans can register their car in the People's Choice Paddock, a limited, fan-judged section where the best cars compete to be crowned People's Choice on the festival stage.

Event sponsors and custom exhibits include Gazoo Racing, SPARQ, Meguiar's, C4 Energy, Fitment Industries, Liqui Moly, XComp Tires, the U.S. Marines, 303/Stabil, O'Reilly and more to be announced.

A portion of the event's proceeds benefit Reach Out WorldWide (ROWW), the nonprofit charity founded by Paul Walker and continued by his brother, Cody Walker. Founded in 2010, the organization was created by the late actor and producer after a massive earthquake devastated Haiti, with the inspiration to organize a relief team that responded to the disaster.

Event information, car registration and tickets can be found now at https://fuelfest.com/, as well as on social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.



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TROOP 61'S PJ ZELATIS EARNS EAGLE WITH PROJECT AT PALEO PRESERVE

By Taylor Wells



Troop 61 Scout Panos Zelatis, known by everyone as PJ, recently earned a great honor — Eagle Scout, the highest rank of the Scouting BSA — and his achievement was awarded and finalized on February 20 with an Eagle court of honor at Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale, his troop's meeting place.

For his Eagle Scout project, PJ worked alongside 24 others, including fellow Scouts, leaders, and friends, to repair walls and outside picnic tables at the Paleo Preserve Fossil Museum in Ruskin. They sanded and painted two walls white to make the space look cleaner and fresher and fixed up tables that had old, peeling paint.

"I chose the Paleo Preserve Fossil Museum after reaching out to several local nonprofits. When I researched the museum, it really stood out to me," PJ said. "It's a place where school groups come to learn about Florida's paleontology and get hands-on experience digging in their fossil pit. I liked the fact that my project would help improve a place that educates kids."

PJ's Scouting journey began in 2014 with Cub Scout Pack 632, and in 2018 he crossed over to the Boy Scouts. He has earned all four religious medals as part of the P.R.A.Y. program, earned 37 merit badges, hiked 971 miles with the Troop 61 Hiking Crew, completed 70 service hours, camped for 84 nights, and been a troop historian, quartermaster, patrol leader, assistant senior patrol leader and instructor/hiking lead, among many more accomplishments.

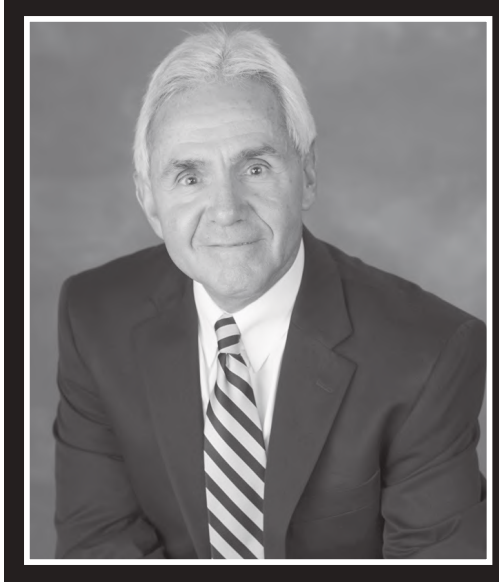
PJ said he especially enjoyed learning how to navigate the outdoors and use a map and compass, set up camp, cook outdoors and handle things on his own. But best of all were his hiking and backpacking trips, where he formed strong friendships and made some of his favorite memories.

"When I achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, it was an incredible feeling," he said. "It was meaningful because I had set that goal for myself as a Cub Scout. There were moments along the way that were challenging, but reaching Eagle showed me that sticking with something and not giving up really pays off. I was proud of the accomplishment, but I was also grateful for the leaders, friends and family who supported me throughout the journey."

With his court of honor complete, PJ now aims to not only succeed in college and build a strong career but to also live up to the responsibility of being an Eagle Scout. He is currently a freshman at the University of Central Florida, majoring in chemistry.

"I want to continue leading by example, giving back to my community, and making choices that reflect the values Scouting has taught me," PJ said.





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16 HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS NAMED TO ADVANCED PLACEMENT SCHOOL HONOR ROLL

Staff Report

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is proud to announce that 16 high schools have been named to the 2025 Advanced Placement Program (AP) School Honor Roll, earning three platinum, four gold, two silver and seven bronze distinctions.

The AP School Honor Roll recognizes schools whose AP programs that deliver results for students while broadening participation. Schools can earn this recognition annually based on criteria that reflect a commitment to increasing college-going culture, providing opportunities for students to earn college credit, and maximizing college readiness.

Platinum
Durant High
Gold
Newsome High
Silver
Riverview High
Bronze
Bloomingdale High School

Local high schools that earned these distinctions include:

- Platinum — Durant High School
- Gold — Newsome High School
- Silver — Riverview High School
- Bronze — Bloomingdale High School

"Our success in AP really comes down to our people," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "From dedicated administrators to committed teachers and hardworking students, everyone plays a role. Together, we've created a culture where students are encouraged to aim higher — and I couldn't be prouder of what they continue to accomplish."

Hillsborough County is proud of its continued success in its AP program, administering over 27,000 exams annually with record breaking success rates. During the spring of 2025, HCPS saw a 70 percent pass rate on AP exams, the highest ever for the district.

College Board's Advanced Placement program enables students to pursue college-level studies — with the opportunity to earn college credit, advanced placement or both — while still in high school. Through AP courses in 40 subjects, each culminating in a challenging exam, students learn to think critically, construct solid arguments and see many sides of an issue — skills that prepare them for college and beyond.

To learn more about Advanced Placement opportunities at HCPS, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org/accelerated-programs.

BRANDON ROTARY OPENS SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL SENIORS, AWARDS NEARLY $25,000

Staff Report



Photo Credit Linda Chion

Rotary Club members recognize 2025 scholarship recipients.

High school seniors across the Greater Brandon area are encouraged to apply for the Brandon Rotary Club Charity Fund Annual Scholarship, with applications due by 5 p.m. on Friday, April 10.

The scholarship program, established by the Rotary Club of Brandon, supports students who live in Brandon or attend high school within the Brandon area. In 2025, the charity fund awarded approximately $25,000 in scholarships to graduating seniors, continuing a long-standing commitment to education, leadership and community service.

Multiple scholarships are available to students who meet eligibility requirements, including residency within the defined Brandon-area boundaries, graduation as a current high school senior, a minimum 3.0 unweighted GPA, documented community service hours and acceptance into an accredited two or four-year college or university.

True to Rotary's mission, service is at the heart of the selection process. Applications are scored primarily on service to school and community, along with a student statement, a recommendation from a community service organization and academic achievement. An optional section allows applicants to be considered for the Sharon S. Sellers Memorial Scholarship, which emphasizes giving back to both community and country.

"All of our scholarship recipients demonstrate a strong commitment to service and leadership," said Chuck Burgess, CEO of High 5 Inc. "These students are already making a difference locally, and we're proud to help support their next steps."

Applications are reviewed by a committee of at least five individuals, which may include Rotarians, educators and charity fund board members. Final selections are made by the committee, and scholarship recipients will be notified directly.

Applicants must submit a single PDF document that includes the completed application, a verified community service time sheet, an official transcript and discipline record, proof of college acceptance and a letter of recommendation from a community service organization. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered. Paper submissions are not accepted.

All applications must be emailed to brccf.scholarship@gmail.com by the deadline.

Scholarship awards will be presented at a future ceremony at the Rivard-Simmons Rotary Event Center, with funds paid directly to recipients' college or university financial aid departments.

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HILLSBOROUGH AGENCIES HELP RESIDENTS FIGHT FRAUD

By Brad Stager



Hillsborough County is a fast-rising slice of the American pie, but beneath the prosperity a shadow economy of con artists exists, preying on residents' personal data and financial holdings. Against this threat, awareness and preparation can serve as defenses.

The jury duty scam targets the citizen's fear of the law, involving a phone call or text that lies about missing jury duty. There's a demand for immediate payment, often in the form of a gift card or wire transfer. According to Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister, that's a red flag for fraud.

"Legitimate courts will never ask for sensitive information or payment over the phone," he said in an official Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office YouTube video. "If you receive a call or a message about jury duty, take a moment to verify its authenticity."

You can verify the matter by calling the Hillsborough County Clerk of Court and Comptroller's Office at 813-276-8100, never using the number provided by the caller.

The hot real estate market means property is as good as gold, and criminals steal it by filing false documents that transfer a home to them. To be vigilant, a property owner should enroll in the fraud alert system offered by the Hillsborough County Clerk of Court and Comptroller's Office. This notification system provides an instant warning of office-related activity regarding their property. You can learn more about the property fraud alert service and register online at https://hillsclerk.com/.

Scams targeting human emotion are where the fraudster poses as a desperate grandchild, a lawyer or a cop and calls with a catastrophic tale of a fabricated crisis. They demand immediate, secret cash to resolve a disaster. It is an exploitation of the powerful obligation to family for quick, easy money. If a family member calls with an emergency, ask them a question only they would know the answer to, or simply call them back on a number you know is theirs.

Similarly, the romance scam involves a virtual life of faked intimacy, with the scammer inventing a financial emergency and begging the victim for money, promising a reunion that hinges on a timely bank transfer.

The essential rule for navigating the danger of fraud is virtually written in stone: Verify, don't trust. Never send money, gift cards or personal information based on a voice that called you, or a contact that appears randomly on a screen.

RIVERVIEW HIGH SCHOOL SEEKS FOOTBALL COACHES AS SHARKS BUILD ON PLAYOFF SEASON

Staff Report



Riverview High School's football program is seeking coaches at multiple positions as the Sharks prepare for the upcoming Class 6A season following a 6-4 record and a state playoff appearance in 2025.

Riverview High School is actively seeking to expand its football coaching staff as the Sharks build on recent success and prepare for the upcoming season in Florida's Class 6A.

The Riverview football program is looking to fill several coaching positions, including linebackers (LB), defensive line (DL), defensive backs (DB), running backs (RB), wide receivers (WR), tight ends (TE) and offensive line (OL). The openings come after a strong 2025 campaign, in which the Sharks finished with a 6-4 record and earned a berth in the state playoffs, signaling continued growth for the program.

School officials said the focus of the search is on committed, high-character individuals who are passionate about developing student athletes both on and off the field. While prior coaching experience is welcomed, it is not required. The program is open to both seasoned coaches and those looking to begin or grow their coaching careers.

"We are looking for men who are willing to invest in our year-round program," the school shared. "If you are committed to our athletes and our culture, we are committed to investing in you through training and development."

Community coaches, including those who are not currently teachers, are strongly encouraged to apply. Teaching positions at the school are currently limited, though additional openings may become available as the district moves into April and the summer months. Being a teacher is not a requirement to join the football staff.

Riverview High School is part of Hillsborough County Public Schools and serves students in grades nine through 12. The school is located at 11311 Boyette Rd. in Riverview. Additional information about the school and its programs can be found at http://riverviewhs.mysdhc.org/.

Interested candidates are asked to submit a resume and references to Antonio Rodriguez at antonio.rodriguez@hcps.net. Questions may also be directed by phone at 813-815-0310.

With a playoff appearance already on the books, Riverview High School hopes to add dedicated coaches who will help continue building a competitive program while mentoring student athletes for success beyond the football field.

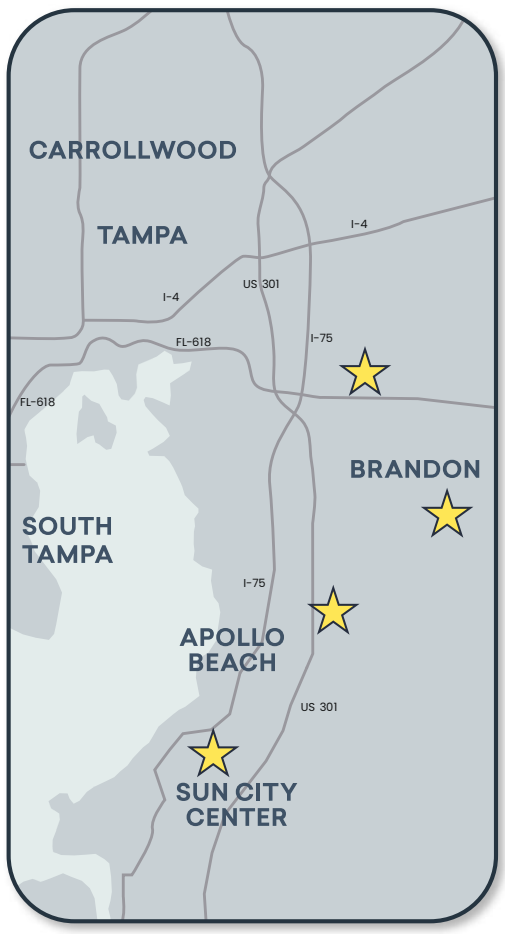
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52ND SUN 'N FUN AEROSPACE EXPO PROMISES HIGH-FLYING FUN AND FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

Staff Report



Aviation enthusiasts and families alike are gearing up for the 52nd SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo, set for April 14–19, 2026, at Lakeland Linder International Airport. Recognized as one of the world's largest aviation events, the weeklong expo promises high-flying excitement with daily and nightly airshows, educational forums, on-site camping, and live entertainment.

This year's event features a special extended Night Airshow on Wednesday, April 15, and a milestone 50th-anniversary celebration of the Red, White & Blue aerobatic team. Attendees can also take part in camping options, including early arrival sites starting April 11. Registration for camping opens April 7, 2026.

Adding a special touch to the opening night festivities, eight honorable World War II veterans will be honored during the Opening Night Concert on Tuesday, April 14, at the Warbird Ramp. The evening kicks off at 5 PM with performances by Angie K, Thomas Mac, and headliner Cooper Alan. This patriotic tribute is included with daily admission, ensuring every visitor can join the salute to America's heroes.

The expo continues the Franklin family's legacy of showmanship, led today by Kyle Franklin, a third-generation pilot and professional wingwalker. Franklin's career spans more than 25 years and includes jaw-dropping acts like comedy flying, motorcycle-to-airplane transfers, and thematic performances such as Pirated Skies and Dracula. Together with his wife, Liz, Kyle continues to push the boundaries of airshow entertainment while honoring his family's decades-long tradition.

EarlyBird tickets are $45 for daily general admission and $170 for weekly, rising to $50 and $180 respectively at the gate. Youth tickets (13–17) are $20 daily/$70 weekly, while children 12 and under are free. Parking is $20 onsite and available online in advance for $10. For more information on schedules, performers, and ticketing, visit the official SUN 'n FUN website at www.flysnf.org.

With thrilling performances, educational experiences, and unforgettable night shows, SUN 'n FUN 2026 promises to be an aviation event not to be missed.

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DAVID WEEKLEY HOMES BREAKS GROUND ON BUNGALOWS IN WATERSET

Staff Report



David Weekley Homes recently broke ground on its newest model homes, The Rosbach and The Hornbeam, in the Waterset Bungalow Series.

David Weekley Homes, one of the largest privately held national home builders, is breaking ground on its newest model homes, The Rosbach and The Hornbeam, in the upcoming Apollo Beach community of Waterset Bungalow Series.

In Waterset Bungalow Series, buyers will be able to select from four 1-story floor plans ranging in size from approximately 1,527-1,707 square feet of living space with three bedrooms, two full baths, one half bath and one to two-car garages. The homes are situated in clusters of four single-family homes that share a common driveway. The Rosbach model home will showcase 1,550 square feet with two bedrooms, two full baths, a study and a two-car garage, while The Hornbeam model home will feature 1,707 square feet of living space with three bedrooms, two full baths and a two-car garage.

Homeowners in Waterset will have access to the Waterset Club, featuring a resort-style swimming pool with slides, a lap pool, a fitness room, a game room and a gathering space; an amenity center with sports courts for sand volleyball, basketball, tennis and pickleball; The Landing Club, which includes a pool and fitness center; multiple community parks, fitness stations, playgrounds, scenic views and a splash zone for kids at Lakeside Picnic Park; and a dog park with dedicated spaces for small and large dogs. Residents will have proximity to the South Coast Greenway, the Waterset Trailhead, Apollo Beach and Tampa Bay, as well as easy access to Brandon, downtown Tampa and Sarasota via I-75. Students within the community will attend Hillsborough County Public School District schools.

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

About David Weekley Homes

David Weekley Homes, founded in 1976, operates in 19 markets across the United States and is headquartered in Houston, Texas. David Weekley Homes was the first builder in the United States to be awarded the Triple Crown of American Home Building, an honor which includes 'America's Best Builder,' 'National Housing Quality Award' and 'National Builder of the Year.' Weekley Homes has been recognized 19 times by Great Place to Work and Fortune magazine as one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For. Since its inception, David Weekley Homes has closed more than 130,000 homes. For more information about David Weekley Homes, visit the company's website at www.davidweekleyhomes.com.

HART LAUNCHES NEXT-GENERATION HARTPLUS SUV INTO SERVICE

Staff Report



The Hillsborough Transit Authority (HART) is proud to announce the debut of the first of 36 new HARTPlus paratransit SUVs entering revenue service. The new HARTPlus SUVs — 2025 Ford Interceptor Utility models — represent a significant step toward modernizing mobility and enhancing service for paratransit riders throughout Hillsborough County.

HARTPlus is HART's door-to-door, shared-ride paratransit service for individuals with disabilities in Hillsborough County who are unable to access or independently use the regular fixed-route bus system.

The new SUVs are designed to improve service delivery and accessibility for customers who depend on HARTPlus. Key benefits include:

- Greater flexibility in navigating neighborhood streets and medical campuses.
- Improved response times and service efficiency thanks to greater fleet availability and lower operating costs.
- Enhanced passenger comfort, including an easy-to-remove seat cover to accommodate service animals.
- Modern safety technology and real-time connectivity.

Each SUV introduces a new generation of onboard technology to strengthen safety, communication and operational awareness. The vehicles are equipped with multiple IP cameras, including an AngelTrax Vulcan dual-windshield camera with integrated AI safety capabilities and a 14-channel mobile DVR system to enhance incident visibility and protect both riders and operators.

Ford Pro Telematics supports vehicle health and utilization monitoring, GPS tracking, maintenance scheduling, remote locking and driver coaching. Additional technology includes a Garmin DriveSmart 86 GPS for navigation and a CradlePoint wireless router to ensure reliable system connectivity.

These enhancements integrate seamlessly with HART's existing Computer-Aided Dispatch/Automatic Vehicle Location (CAD/AVL) system, giving dispatchers greater real-time visibility into operations while supporting operators in maintaining on-time performance and prioritizing safe driving. Collectively, these investments reinforce HART's commitment to providing safe, clean and reliable transportation across the community.

The new SUVs will primarily serve HARTPlus customers who do not require mobility devices, allowing for more efficient and flexible trip scheduling.

Additional HARTPlus SUVs are expected to enter service in the coming months as part of HART's continued commitment to modernizing its paratransit fleet.

For more information about HART service, visit www.gohart.org.

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CLERK HOSTS VALENTINE'S VOWS AT TIE THE KNOT CEREMONY

Staff Report



Valentine's Day once again proved to be one of the most popular dates for couples ready to say "I do," as dozens celebrated their love during the Hillsborough Clerk of Circuit Court & Comptroller's Office's annual Tie the Knot Ceremony. The special event took place on February 14 at Joe Chillura Courthouse Square in downtown Tampa.

Hillsborough County Clerk of Circuit Court & Comptroller Victor D. Crist officiated the group wedding ceremony, uniting approximately 40 couples during the Valentine's Day celebration. Participation was limited to couples who preregistered and obtained marriage licenses through the Hillsborough County Clerk of Circuit Court & Comptroller prior to the event.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, each couple received a special commemorative marriage certificate to mark the occasion. Official certificates of marriage were mailed within one week following the ceremony. In recognition of Valentine's Day, the clerk waived the standard $30 ceremony fee, although regular marriage license fees still applied. The ceremony was conducted in English, with accommodations that included an American Sign Language interpreter as well as Spanish-language services to ensure accessibility.

Crist brought decades of public service experience to the event. His career included 10 years as a Florida state senator, eight years as a state representative and eight years as a Hillsborough County commissioner. During his legislative tenure, Crist played a key role in justice reform and fiscal oversight, including helping to craft Florida's $4 billion statewide justice budget and leading the transition to a unified, state-funded court system under Article V of the Florida Constitution.

As one of Hillsborough County's seven elected constitutional officers, the Clerk of Circuit Court & Comptroller's Office fulfilled more than 1,000 constitutional and statutory responsibilities and employed more than 700 staff members, making it the second-largest constitutional office in the county. The clerk's duties encompassed both court-related services and financial oversight for county government.

For the couples who tied the knot, the ceremony offered a meaningful blend of \ tradition and public service — a memorable beginning to married life in the heart of Tampa.

FROM MANATEES TO SEA TURTLES, PLASTICS TAKE A DEADLY TOLL

Staff Report



A small piece of plastic — no larger than a baseball — can be enough to kill an adult Florida manatee, according to new findings from Ocean Conservancy. The organization is sounding the alarm as plastic pollution continues to harm and kill marine wildlife across Florida's waterways.

Ocean Conservancy reports that manatees, sea turtles, seabirds, dolphins and whales are ingesting plastic at alarming rates, often with fatal consequences. Nearly one in six Florida manatees examined after death were found to have plastic in their digestive systems, and one in 25 died directly because of it.

Sea turtles are especially vulnerable. According to the organization's research, nearly 70 percent of loggerhead sea turtles ingest plastic during their lifetimes. Even more concerning, just a teaspoon of plastic can be fatal to a newly hatched green sea turtle, whose digestive system can easily become blocked.

"These animals aren't just encountering plastic — they're mistaking it for food," said Jon Paul 'JP' Brooker, Ocean Conservancy's director of Florida conservation. "Once ingested, it can cause starvation, internal injuries or death."

Dr. Erin Murphy, Ocean Conservancy's manager of ocean plastics research and lead author of the study, emphasized that plastic pollution remains a preventable threat.

"The science is clear," Dr. Murphy said. "Plastic pollution is killing wildlife, but proven solutions exist to stop it at the source."

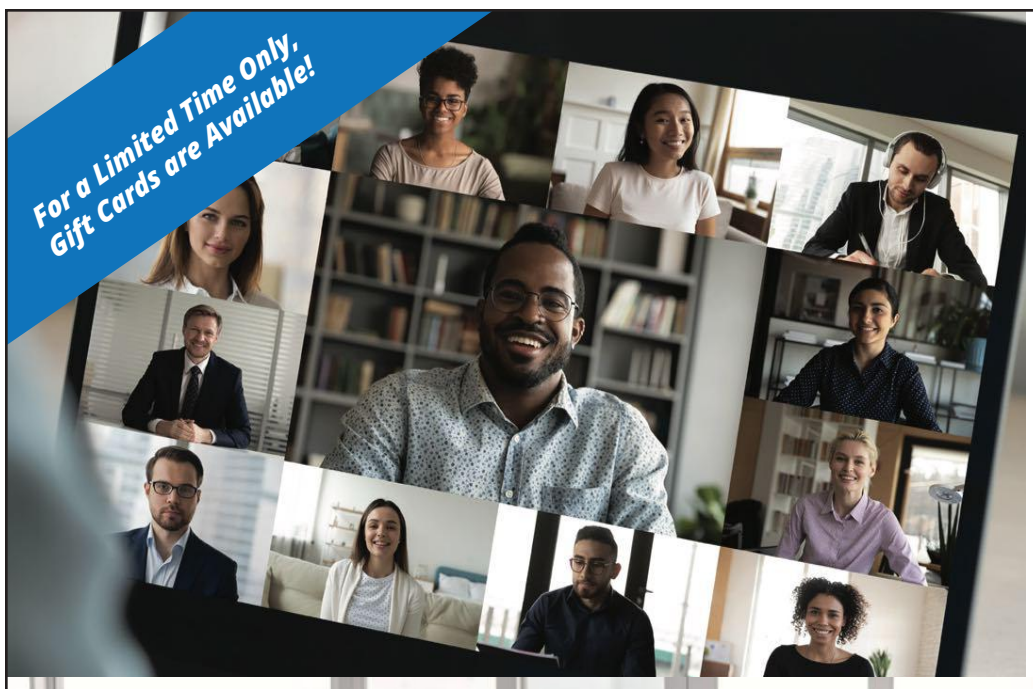
Ocean Conservancy released the full findings of its research on February 12, along with recommendations for state and local leaders to reduce plastic pollution and protect Florida's most vulnerable marine species. The organization said policy changes, improved waste management and community action can significantly reduce plastic entering waterways.

Local waterways, including areas such as Apollo Beach Preserve, are critical habitats for manatees and other marine life and are directly impacted by plastic debris from land-based sources.

For more than 50 years, Ocean Conservancy has worked to deliver science-based solutions to protect the ocean and the people and wildlife that depend on it. Through research, policy advocacy and public engagement, the organization continues to address plastic pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss.

Experts warn that without immediate action, plastic pollution will continue to take a deadly toll on Florida's iconic marine animals — a loss that is both tragic and avoidable.

Apollo Beach Preserve is located at 6760 Surfside Blvd. in Apollo Beach.





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LOCALLY OWNED SOUTHERN CONSTRUCTION CELEBRATES A DECADE OF BUILDING TRUST

By Olivia Clark



Southern Construction reached a milestone in November 2025, marking 10 years in business and a decade of service within the construction and restoration industry. Since its founding in 2015, the company has grown into a trusted contractor serving residential and commercial clients throughout the region.

Over the past 10 years, Southern Construction has expanded its capabilities to include both general construction and comprehensive restoration services. Its work ranges from residential and commercial construction projects to emergency response following water, fire, mold and storm-related damage. The company maintains proper state licensing and industry certifications, allowing it to manage complex projects while meeting safety and quality standards.

"Reaching 10 years is a significant milestone — proof that our steady hard work has built a trusted, sustainable company," said Blair Johnson, president of Southern Construction. "It's a proud moment for our team and partners, showing we deliver consistently and that our relationships with clients and the community truly matter."

Several milestones over the decade helped shape the company's direction and growth. One notable moment was Southern Construction's feature on HGTV's *100 Day Dream Home,* which showcased its craftsmanship to a national audience. The company also played a critical role in restoration efforts following Hurricanes Ian, Milton and Helene, expanding its emergency response capabilities to better serve both residential and commercial property owners.

"Responding to Hurricanes Ian, Milton and Helene expanded our restoration capabilities so we could better serve residential and commercial clients when they needed us most," Johnson said.

As Southern Construction enters its second decade, the company is focused on strengthening its internal operations while preparing for future growth. Investments in workforce development and emergency planning remain key priorities.

"What excites us most about the future is developing our team at Southern Construction," Johnson said. "We are investing in workforce training to deliver higher-quality, more efficient projects. Expanding our emergency response plans deepens our partnerships with clients and the community, allowing us to take on bigger challenges and make a lasting regional impact."

With a decade of experience behind it, Southern Construction continues building on a foundation of reliability, adaptability and community-focused service.

For more information, visit the website at www.southernconstruction.net.

GASPARILLA MUSIC FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES 2026 LINEUP

Staff Report



The Gasparilla Music Festival, presented by Water Street Tampa, has announced its initial lineup for the 2026 festival taking place from Friday through Sunday, April 10-12, at its new home at Meridian Fields. The festival released over 30 bands joining its 2026 headliners, Mt. Joy, Two Friends and Gov't Mule.

Among the artists added to the lineup include Shakey Graves, Jai Wolf, Drive-By Truckers, Bryce Vine, GZA, Kaitlin Butts, East Nash Grass, Future and Tom G.

"We are really excited to have such a vibrant mix of legendary performers, emerging artists and homegrown talent for 2026," said David Cox, executive director of the Gasparilla Music Foundation.

The festival will be announcing its full daily lineup with more band additions in the coming weeks. Additionally, the festival has more exciting announcements coming, including its highly anticipated food lineup, the return of its free GMF Kids Fest and some new, unique activations at the fest.

The three-day festival will take place across 11.5 acres just north of the Water Street Tampa district at 101 S. Meridian Ave., known as Meridian Fields, placing the festival in the heart of one of downtown Tampa's most energized districts. Additionally, the festival will include live performances and a free stage throughout the Water Street Tampa district.

Organizers expect nearly 10,000 attendees per day, marking a strong comeback for this Gasparilla-season tradition. Founded in 2012, the Gasparilla Music Festival has hosted local bands and nationally touring artists for more than a decade, growing into a signature highlight of Tampa's Gasparilla season.

Weekend passes to the festival start at $100, and single-day tickets are available, starting at $55 for general admission and $135 for VIP, at www.gmftickets.com.

For more information, tickets and schedules, visit www.gasparillamusic.com.

About the Gasparilla Music Festival

The 2026 Gasparilla Music Festival will be its 14th edition and is produced by the 501(c)(3) Gasparilla Music Foundation. The festival will take place at Meridian Fields, a new venue in downtown Tampa, and will feature 40 bands performing on multiple stages. The festival includes a broad range of musical genres, and past festival performers at the Gasparilla Music Festival have included Brandi Carlile, The Avett Brothers, Louis the Child, Nas, Cage the Elephant, The Roots, Billy Strings and hundreds more.

The Gasparilla Music Foundation works to provide musical instruments to Title I classrooms and support to local musicians.





ADVENTURE, PIRATES AND MAGIC TAKE CENTER STAGE AT THE 2026 BAY AREA RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL

Staff Report



The Bay Area Renaissance Festival returns in 2026 with an expanded lineup of immersive attractions designed to deliver more adventure, creativity and excitement for guests of all ages. Now in its 48th year, the beloved seasonal tradition is introducing three all-new and enhanced experiences that add action, imagination and swashbuckling fun throughout the festival village.

One of the most anticipated additions is the Knights Ninja Challenge, a free, high-energy obstacle course that blends medieval valor with modern athleticism. Festivalgoers are invited to test their strength, speed and balance as they dash, duck and climb through a series of physical challenges. Designed for friendly competition and spectator excitement alike, the course brings a fast-paced, interactive element that adds a new level of energy to the grounds.

Also making its debut this season is Buccaneer Bay, a pirate-themed port filled with music, crafts and seaside revelry. The lively area features a themed pirate bar, a dedicated performance stage offering entertainment throughout the day and hands-on activities for younger adventurers, including a spyglass craft station. Festival organizers said additional family-friendly elements and treats will be added as the season continues, further expanding the bustling coastal hideaway.

Returning by popular demand, the Wicked Wand Workshop has been expanded for 2026. Guests can once again design and decorate a free custom wand using colorful paints, glittering accents and whimsical charms. The much-loved Wand Testing Ceremony also returns, giving each creator a playful, magical reveal. With added space and enhanced decor, the experience offers even more room for imagination and creativity.

Together, these new and enhanced attractions make 2026 one of the most dynamic seasons yet for the festival. With obstacle-course heroics, pirate adventures and hands-on, magical crafting, visitors will find plenty of new reasons to explore the village and create lasting memories.

The Bay Area Renaissance Festival takes place at 12838 Auton Rd. in Dade City, running during weekends from now through Sunday, March 29, from 10 a.m.-6 p.m., rain or shine.

The festival features themed weekends, jousting, live performances and artisan vendors. Discounted tickets are available at participating Circle K locations, with coupons offered at participating Papa John's locations. For more, visit https://bayarearenfest.com/ or follow @bayarearenfest on social media.

FAMILIES HOST WALK-4-CMT SET TO RAISE AWARENESS OF DISEASE

By Brad Stager



Families united by the challenges of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT) are taking a proactive step to combat this neuromuscular condition. The local chapter of the Charcot-Marie-Tooth Association (CMTA) is organizing the Tampa Bay Area Walk-4-CMT and Family Picnic to raise awareness about the disease.

CMT is a hereditary neurological disorder, frequently showing up in childhood or early adolescence. The disease gradually worsens over the course of a patient's normal lifespan. This progressive deterioration stems from damage to the peripheral nerves, impairing communication between the brain and the limbs.

Ultimately, this nerve damage results in the progressive loss of muscular function and mobility. Patients experience increasing weakness and atrophy in the affected muscles, leading to deformities, difficulty walking and problems with fine motor skills. The profoundly cumulative impact on physical function is typically slow, spanning decades, requiring those affected to continually adapt to their diminishing physical capabilities.

Tampa Bay, FL CMTA Branch leader Ed Linde was diagnosed with the disease at the age of 5, and more than 60 years later he looks back and credits CMTA with helping him learn how to adapt to the disease to live a full life with a family, career and hobbies, like riding motorcycles and bowling.

"As an organization, CMTA has supported me throughout my lifetime journey," he said, citing help with accessing training and medical resources.

Linde has written a book about his life and experience with CMT titled Courage Motivation Tenacity: Living with a Progressive Disease. It provides insight into what life can sometimes require of someone in order to live as fully as possible and is available through Amazon.

This year marks a postpandemic return of what is a popular event in the Tampa Bay CMT community.

"This is the first one we've had since COVID, so it's been a few years," said Linde, a Riverview resident.

The Tampa Bay Area Walk-4-CMT and Family Picnic is from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Sunday, March 29, at MacFarlane Park, located at 1700 MacDill Ave. in Tampa. There will be a quarter-mile shaded walk, and attendees are asked to bring a covered dish for sharing. You can register or make a donation at https://cmtausa.org/tampawalk/, and you can learn more about the CMTA organization as well as information about the disease itself at the website at www.cmtausa.org.

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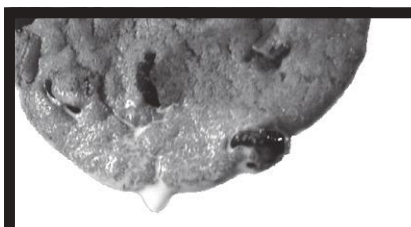
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Job Fair, Firehouse Spring Break Camp & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Your Next Career Opportunity Awaits

Job seekers in the area have a reason to celebrate. ECHO, in partnership with New Hope Church and Better Together, is hosting a community job fair designed to connect talent with opportunity on Tuesday, March 31, from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. This event promises a unique experience that goes beyond the typical job fair. Attendees will have the chance for face-to-face interviews with hiring managers from reputable companies while also accessing valuable resources to advance their careers. For more details and to register as a job seeker or employer, visit https://bettertogetherus.org/events/brandon-fl-job-fair-hosted-by-new-hope-church/. New Hope Church is located at 121 N. Knights Ave. in Brandon.

Democratic Club

The East Hillsborough Democratic Club welcomes all like-minded individuals to its Tuesday, March 10, meeting being held at the Brandon Crossroads Bowl, 609 Crater Lane in Tampa. The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m., with a meet and greet at 6 p.m. You will meet local candidates at most meetings. For more information, visit https://easthillsboroughdems.org/, email drew@drewvaugh.com or call 813-645-6324.

Firehouse Cultural Center Spring Break Camp

The Firehouse Cultural Center invites young performers ages 7–14 to its Spring Break Musical Theatre Camp, held from Monday through Friday, March 16-20, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Day campers will explore music, costumes and set design while rehearsing for a live stage performance on the final day. Featuring songs from Broadway favorites, including The Lion King, Shrek, Mamma Mia and more. The cost is $199 for the week. Space is limited, early registration is encouraged; you can register at https://firehouseculturalcenter.org/. Firehouse Cultural Center is located at 101 1st Ave. NE in Ruskin.



Dinosaurs In Your Backyard!

Wait, what? A T. rex in your yard? Sort of! Birds are the only living descendants of dinosaurs. Join the Eagle Audubon Society in March as Dr. Julie Stocksdale explains how dinosaurs evolved into today's birds, why feathers and flight developed and what happened to the rest of the dinos (hint: BOOM!).

The Eagle Audubon Society, the South Hillsborough chapter of the National Audubon Society, meets at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, located at 1239 W. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center on Monday, March 16. There will be coffee at 1 p.m., with the program starting at 1:30 p.m. The event is free and open to all. Visit https://eagleaudubonflorida.org/ for more information.

Beth Israel Sisterhood Will Celebrate The Suffragists For Women's History Month

Suffragists advocated for women's right to vote using peaceful lobbying and constitutional methods, unlike their counterparts in Great Britain, the suffragettes. Beth Israel Sisterhood will explore their fascinating history and their ultimate success on Tuesday, March 10, at 1 p.m. in Beth Israel's social hall, located at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. Historian, Zillah Green will tell stories of life for a woman in 19th-century America and what really happened during the 76-year journey to the vote. Contact sisterhood@jcscc.org.

Summerfield Spring Market

Stop by the Summerfield Spring Market from 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 14, and shop over 70 vendors. A lot of your favorite vendors will be there, as well as some new ones; there will be something for everyone. Remember to shop local. The Summerfield Spring Market is located at 13011 Summerfield Blvd. in Riverview.

Beth Israel Sisterhood's Women's Seder

Beth Israel Sisterhood is having a Women's Passover Seder Luncheon on Tuesday, March 24, at 12 Noon in Beth Israel's social hall, located at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. The Women's Seder has become immensely popular, offering women the opportunity to infuse the Passover narrative with women's voices and experiences. Come join them in this beautiful, spiritual, and delicious event.

You don't need to be a member of Beth Israel to join Beth Israel Sisterhood. Sisterhood is a great way to meet other women and share fun times while watching and participating in interesting programs. To RSVP for the Seder or to join Sisterhood, contact Donna at sisterhood@jcscc.org.

Mt. Zion AME Church Riverview Soul Food Festival

Join Mt. Zion AME Church Riverview, on Saturday, March 28, for its annual Soul Food Festival, a joyful celebration featuring delicious cuisine, fellowship and community connection. This family-friendly event brings together residents from across the area to honor tradition and support impactful ministry efforts.

Purchase tickets online at https://shorturl.at/mr8xV. Mt. Zion AME Church is located at 5920 Robert Tolle Dr. in Riverview.

Women Of God Tampa Bay 5K Run To Benefit Local Charities

Women of God, a local nonprofit women's ministry, is a community of Christ-centered women living out their faith through fellowship, action and a life rooted in Christ. It recognizes the growing mental health crises and is hosting the Stephanie & Iris Allen 5K Memorial Walk/Run to bring awareness, hope and healing to the community through faith. The event will take place at John Chesnut Sr. Park, located at 2200 E. Lake Rd. S. in Palm Harbor on Saturday, May 2. The benefiting charities include Women of God Tampa Bay, Hope for Her and One Another Counseling. To register for the event, visit https://womenofgodtampabay.org/5k-memorial/.

Blessing Bags Now Available From Local Knights Of Columbus

Are you familiar with Blessing Bags? These bags hold a large variety of items to help the homeless. They are compact enough to carry on the floor of your car or golf cart and then hand out when you see a homeless person. They are available to the public at no cost. Blessing Bag from the Knights of Columbus at the organization's monthly pancake breakfast from 8-11 a.m. on Sunday, March 15 and April 19. It is located in the Conesa Center of Prince of Peace Catholic Church at 702 Valley Forge Blvd. in Sun City Center.

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TAMPA BAY CHAMBER BRINGS HOME NATIONAL ABILENE AWARD FOR MILITARY SUPPORT DURING HURRICANE RESPONSE

Staff Report



The Tampa Bay Chamber, South Tampa Chamber, Tampa Bay Defense Alliance, and the MacDill Support Group are proud to announce that the Tampa Bay region has been awarded the 2024 Abilene Trophy, recognizing the nation's most outstanding community support to an Air Mobility Command (AMC) base. The award was officially announced by the Abilene Military Affairs Committee in partnership with AMC and Air Force Reserve Command Public Affairs offices.

In the announcement, Abilene AMC Civic Leader Sam Nichols said, "For over eighty-five years, the broad-based communities in the greater Tampa area have delivered continuous support to meet the needs of Wing and Area Military families. Following Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton their incredible collaboration demonstrated their outstanding commitment to MacDill Air Force Base, its mission, their airmen, and families."

This prestigious award honors Tampa Bay's decades-long commitment to the Airmen and their families at MacDill Air Force Base including extraordinary collaboration in 2024 through AirFest, education initiatives, workforce programs, and an unprecedented community response following Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

The partnering organizations expressed collective pride in the recognition.

"We are honored to receive the Abilene Trophy, a testament to our community's longstanding commitment to MacDill Air Force Base and the families who call Military Bay, USA home," said Dr. Bob Rohrlack, President and CEO of the Tampa Bay Chamber. "This award celebrates the strength of our partnerships throughout Tampa Bay and the dedication of our business and civic leaders who consistently step forward in support of our military."

"The Abilene Trophy honors communities that demonstrate exceptional, sustained support for their Air Mobility Command base. Tampa Bay's partnership with MacDill Air Force Base is part of who we are, and we are proud to see that commitment recognized. For more than eight decades, our community has stood beside the men and women of MacDill, supporting their mission, their families, and their vital role in our nation's defense," said Kelly Flannery, President and Chief Executive Officer, of the South Tampa Chamber.

"TBDA expresses our sincere appreciation to the Abilene Military Affairs Committee for their selection of Tampa Bay as the recipient of the 2024 Abilene Trophy," Maj Gen (ret) Larry Martin, president of TBDA, said. "For decades, the Tampa Bay Region has demonstrated its enduring commitment to our military members, their families and the air mobility mission, but never so much as before and after the devastation of 2024's hurricanes Helene and Milton."

For more information, visit the website www.tampabaychamber.com.

PAMELLA LEE PHOTOGRAPHY CAPTURES MORE THAN JUST MEMORIES FOR HER CLIENTS

By Libby Hopkins

PamElla Winslow, a local photographer and the owner of PamElla Lee Photography, has the ability to catch some of the most amazing moments in people's lives.

"My journey began as an amateur photographer just wanting to take better pictures for my growing church," Winslow said. "As I supplied more photographs of events and staff for slideshows and marketing material, people began to ask if I would also make family portraits as well. From there, my photography business began."



PamElla Winslow loves being able to capture the fun and core memories of her clients. She is a photographer and the owner of PamElla Lee Photography.



As she learned more about photography, she realized she wanted to learn more to further her photography career, so she returned to school to complete her Bachelor of Fine Arts in digital photography.

"I finished my BFA at the age of 52 from The Art Institute of Tampa and launched in 2016," Winslow said. "Attaining my degree was actually the beginning of lifelong learning and growth to continue bringing technical excellence to my work. I've not stopped running and I've never looked back; maybe glanced in the 'rear-view mirror,' but no regrets."

Winslow has received awards for her photography from the American Advertising Federation of Tampa Bay and is a member of Professional Photographers of America, the American Advertising Federation, the Society for Photographic Education and the American Society of Media Photographers. Her photos have also appeared in Tampa Bay Business & Wealth magazine.

What Winslow loves most about being a photographer is working with her clients and catching the fun or core memories in the photos she takes of them.

"I have always been a people person and love to capture genuine expressions, whether formally posed or candid, editorial images," Winslow said. "The most important thing to me is the experience my clients have when working with me to produce their pictorial story. Most are not comfortable in front of the camera, so it is important to me to put everyone at ease while participating in a session."

Keeping things local is important to Winslow as well.

"Being a local business owner in our community it extremely important to me," Winslow said. "My clients are part of this community, and they allow me to be part of their most precious moments. They allow me capture more than just memories."

If you would like to learn more about PamElla Lee Photography or hire her for your next event, you can visit her website at www.pamellalee.net or call 813-372-7916.

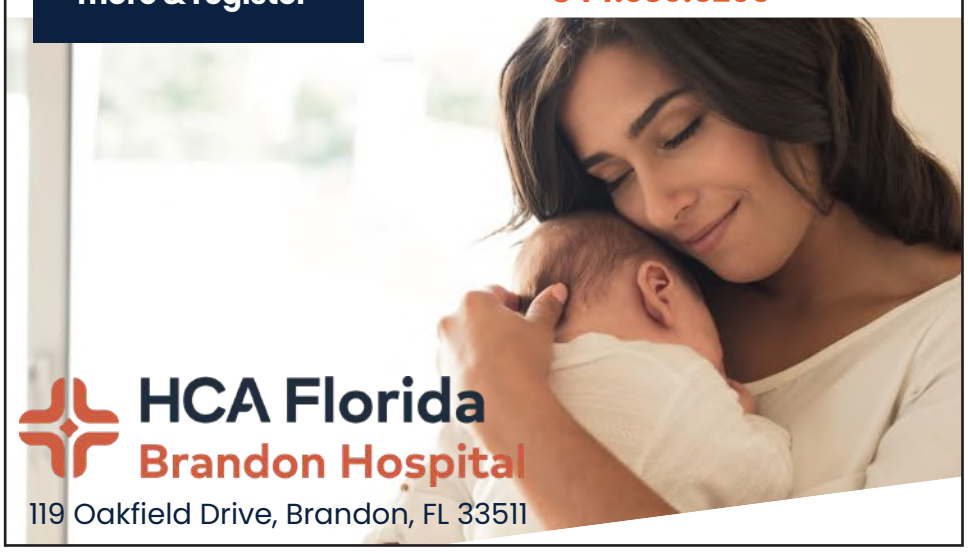
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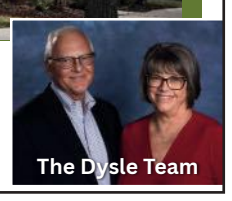


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EYE ON BUSINESS



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New Manager At Flooring Master

Heather Peterson is honored to serve as the new retail manager at Flooring Master Riverview.

Peterson brings over a decade of retail leadership experience and, more importantly, a genuine passion for people and community. She believes a great store starts with great relationships, and she is committed to creating a warm, welcoming experience every time you walk through its doors. Peterson is proud to call Hillsborough County home; she lives locally with her husband, their two daughters, two dogs and a cat. Please stop by the Flooring Master Riverview location, at 11531 Balm Riverview Rd., and say hello. It would truly appreciate the opportunity to earn your business. Visit its website at www.flooringmaster.com for more information about the services offered.

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Chick-fil-A Riverview Events

Chick-fil-A Riverview is hosting a variety of Western-themed events in March that are inspired by a new limited-time menu. Breakfast bingo will be held in the lobby on Thursday, March 19, from 8:30 a.m-10 a.m.; your chance to meet a real mini Highland cow at the Mini Cow Meet and Greet will take place on Saturday, March 21, from 3-5 p.m.; and Crafts With the Cow will be held on Monday, March 23, from 5-7 p.m. (while supplies last). Chick-fil-A Riverview is located at 12810 Summerfield Crossing Blvd. in Riverview. Visit www.chick-fil-a.com/locations/fl/riverview for more information.

Professional Pets Florida

Professional Pets Florida, based in Valrico, is the premier provider of in-home pet-sitting and dog-walking care in the Hillsborough County area. Owned by Lauri Partanio, a former certified animal control officer and veterinary technician, Professional Pets Florida is focused heavily on bringing veterinary medicine and animal welfare to pet sitting and dog walking locally.

"The 2026 pet parent is more educated than ever. They don't just want a pet sitter; they want a professional that treats their pet like their own," Partanio said.

For additional information, visit its website at https://professionalpets.net/.

Apex Sight Solutions

Apex Sight Solutions is a premier property insight firm that delivers top-tier residential inspection services, enhanced by advanced aerial technology. Its inspection services are for homeowners that are buying, selling, building, maintaining or even refinancing their home.

It recently added 203k consulting to its services for the community. 203k loans are back by HUD and are for those who are purchasing a home that needs renovations or are looking to do improvements on their home and choose to refinance and incorporate the renovation costs into their loan. Apex Sight Solutions is located at 11232 Boyette Rd., Unit 2088, in Riverview. Visit https://apexsightsolutions.com/ to find out more.

Navigator Academy Leadership Day

Navigator Academy of Leadership Valrico, located at 1101 Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico, is excited to invite you to our upcoming Leadership Day on Monday, March 9.

This special event is an opportunity for local business and community leaders to visit our campus, meet our student leaders, and see how the Leader in Me program shapes the culture, confidence and leadership of our students.

Royal Cleaners Celebrates Three Years In Business

Three years ago, local residents Steven Lewis and Nicholas Goines started helping their neighbors by installing hurricane shutters and doing other odd jobs. Their hard work and willingness to do what was needed has built their company, Royal Cleaners, into what it is today and enabled them to celebrate three years of being in business. Royal Cleaners provides you with 'royal treatment' and can help you with junk removal, estate and hoarder cleanouts, construction cleanups, furniture delivery, moving services and more. Visit the company website ghwww.royalcleanerllc.com or call either 321-368-1556 or 918-519-1164 to find out more.

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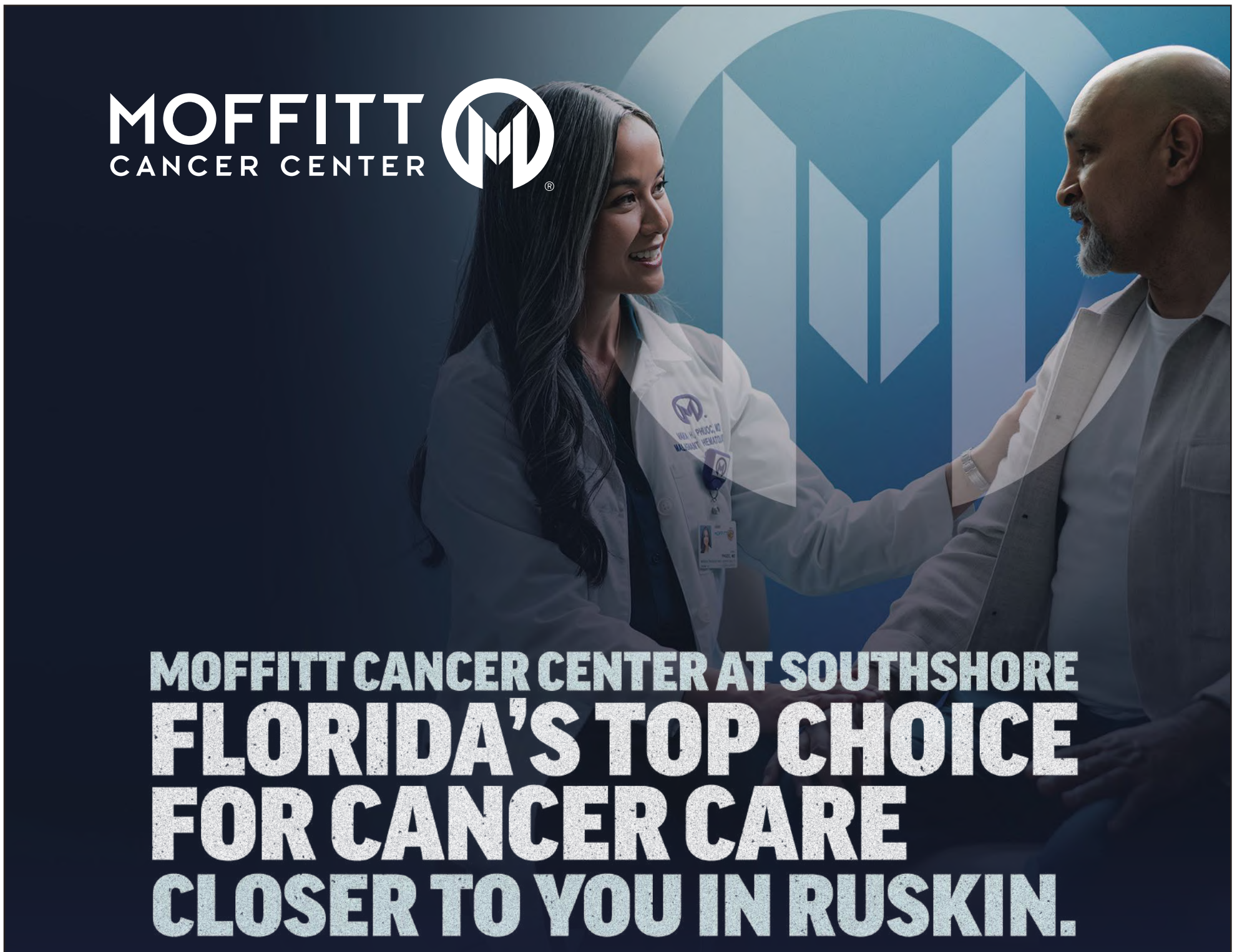
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SUMMER CAMPS 2026





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SUMMER 2026: DISCOVER THE BEST LOCAL CAMPS FOR LEARNING, ADVENTURE AND FUN



Spring is almost here, and summer is just around the corner — which means now is the perfect time to start planning a season full of discovery, creativity and fun. To help families get a head start, the Osprey Observer team has once again rounded up the best local programs for our annual Summer Camp Guide, a special pullout section designed to connect students with unforgettable summer opportunities across the community.

From performing arts and STEM to sports, outdoor adventures and enrichment programs, this year's guide highlights camps for nearly every interest and age group. Budding performers can take center stage at Music Showcase and the Florida Academy of Performing Arts, where children immerse themselves in acting, singing and dance through themed musical theater camps. Young artists can also explore dance, theater and music through the Patel Conservatory, which offers more than 100 camps and classes taught by working professionals. Music lovers won't want to miss School of Rock, featuring genre-themed camps for ages 7–18, or Center For Dance Arts, known for its wide range of dance instruction and award-winning competition teams.

For hands-on creativity, AR Workshop provides engaging DIY camps that build confidence and imagination, while Camp Mirage keeps kids moving with action-packed mornings full of creativity and play.

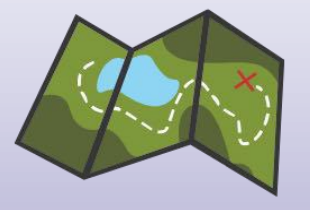
Families looking for outdoor or traditional camp experiences will find plenty of options, including Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center, Circle F Dude Ranch and Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, which blends thrilling rides with animal encounters and education. Horse lovers can saddle up at TLC's Gypsy Haven, while sports-minded campers can stay active through Fellowship Church sports camps or daily adventures at High 5 Inc.

Academic and STEM-focused families will appreciate enrichment options from Mathnasium, Skill Samurai and Code Wiz, while Kids 'R' Kids Circa FishHawk delivers themed camps that blend learning with fun. With more than 25 locations, YMCA of Tampa Bay also offers something for every camper, from arts and gymnastics to zip-lining and pool time.

Be sure to explore the full Summer Camp Guide for dates, pricing and registration details — and don't forget to enter our Summer Camp Sweepstakes, where one lucky family will win a free week of camp. With so many outstanding options, Summer 2026 is shaping up to be one to remember.

Families are encouraged to register early, as many camps fill quickly and offer early-bird discounts, scholarships or flexible scheduling options. Summer camps provide more than entertainment — they help children build confidence, friendships and lifelong skills while giving parents peace of mind. Whether your child wants to explore a new passion or deepen an existing one, this guide is your go-to resource for planning a summer filled with growth, joy and memorable experiences close to home.







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SUMMER CAMPS 2026







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DANCE, THEATER AND MUSIC PROGRAMS OFFERED AT STRAZ CENTER THIS SUMMER

By Olivia Clark



Registration for the 2026 summer camps and classes is now open at the Patel Conservatory, the accredited performing arts school at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Tampa. The summer session runs Monday, June 1, through Friday, July 31, and the programs in dance, theater and music are carried out for students ages 3 through adult.

Each summer, the conservatory opens its doors to those who want their first experience in the arts and to those who desire more advanced, preprofessional training. Families from across the Tampa Bay area enroll in the programs, which offer both creative enrichment and more formalized skill development during the summer months. Classes are conducted by working artists and experienced instructors in a professional performing arts environment.

They can take dance courses in the Next Generation Ballet Summer Intensive, which has five, three and two-week sessions for ages 11 through college, and dorm housing is provided for older students. Younger dancers can join the Junior Intensive and other camps appropriate for their age, designed to enhance their technique, strength, and performance quality.

These students will get the chance to rehearse and perform in fully staged productions, like Seussical Jr. and Aladdin KIDS, in which they will get acting, singing and stage movement experience. There are other specialty camps for fundamental acting skills and Shakespeare, and older students have the chance to audition for the Broadway Intensive production of Catch Me If You Can.

Music offerings include jazz, choral and chamber intensives; a singer-songwriter camp; and a number of workshops focusing on particular instruments. Younger students also learn about composition, rhythm and collaboration through weekly camps, like The Science of Music and World Drumming and Storytelling.

Tuition rates differ for each program, with most weeklong camps costing $475 and multiweek intensive programs being charged at higher rates depending on the length of the program. Auditions or placements are required for some programs before registration, and early enrollment is recommended since enrollment is limited.

For families requiring extended hours, precamp and postcamp care are available five days a week, Monday through Friday. Each student pays a registration fee.

For schedules or to register, go to www.patelconservatory.org. Call 813-222-1040 or email admissions@strazcenter.org.

CEDARKIRK BLENDS FAITH, ADVENTURE AND LEADERSHIP FOR SUMMER 2026

By Olivia Clark



Tucked away on 170 wooded acres along the Alafia River, Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center continues its longstanding tradition of offering a place apart for children and teens to grow in faith and community. Owned by the Presbyteries of Tampa Bay and Peace River, Cedarkirk has served the region since 1971 and welcomes more than 1,000 campers each summer.

While its residential camps remain a cornerstone of the ministry, Cedarkirk is placing added emphasis on its growing day camp program. Mandy Goff, Program Director, said the camp launched day camp two years ago and saw participation more than double in its second year. In response to family needs, Cedarkirk has added early drop-off from 8-8:30 a.m. and late pick-up from 5-5:30 p.m. for an additional fee.

"We are really trying to focus on our day camp program and make it affordable for families in this area," said Goff.

Day camp serves students who have completed kindergarten through fifth grade. Cedarkirk is also piloting a small middle school day camp during the final week of summer, Monday, July 27, to Friday, July 31, with limited space available. Residential camps continue to run Sunday to Friday for students who have completed third through 12th grade, while Explorer Camp provides a two-night introduction to overnight camp for children who have completed first through third grade.

Goff explained that a typical day camp day begins at 9 a.m., with drop-off beginning at 8:30 a.m. Campers join residential campers for morning songs before rotating through scheduled activity blocks that include zip lining, canoeing on the river, climbing the rock wall, arts and crafts and hiking. Campers swim daily, weather permitting, and share family-style lunches together. Each afternoon concludes with Bible study, worship and snack before pickup from 4:30-5 p.m.

Goff said creating community is central to the experience. Technology is not permitted, encouraging campers to build friendships, engage with nature and participate in shared traditions such as group songs and family-style meals. With approximately 30 summer staff members and small day camp groups of 12-14 campers per session, Cedarkirk continues to prioritize connection, outdoor adventure and spiritual growth.

Learn more or register at www.cedarkirk.campbrainregistration.com.





& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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A LOOK INTO HIGH 5'S SUMMER CAMP PROGRAM FOR AGES 5-12

By Emily Harper





High 5 Inc. is a multipurpose facility committed to positively impacting the community. Located in Brandon, High 5's programs are divided into five pillars: learn to swim, special needs education, after-school care, sports and recreation and community partnerships.

From Monday, June 1, through Friday, August 7, High 5 offers summer camp for ages 5-12. This weekly program is Monday through Friday, 7 a.m.-6 p.m., for the main campus, and Monday through Thursday, 7 a.m.-6 p.m., for the off-site campus at Bevis Elementary School.

A typical day at the main summer camp consists of a wide variety of engaging activities. During the day, campers rotate through swimming, outdoor sports, gym games, playground time, arts and crafts, hands-on S.T.E.M experiences and Gamers Grotto (a supervised and age-appropriate video game room). The off-site location's camp is similar in structure, minus the pool. However, it does offer water activities on some days of the camp.

"What truly sets our camp apart is the experience we're able to provide on our beautiful, expansive campus and the wide range of activities we offer. Our programming is thoughtfully designed to balance fun with learning, physical activity with creativity and structure with exploration," said Jada Spano, vice president of operations.

Families can expect a safe and fun environment where children play and learn while making lifelong summer memories. High 5's experienced staff creates a welcoming atmosphere, keeping safety as their top priority.

"We focus on creating a safe, inclusive and supportive environment where every child feels valued and encouraged to grow," said Spano.

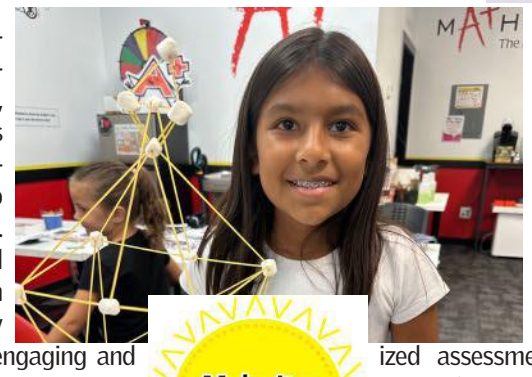
One of the most anticipated moments of camp is the 'World's Largest Swim Lesson'. Happening on Thursday, June 25, this global event promotes water safety and drowning prevention.

Spano stated, "Our campers love being part of something so meaningful and memorable, and families appreciate the important life-saving skills it reinforces."

Registration for the summer camp is now open on the website at www.high-5inc.org/camp. The main campus camp costs $175 per week, with a one-time $40 registration fee for the summer, while the off-site camp is $90 per week.

MATHNASIUM RIVERVIEW CAMPS KEEP SKILLS SHARP DURING SUMMER BREAK

By Libby Hopkins



Summer is a season full of possibilities, longer days, new experiences and the perfect opportunity for kids to grow in confidence. It's also a powerful time to strengthen math skills in a way that feels positive, engaging and stress-free. At Mathnasium, summer learning doesn't pause; it accelerates, giving students the chance to build skills, explore new ideas and feel proud of their progress.

"Summer is one of the most powerful times for growth," said Mathnasium owner Becky McDaniels. "Without the pressure of school, kids have the space to truly understand math, and that's where Mathnasium shines. It's all about momentum and meeting students exactly where they are, strengthening skills and building confidence so they return to school prepared and proud of themselves. After 12-plus years with Mathnasium, it never gets old hearing students tell us after the first nine weeks how excited they are about their success and the confidence to raise their hand on day one."

While some students use summer to reinforce essential skills, others are ready to push ahead, and younger learners are just beginning to form the foundations that will support future success. Mathnasium supports students at every stage of learning, from building foundations to tackling advanced challenges.

At Mathnasium, summer learning is never one-size-fits-all. Every student begins with a personalized assessment that identifies strengths, gaps and learning styles. From there, McDaniels and her team create an individualized learning plan tailored specifically to each child. Students who need extra support receive targeted instruction to rebuild confidence and close learning gaps. Students who are on track keep their skills sharp and steady. Advanced learners are challenged with deeper concepts that keep them engaged and motivated. And its youngest 'Great Foundations' students develop number sense, problem-solving skills and a love of math that sets them up for long-term success.

Summer is also the ideal time to get ahead without pressure. Mathnasium sessions are engaging, encouraging and flexible, making it easy to balance learning with vacations, camps and family time.

Learn more about Summer Camps at Mathnasium of Riverview, located at 13388 South US Highway 301, Riverview. Call 813-565-1102 or visit the website directly at www.mathnasium.com/riverview.

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FLORIDA ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS OFFERS FUN MUSICAL SUMMER CAMPS

By Libby Hopkins

The Florida Academy of Performing Arts (FAOPA) is a local nonprofit organization that was established to support the performing arts through programs at the academy and in the Brandon community.



FAOPA is committed to providing extraordinary theater experiences that educate, challenge and inspire students and their surrounding communities. FAOPA fosters self-discovery, creativity, confidence, group responsibility and pride in accomplishment.

"FAOPA celebrates the professional artistic disciplines of music, dance and the visual arts," said Danielle Sanchez, academy director of FAOPA. "We strive to be a model of excellence in theatre for all our audiences."

FAOPA and Music Showcase have offered summer camps, day camps and musical theater camps for many years.

"The day camps consist of singing, dancing, arts and crafts, intro into theater through improv," Sanchez said. "Our musical theater camps are for all ages and skill levels. We offer a variety of shows throughout the summer. Students work on choreography, blocking, stage direction and character development. Throughout the process, we watch students grow in confidence and self-esteem as they become blooming actors on the stage."

FAOPA is currently working on the camps they will be offering this summer to the community.

"We will offer musical theater camps and day camps," Sanchez said. "Our musical theater camps are two weeks long. Day camps are one week long. We have our middle school/high school groups that meet in the afternoon/evening."

The cost for musical theater camp is $295 plus a service fee. Day camps are from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. for half day and from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. for whole day. Day camp is for kindergartners through age 10, and the cost is $230 plus service fee.

"Parents love our musical theater camps," Sanchez said. "They love watching where their student starts and end up as well as seeing the difference. They love to watch their children grow in self-esteem and find the confidence to stand on the stage with their peers in the show. ."

If you would like to learn more about FAOPA and the camps it will be offering this summer, you can visit its website at www.faopa.org/ or call 813-490-ARTS (2787). FAOPA is located at 402 Oakfield Dr. in Brandon.

TEN WEEKS OF FUN AWAIT FAMILIES AT TAMPA YMCA SUMMER CAMPS

By Olivia Clark



Summer will arrive soon, and the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA is getting ready for another season of adventure, learning and friendship. Registration is now open for summer camp at the Campo Family YMCA, Spurlino Family YMCA and North Brandon Family YMCA. Campers ages 6-15 can enjoy 10 weeks of fun activities in a safe and organized setting.

Each location offers a unique mix of Signature Camp and specialty options. Signature Camp allows kids to rotate through activities such as swimming, STEM projects, arts and crafts, outdoor education and team-building games. Counselors support campers throughout daily activities designed to build confidence, promote friendships and keep campers active during the summer.

The Campo Family YMCA in Valrico features specialty camps that include sports, creative arts, and teen leadership programs. The Spurlino Family YMCA in Riverview offers many athletic and enrichment camps, along with popular options for teens. The North Brandon Family YMCA in Seffner provides sports, drama, gymnastics and adaptive camps, ensuring families can find a program that fits their child's interests and abilities.

Teens have new opportunities this year, with three unique experiences tailored for ages 13-15. Programs focused on leadership, such as Junior Lifeguard Camp and Counselor in Training, help participants build responsibility, communication skills and hands-on experience that lasts beyond summer. The Junior Teen Camp program introduces participants to outdoor exploration, basic archery, scenic trails and lake adventures while fostering confidence and creativity.

Families can enhance the regular 9 a.m.-4 p.m. camp day with optional add-ons, which vary by location. These may include swim lessons, open swim, sports, high ropes, horseback riding and gymnastics. During registration, families can choose available add-ons specific to their YMCA.

Tampa YMCA camps are ACA-accredited, which means they have gone through a thorough review by the American Camp Association focusing on health, safety and program quality standards. This distinction places Tampa YMCA camps among a select group of accredited day camps in Florida.

Register online at www.tampaymca.org, where families can view session weeks, age group details, and more information about the camps. Families are encouraged to secure spots early, as sessions fill up quickly.

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MATHNASIUM
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CIRCLE F DUDE RANCH CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF ADVENTURE AND TRADITION

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Circle F Dude Ranch Camp is excited to celebrate its 75th year, marking a milestone for the Lake Wales camp that has welcomed generations of young people. Camp Director Benjamin Moss said the camp's longevity comes from staying true to its mission while adapting to the needs of each new generation.

"Circle F has remained special because it has always stayed true to its purpose — helping young people grow in confidence, character, and independence — while thoughtfully evolving with each generation," Moss said. "Since 1952, families have trusted us to provide a place where kids can unplug, build real friendships and discover who they are beyond screens and schedules."

During the summer, Circle F welcomes about 200 campers per session, evenly split between boys and girls. Campers spend their days immersed in activities such as horseback riding, waterfront programs, arts, team and individual sports, ax throwing, paintball, boating and climbing towers.

The camp sits on 500 acres of southern live oak forest surrounding a spring-fed private lake, creating a scenic backdrop for exploration and adventure.

Many of Circle F's traditions have remained unchanged, Moss said, including opening and closing campfires, cabin living, horseback riding and more. "Those moments connect today's campers with generations who sat around the same fire before them," he said.

Moss said climbing, adventure sports, leadership pathways and more intentional skill development have helped shape the modern Circle F. "The balance between tradition and innovation is what defines modern Circle F, honoring our roots while preparing campers for the world ahead," he said.

Circle F will host an open house in May to give families a firsthand look at camp life. Moss said visitors can expect tours, staff introductions and opportunities to explore activity areas. "Visitors will tour cabins and activity areas, meet our leadership team and staff, see programs in action, and get a real sense of daily life at Circle F."

For more information, visit the website at www.CircleFDudeRanchCamp.com or call 863-676-4113.

IMPACT TEEN SUMMER STAFF PROGRAM INSPIRES HEALTHY CHOICES

Staff Report



This summer, teens across Hillsborough County will have the chance to make a real difference at Teen Impact Summer Staff.

Teen Impact Summer Staff is made up of 20-35 students who travel to middle and high school youth-based organizations to perform a powerful, skit-based presentation. Its message focuses on avoiding high-risk behaviors and choosing a healthy lifestyle. What makes this program unique is that it is student-led. Teens speak to other teens in a way that feels honest and relatable. When students see people their own age choosing positive paths, it helps them understand that risk avoidance is possible. The goal is to inspire young people to build healthy relationships and make smart choices that lead to a strong and positive future.

Angie Kagey, executive director of IMPACT, explained, "We are the prevention arm, encouraging teens to make healthy choices before other intervention may be required."

Since 1998, the organization has served the Hillsborough County community with the mission to educate, equip, empower and support students, parents and teachers in the area of sexual risk avoidance and healthy relationships. Over the years, IMPACT has reached thousands of families through school programs, summer staff presentations and community events.

Teen Impact Summer Staff is also a great opportunity for students who need community service hours for the Bright Futures Scholarship program. Students entering ninth grade in the fall or older are invited to apply.

The program begins on Monday, June 1, and runs through Friday, July 24. The first week students train to prepare them to present the skits and speak in front of audiences. After training, presentation days are Monday through Thursday, with every other Friday offering an optional fun activity. Students may take up to 10 business days off during the summer, outside of training week.

The application deadline is Friday, March 27. Applications can be found by visiting www.whatisimpact.com/students. Completed applications should be emailed to Joy Miller at jmiller@whatisimpact.com.

To learn more about the Impact Program and its upcoming events can visit the website at www.whatisimpact.com.

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The Florida Academy of Performing Arts



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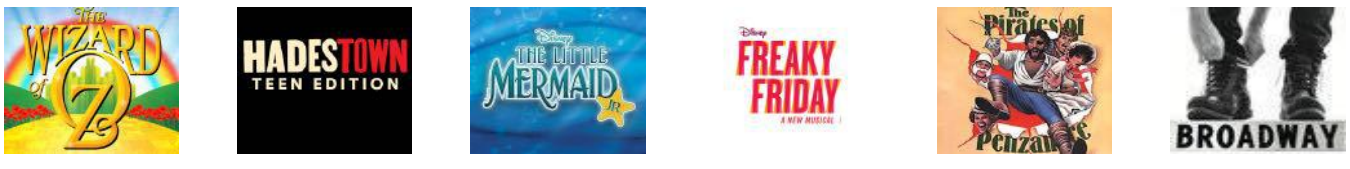
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CAMP CRISTINA OFFERS ADVENTURE & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ALL SUMMER

By Olivia Clark





At Camp Cristina in Riverview, the summer is set for exploration, skill enhancement and outdoor fun. Registrations are now open for the camp's 10-week summer program designed to offer hands-on and natural confidence-inspiring experience.

Signature Camp at Camp Cristina features a rotating lineup of activities for children that take place all day long and include swimming, STEM projects, arts and crafts, outdoor education and team-building games. Campers are closely monitored and grouped according to age, with counselors providing guidance in a structured environment where children can remain physically active and mentally stimulated.

Camp Cristina has a variety of specialty camps for older campers with particular interests. In Horse Camp, participants learn the basics of grooming, go on trail rides and gain confidence working with horses. Swim Camp focuses on water safety and swim instruction with certified staff to help campers build skills in and around the water. Lifeguard Camp offers aquatics leadership skills, teamwork and hands-on training that generates responsibility and prepares young adults for future certification opportunities.

Campers can also take part in Adventure Camp, which includes activities like archery, exploring the lake and team challenges that promote cooperation and problem-solving. The Counselors in Training and Junior Lifeguards programs offer leadership skills, communication skills and hands-on training in a nurturing environment focusing on growth and responsibility.

Thus, families can add on to the traditional camp day, which runs from Monday to Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., with weekly add-ons, such as swim lessons, gymnastics and extended care. Add-ons vary according to the age group and availability and can be chosen during registration. There is a nonrefundable deposit at registration and a separate deposit for select teen leadership programs.

Camp Cristina is one of the Tampa YMCA's ACA-accredited camps, which is reflected in the national standards for safety, staff training and program quality. This places the camp among the few day camps in Florida meeting the standards set by the American Camp Association.

For further information or to register, visit www.tampaymca.org/letscamp or the Tampa YMCA registration portal. Families are advised to register their children at the earliest opportunity to avoid missing out on available sessions.

ULTIMATE SUMMER WITH BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY CAMPS

Staff Report



Your search for summer plans is over. Families looking ahead to summer camp 2026 will find a wide range of engaging, educational and adventure-filled options at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, where camps are designed for animal lovers, thrill seekers and curious minds of all ages.

Busch Gardens summer camps offer children and teens the chance to unplug and connect with animals, nature and one another in a dynamic, hands-on environment. Campers explore wildlife, learn about conservation and animal care, enjoy thrilling rides and shows, and build friendships that often last long after summer ends. These experiences are not only fun, but also meaningful, helping campers grow in confidence, curiosity and teamwork.

Busch Gardens' summer programs are led by carefully selected, highly trained professionals who know how to balance education with excitement. The park offers a variety of educational summer day camps for students from kindergarten through 12th grade, with sessions tailored to different age groups and interests. Campers enjoy close-up animal encounters, behind-the-scenes experiences, themed games and crafts, age-appropriate rides, live shows, and interactive learning activities. Each camper also receives souvenir keepsakes, including a camp T-shirt and water bottle, along with opportunities to return to the park after camp hours.

For older students seeking a deeper adventure, overnight resident camps provide a one-of-a-kind sleepaway experience. Based in a secure on-site lodge, these all-inclusive camps immerse rising seventh through 12th graders in a blend of wildlife education and adrenaline-pumping attractions. Campers gain exclusive access to animal care areas, interact with park professionals, and experience the park in ways not available to regular guests.

Busch Gardens camps are accredited by the American Camping Association, offering parents added confidence in program quality, safety and staff training. Priority access to attractions, enriching educational content and unforgettable behind-the-scenes moments consistently place these camps among the top summer programs in the region.

With options ranging from early elementary students to teens—and even specialized programs for those exploring future careers—Busch Gardens Tampa Bay continues to be a standout destination for summer camp 2026 registration opportunities. Register at www. buschgardens.com.







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ANIMAL CROSSING: AQUARIUM TOUR STOPS AT SEA LIFE ORLANDO

By Libby Hopkins

The aquarium experience inspired by the Animal Crossing: New Horizons video game on the Nintendo Switch is now at SEA LIFE Orlando. Now through Thursday, April 30, themed activities will offer aquarium guests the opportunity to explore the wonders of aquatic life while enjoying the world of Animal Crossing: New Horizons.



At SEA LIFE Orlando, guests will be able to interact with familiar Animal Crossing characters through April 30.

In the Animal Crossing: New Horizons game, gamers escape to a deserted island and create their own paradise as they explore, create and customize. The island getaway has a wealth of natural resources that can be used to craft everything from tools to creature comforts. Gamers can hunt down insects at the crack of dawn, decorate their paradise throughout the day or enjoy sunset on the beach while fishing in the ocean. Animal Crossing: New Horizons is available for the Nintendo Switch family of systems on Nintendo eShop and through retailers.

At SEA LIFE Orlando, guests will be able to interact with familiar Animal Crossing characters while learning more about the real-world animal kingdom and coming face-to-fin with thousands of sea creatures.

The event will include:

- An Animal Crossing: New Horizons photo opportunity featuring an aquarium-themed background with characters from the game.
- Themed signage throughout the Aquarium featuring creature descriptions presented by in-game curator Blathers, with information directly from the game.
- Cutout displays of familiar characters from the game throughout the aquarium near a wide variety of habitats.
- My Nintendo kiosks where guests can check in to receive 100 My Nintendo Platinum Points, which are redeemable at https://my.nintendo.com/ for exclusive digital and physical rewards.
- A Nintendo Account is required to receive and redeem points. Terms apply (https://accounts.nintendo.com/term_point).

Planned character meet and greet and stamp rally dates for SEA LIFE Orlando are Friday to Sunday, March 20-22 and April 3-5. Tickets for the experience are included with the cost of general admissionr at the website www.visitsealife.com/orlando.

CENTER FOR DANCE ARTS PLANS TO STEAL THE SPOTLIGHT THIS SEASON

By Mylena C. Ferman

This March, the Center For Dance Arts' VIP Team gets to showcase their skills at the first mandatory competition of the season! Located in Brandon, the dance studio provides students with a safe place to grow as both dancers and people.



"I think it's important that we teach them not just the importance of dance," Christi Furgason, assistant director and studio manager of the Center For Dance Arts, said, "but how dance can shape you as a person in the outside world."

The VIP Team is the Center For Dance Arts' competitive dance team. Each season, the VIP Team learns new routines to compete against other studios. There are four regional competitions and a national competition, with various optional competitions that the dancers are not required to attend.

"We want to go for first [place], but it's also about the experience," Furgason said, "and making sure they grow not just in dance but also in life."

Once a week, the VIP Team has a class focused on team building and social skills. Activities can include team scavenger hunts, where everyone must be included or risk losing all earned clues and restarting, or obstacle courses guided by a peer on the sidelines.

"Afterwards, we come together, and we're like, 'OK, so what worked and what didn't?'" Furgason said.

Those who want a taste of the spotlight can join the Center For Dance Arts on Thursday, March 12, for a bingo night at Bullfrog Creek Brewing Co. The fundraiser is open to anyone looking to support the dancers. The doors open at 6:30 p.m., with bingo beginning at 7 p.m.

This season, the VIP Team boasts about 15 dancers, primarily between ages 9-14 years old.

While auditions for this season's competition team have passed, auditions for next season's VIP competition team are currently set for Friday, May 15. The audition schedule for ages 4-11 is 5:30-7 p.m., and those ages 12-18 audition from 7-8:30 p.m.

For more information about the Center for Dance Arts, please visit www.mycfda.com, call 813-657-1500, follow its social media pages on Instagram @cfdaofficial or Facebook at www.facebook.com/center-4dancearts/.

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SUMMER CAMPS 2026



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CEDARKIRK, CIRCLE F DUDE, PATEL, MATHNASIUM AND MORE....

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center

Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center, located on 170 acres of woodlands, wetlands and uplands near the Alafia River, will have summer overnight and day camps starting on Sunday, June 7, and finishing on Friday, July 31. Campers can sign up for a week or the whole summer. Day camp is available for campers who have completed kindergarten up to those who have completed fifth grade and is priced at $230 per week. Day campers must bring their own lunch. Overnight camp is available for campers who have completed first through 12th grade and starts at $555. Cedarkirk is located at 1920 Streetman Dr. in Lithia and can be reached at 813-685-4224. For more information and to register, visit www.cedarkirk.org.

Circle F Dude Ranch

Circle F Dude Ranch, located in Lake Wales, welcomes boys and girls from all over the United States and the world for one to three-week sleepaway camp sessions. Kids range in age from 6-16. Circle F fosters grit, growth and a love for the outdoors. With the perfect blend of Western flair and classic camp fun, it gives kids the kind of summer they'll never forget. Visit Circle F Dude Ranch for an open house on May 9, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. meet the leadership team, try activities and learn about summers on the ranch, RSVP at admin.gazeboevents.com. For more and to sign up, visit www.circlefduderanchcamp.com.

Mathnasium

Summer is the perfect time for kids to grow in confidence and strengthen math skills without pressure. At Mathnasium, summer learning accelerates with personalized plans designed for every stage — from building foundations to tackling advanced challenges. Students receive targeted support, stay sharp or move ahead while enjoying engaging, flexible sessions that fit busy summer schedules. Parents often see gains not just in skills but also in confidence and attitude. This summer, help your child return to school prepared, motivated and excited about math. To find a location near you, please visit www.mathnasium.com.

The Patel Conservatory

The Straz Center's Patel Conservatory offers arts education courses and programs in dance, theater and music, with 100-plus camps and classes available. Students are instructed by passionate, working artists with a taste array of professional performance experience and exemplary curriculum vitae. Running from Monday, June 1, to Friday, July 31, full and half-day camps are available weekly for ages 4-18. The cost varies depending on the camp; financial aid and scholarships are available. Visit the website at www.patelconservatory.org or call 813-222-1040. Open Houses are scheduled for Sat., March 7, from 9-10 a.m. and Thurs,, May 14, from 5-6 p.m.

Busch Gardens

For more than 25 years, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay has provided children with inspiring, exciting and educational experiences through some of the best Tampa summer camp options. There are a wide variety of summer day camp options to fit your child's grade level and interests. One of the reasons to choose Busch Gardens as your summer camp include it being accredited by the American Camping Association, meaning parents can trust that the camp meets high standards for safety, staff training and program quality. Also, campers get to enjoy the adrenaline rush of rides as well as the unique opportunity to meet animals up close. Beyond the fun, campers experience activities that are both enriching and educational, providing a well-rounded experience.

For schedules, details and registration information, visit the park website at www.buschgardens.com.





& ACTIVITY GUIDE





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ROCK SCHOOL, HORSE CAMP, BUSCH GARDENS, SKILLS & MORE...

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Camp Mirage

Camp Mirage is an activity-based summer camp built around movement, creativity and hands-on fun. Its promise is simple — campers will go home tired, a little dirty, smiling and excited to come back the next day. It offers half-day camps for grades K and up, running from 9 a.m.-12 Noon, with before and after-care available from 7:30 a.m.- 5:30 p.m. Weekly tuition ranges from $125-$185 depending on age group, a membership discount program is available which provides 10 percent off tuition and a reduced rate for before and after care. Camp Mirage is located at 2913 John Moore Rd. in Brandon. Visit www.campmiragebrandon.com or call 813-825-2234.

Fellowship Church

Fellowship Church, located at 15326 FishHawk Blvd., in Lithia will be holding a weekly sports summer camp from Monday, June 1, through Thursday, July 23. Camp will be Mondays through Thursdays from 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and will cost $150, with a sibling discount available. Campers must bring drinks and a snack, as well as wear sports attire; a camp shirt will be provided. Visit its website at www.fellowship.church or call 813-655-7431.

Music Showcase And The Florida Academy Of Performing Arts

Music Showcase and the Florida Academy of Performing Arts (FAOPA) will host their annual summer camp this summer starting on Monday, June 1. Campers will be immersed in acting, singing, dancing and more throughout the summer. In Musical Theater Camp, campers will learn about working collaboratively, the art of stage character, voice projection, props and working with a set, with productions for all ages and skill levels. FAOPA's day camp will include activities to explore instruments, acting, singing and art, with themed weeks like Harry Potter, Wicked, superheroes and more. Free early drop-off, free late pickup, scholarships and sibling discounts. Music Showcase is located at 402 Oakfield Dr. in Brandon. Visit www.faopa.org.

Skill Samurai

Skill Samurai's STEM Camps give students hands-on experience with today's most exciting technologies. Campers explore Minecraft and Roblox through creative game design, learn responsible content creation in YouTube Studio and discover the fundamentals of artificial intelligence. Designed for curious minds, these camps build problem-solving, creativity and confidence in a fun, supportive environment. Perfect for beginners and experienced students alike, Skill Samurai helps children turn interest in technology into real-world skills that last a lifetime locally. Visit www.skillsamurai.com/fl-brandon/camps or call 813-761-2832

TLC's Gypsy Haven Riding Camps

Come and learn about horse riding and grooming at TLC's Gypsy Haven's summer camp, which offers hands-on experience and education. Camps run from Tuesday-Thursday from 9a.m. - 2p.m. from Tuesday, June 2, through Thursday, June 25, and Tuesday, July 7, through Thursday, July 30. Group lessons are also available on Fridays and Saturdays. Visit the website at www.tlcsfarms.com or call Tammi on 813-842-4236 for information. TLC's Gypsy Haven is located at 4325 Keysville Rd. in Lithia.

School of Rock Valrico

Let your budding musicians join School of Rock this summer for a variety of music-themed camps, including Taylor Swift and Classic Rock Rewind. There are different themes for different age groups, with camps suitable for ages 7-18. Camps are available for full or half days, with the earliest available drop-off being at 8:45 a.m.

School of Rock is located at 3244 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., #104, in Valrico. Visit www.schoolofrock.com/locations/valrico or call 813-397-8828.







SUMMER CAMPS 2026









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YMCA, CODE WIZ, AR WORKSHOP, VIBE CAMP, HIGH 5 INC. & MORE

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

High 5 Inc.

Brandon's High 5 Inc. is inviting students to embark on an exciting and adventurous journey where your child will experience the thrill of summer camp. Daily activities will include pool time, outdoor play, field games, arts and crafts and more, including field trips.

Camp is offered Monday through Friday from 7 a.m.-6 p.m. at High 5 Inc., located at 405 Beverly Blvd. in Brandon. Campers can sign up for individual weeks or throughout the entire summer. Visit www.high5inc.org or call 813-689-0908.

Code Wiz

Code Wiz, located at 16132 Churchview Dr., Ste. 105, in Lithia, teaches coding and robotics to children, its camps are hands-on, student-driven and designed to foster curiosity and independence. Campers are encouraged to explore, problem-solve and create at their own pace, with guidance from coaches to support their individual learning journeys. Camps will run throughout the summer and are available for mornings, afternoons or full days. Visit online at www. codewiz.com/fishhawk-fl.

Kids 'R' Kids

Looking for a summer camp that combines fun, education, and adventure? Look no further! Kids 'R' Kids Learning Academies has created the perfect summer escape for kids to learn, grow and explore in a safe and exciting environment. Camp VIBE involves a new theme designed to empower campers through amusing activities, fascinating field trips, timely lessons in teamwork and so much more. Campers will have their eyes opened to limitless possibilities and their minds focused to ignite their passions. Let them catch the VIBE of summer! Kids 'R' Kids is located at 5815 Kids Crossing Dr. in Lithia. For more information, visit its website at www.kidsrkids.com/circa-fishhawk/programs/summer-camp.

AR Workshop

AR Workshop is a craft studio offering hands-on classes for campers ages 5-17. The hands-on classes are designed to inspire creativity, confidence and fun in a supportive studio environment. Both full and half-day camps are available at its location in Valrico at 1046 Bloomingdale Ave. Visit its website at www.arworkshop.com/brandon for more information and to register.

Center For Dance Arts

The Center For Dance Arts offers dance instruction in various genres, from beginner to advanced levels, for students ages 2-18. It is also the home of an award-winning competition team. It will be offering summer camp; visit its website at www.mycfda.com or call 813-657-1500 for more information and to register. The Center For Dance Arts is located at 929 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon.

YMCA Summer Camp

With over 25 different summer camp options throughout the Tampa YMCA area, there's something for every camper to enjoy. From art and gymnastics to zip-lining and splashing in its pools, the Y is the ultimate summer destination with friends, fun and adventure. Summer camps start on Monday, June 2, and run all summer. Register at www.tampaymca.org/letscamp.



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& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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GALACTICOASTER BLASTS OFF AT LEGOLAND FLORIDA WITH FIRST-EVER INDOOR FAMILY COASTER

Staff Report

Families are invited to suit up and blast off as Galacticoaster launches at LEGOLAND Florida Resort, marking the debut of the park's newest space-themed land and its first indoor roller coaster since opening in 2011.



Guests design their own LEGO spacecraft before blasting off on Galacticoaster, the first indoor family coaster at LEGOLAND Florida Theme Park,

Billed as the Ultimate Indoor Family Coaster, Galacticoaster combines storytelling, interactivity and cutting-edge ride technology to deliver a one-of-a-kind LEGO space adventure designed for guests of all ages. The attraction officially opened in February.

As part of the celebration, guests were able to collect a free, exclusive Galacticoaster Grand Opening First Flight Pop Badge while supplies lasted.

The adventure begins well before launch. Upon entering the queue, guests are immersed in a cinematic LEGO space mission, reporting to the Briefing Room, where Chief Engineer Biff Dipper — a larger-than-life robotic minifigure — delivers mission instructions filled with humor and classic LEGO personality. The preshow experience welcomes recruits to Galaxy Command and builds anticipation as launch approaches.

Before blast-off, riders design their own spacecraft using interactive touchscreens, choosing from nose, tail, wing and special-feature options to create one of more than 625 possible combinations. Each custom creation is stored on an RFID wristband and appears throughout the ride, allowing guests to soar through the LEGO Galaxy in the very ship they designed.

Once airborne, Galacticoaster reaches speeds of up to 40 mph as it rockets through an intergalactic LEGO solar system filled with synchronized lighting, special effects and surprise appearances from classic LEGO Space characters, including the attraction's first-ever animatronic minifigure.

LEGOLAND Florida Theme Park is part of LEGOLAND Florida Resort, which also includes Peppa Pig Theme Park Florida, SEA LIFE Florida and LEGOLAND Water Park, Designed for children ages 2-12. For tickets and times, visit www.legoland.com.

Kids R Kids Learning Academy

CAMP VIBE

Your Summer. Your Style. Your Fun.

Feel the Energy. Catch the VIBE of Summer!

Get ready to VIBE into the best summer ever at Kids 'R' Kids Summer Camp 2026!

Each week brings a brand-new adventure as campers dive into themed experiences that spark creativity, curiosity, and connection. Whether they're creating masterpieces, exploring the ocean, living out legendary stories, cooking up delicious fun, or filming their own productions, every day is a chance to discover something amazing.

From Junior to Senior Camp, our weeks are packed with hands-on activities, exciting field trips, team challenges, and memory-making moments that build confidence, friendship, and a lifelong love of learning.

Unleash their imagination. Ignite their passions. Let them catch the VIBE of summer!

Circa FishHawk
5815 Kids Crossing Drive
813-654-7000
www.krkcirca.com

Kids R Kids Learning Academy of Area Name

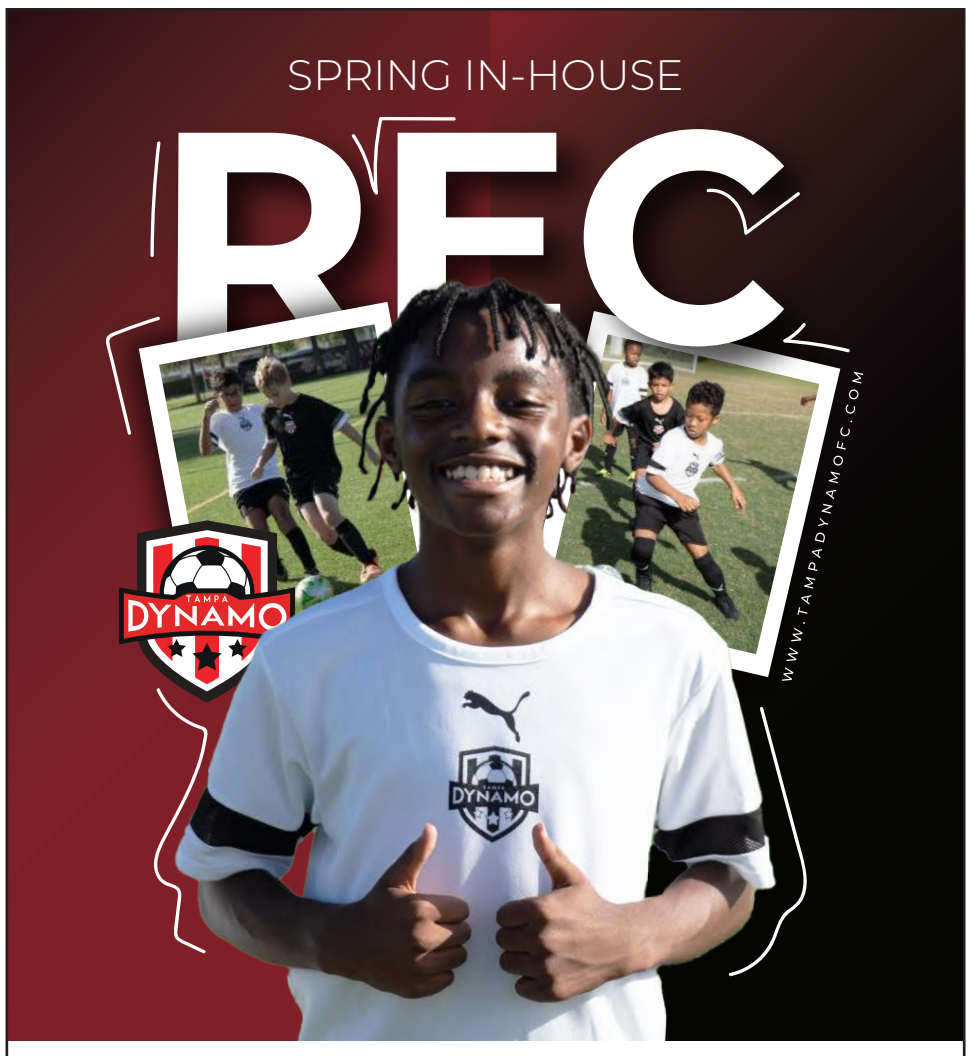


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(813) 820-6583 | fishhawk@thecodewiz.com
https://thecodewiz.com/fishhawk-fl

Camps will take place at
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UNLOCK YOUR CHILD'S INNER GENIUS!

Christian Voice



Grace Notes

Short, But Oh So Sweet

By Debora Coty

At 5'1", I'm generally considered a shortie. They always make me stand in front for group photos because everybody else can easily be seen over my head. I dutifully hem each pair of pants I buy. I gape through the armpit of the man in front of me at church to see the stage.

I didn't have much say about my stature, but since my mother is the tallest of four sisters at 5-feet even, I never stood a chance of standing tall.

I have a soft spot for all things short. Including my awesome 5'6 husband.

So, I was delighted when I recently ran across the shortest Psalm in the Bible. Yep, the 117th Psalm is only two verses long! But strong, vibrant verses they are – the perfect example that short can be extremely powerful. That's Communication 101 for us writers: write tight. Say what you mean and say it succinctly.

Yep, short can pack an incredible punch.

"Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! For His lovingkindness toward us, and the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 117 in its entirety)

See what I mean? This short but oh, so sweet Psalm explodes with the combustibility of Truth that the Almighty's love blessings for us are eternal and truly worthy of our praise! And that's all we really need to know right there. Bottom line. Close book.

The same power is present in short prayers too. Some think the more they drone on covering all possible bases, the more pious Yahweh will see them and perhaps push them to the front of the line. Nah.

A real prayer is a cry from the heart that bypasses all the fluff and communicates directly with the heart of God. Even if it takes only thirty seconds to cut right to the chase, we can be assured that, "the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results" (James 5:16 NLT).

If our intent is seeking God's presence and His peace – His supernatural peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7) – short frequent prayers keep our heavenly Father's presence, wisdom, and guidance constant.

And that makes it possible to make prayer a lifestyle rather than an event.

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.

SOMETIMES WE NEED A TEAR-OUT AND REFIT



"A chain is no stronger than its weakest link." – A 19th century proverb.

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins maybe wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord," (Acts 3:19).

Our ongoing home restoration journey continues to be rewarding, challenging, fun, beautiful — and sometimes confounding. Sometimes things come along that catch us off guard.

One characteristic that tipped me in favor of this house was just how decrepit it was! That meant we weren't patching things up; we were tearing them out and starting over. So, brand-new plumbing, electrical, fittings, fixtures, appliances, heat and air — and more.

Sure, old houses cost more to heat and cool, but when our gas hit $1,000 in December 2025 and then more in January, I called in the experts. What we found is the "weakest link" proverb in action. You can't join a new unit to old, damaged, perforated, crushed, crimped, poorly insulated, out-of-date ductwork and expect it to work. There were even open runs dumping heat directly into the crawl space!

So, we opted for a total tear-out, and we now have properly designed ducts specifically calibrated to match the specs on the compressor.

The whole fiasco reminds me the best solutions are systemic not topical. Like new tires on a car versus fixing the alignment that destroyed the old ones. Or a statin for cholesterol but continuing the junk-food diet. Or going to church once in a while without ever becoming a disciple of Jesus.

Sometimes we must look under the surface and address the need for a radical tear-out and refit rather than attach something new and shiny on the outside and expect things to change.

My question is, "What's the weakest link in our lives we need to bring to God and ask for a radical refit?" It may be costly up front, but new life and peace and joy and celebration and new possibilities turn out to be exactly what we are looking for.

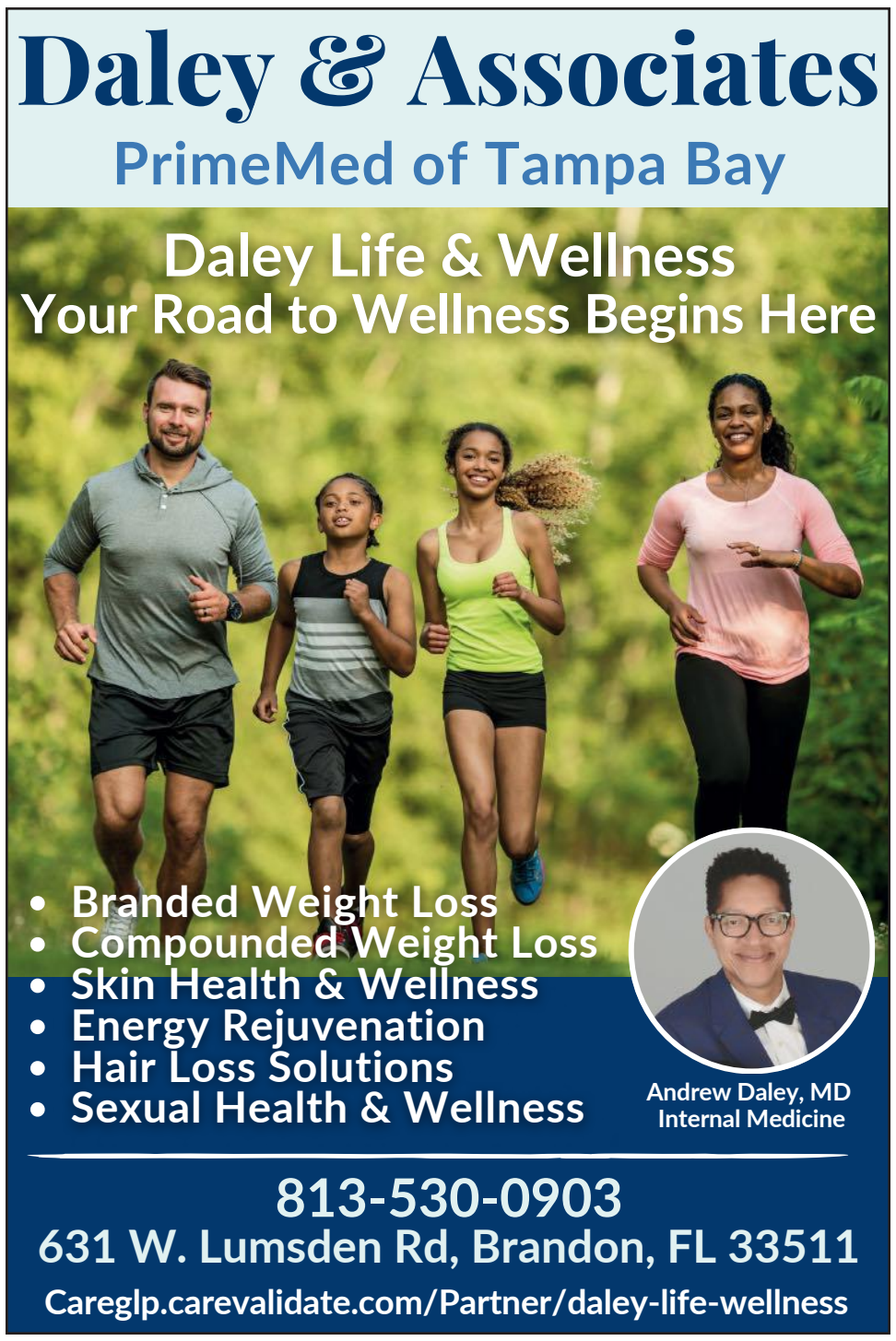
Then, as Peter said to the crowd in Jerusalem, "Times of refreshing will come from the Lord." Gotta love a good refreshing.

— 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.

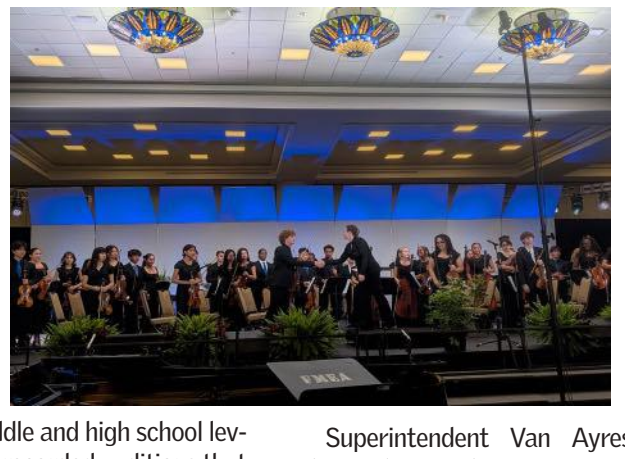




HILLSBOROUGH STUDENTS EARN PRESTIGIOUS ALL-STATE MUSIC HONORS ENSEMBLES

Staff Report







Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) proudly announces that 201 outstanding students have earned placement in the highly selective Florida Music Educators Association (FMEA) All-State Ensembles, distinguishing themselves among the state's most accomplished young performers.

Each year, FMEA conducts rigorous statewide blind auditions to fill positions in 24 different All-State performing groups, spanning elementary, middle and high school levels. Students submit recorded auditions that are evaluated against thousands of peers from across Florida. This year, 20 elementary, 101 middle and 80 high school students in HCPS earned All-State selections from a competitive pool of more than 10,000 audition entries, proudly representing the district at the 2026 FMEA All-State Music Conference held in Tampa.

Elementary :

All-State Elementary Chorus
Cecelia Cannon - Collins K-8
Azalea Covarrubias - Collins K-8
Amara Fontanez - Collins K-8

Middle :

All-State Middle Band
Giuliana Daniele - Barrington (Trombone)
Middle Honors Band
Jocelyn Laseca - Randall (Bb Clarinet)
Seth Carpena - Burns (Alto Saxophone)
Joshua Pinizzotto- Mulrennan (Trombone)

All-State Middle Orchestra
Matthew Maloney - Burns (Violin 1)

Middle Honors Orchestra
Emanuel Jerald - Randall (Violin 2)

All-State Middle Treble Chorus
Leah Kim - Randall (Treble 1)
Karys Grimaldo - Eisenhower (Treble 2)
Keila Akingboye - Barrington (Treble 3)
Genesis Hurtado - Barrington (Treble 3)
Natalie Simos - Randall (Treble 3)
Brunette Telcy - Rodgers (Treble 3)
Linden Whitman - Barrington (Treble 3)

All-State Middle Mixed Chorus
Hannah Wright - Burns (Soprano)
Lily Alerta - Barrington (Alto)
Eleanor Floyd - Barrington (Alto)
Norah Nadeau - Burns (Alto)
Cara Stewart - Barrington (Alto)
Rory Steever - Barrington (Tenor)
Clark Bentinganan - Barrington (Bass)
Andres Ospina - Barrington (Bass)
Rishit Srivastava - Barrington (Bass)
Noah Ward - Burns (Bass)
Austin Zaifert - Barrington (Bass)

High :

Honors Orchestra
Angel Mercado - Sumner (Violin 1)
Chase Copeland - Bloomingdale (Cello)
Madison Moncrief - Lennard (Cello)

All-State Symphonic Band
Nicolas Hart - Riverview (French Horn)

Superintendent Van Ayres celebrated the students' achievements, stating: "To see such a large number of Hillsborough County students earn All-State recognition from a field of more than 10,000 auditions is truly remarkable. It shows not only their hard work and talent but also the strong music and fine arts opportunities our school district provides. Our students thrive because they are supported by exceptional teachers who build outstanding music programs, and we are incredibly proud of their success."

Students selected for All-State represent schools across the district and excel in a wide range of ensembles, including orchestras, choirs, concert bands, jazz groups, guitar ensembles and specialized performance groups. For more, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org. HCPS congratulates the following students:

High Honors Band
Tamara Yasin - Lennard (Flute)
Adam Goodenough - Bloom (Bb Clarinet)
Allison Mazuchowski - Brandon (Trumpet)
Ryan Tardy - Lennard (French Horn)
Ian Cortes - Lennard (Euphonium)
David Baca - Durant (Percussion)

All-State Popular Music Collective
Tamara Yasin - Lennard (Vocalist)

All-State Concert Orchestra
Rebecca Jorgensen -Newsome (Bass)

All-State Symphonic Orchestra
Michael Iwanicki -Newsome (Cello)
Romeo Mongaya - Durant (Bass)
Jalina Guo -Newsome (Oboe)

All-State Concert Chorus
Julia Guarnieri - Newsome (Soprano 2)
KAnjali Pathania - Bloomingdale (Alto 2)
Matthew Bowman - Riverview (Tenor 1)
Ian Silverman - East Bay (Tenor 2)
Ryan Noe - Newsome (Bass 2)
Gavin Taylor - Newsome (Bass 2)

All-State SSAA Chorus
Parker Herold - Newsome (Soprano 1)
Alexis McLean - Newsome (Soprano 1)
Ella Bucko - Newsome (Soprano 2)
Olivia Heinis - Newsome (Soprano 2)
Hayrah Rahman - Lennard (Soprano 2)
Patience Bond - Riverview (Alto 1)
Eliana Estes - East Bay (Alto 1)
Devi Schmidt - Newsome (Alto 1)
Layla Williams - Newsome (Alto 1)
Adra Allen - Lennard (Alto 2)
Lorena Figueroa-Carrillo-Newsome(Alto 2)
Neela Lee - Riverview (Alto 2)
Brooke McOrmond - Newsome (Alto 2)
Susanna Perez - Durant (Alto 2)

All-State TTBB Chorus
Jacob Lachance - Sumner (Tenor 1)
Brock Bartlett - Newsome (Tenor 2)
Owen Kudia - Newsome (Tenor 2)
Jacob Loviska - East Bay (Tenor 2)
Patrick Mares - Bloomingdale (Bass 1)
Keegan Hartung - East Bay (Bass 2)

TESSERA BRANDON
Assisted Living Facility #AL13150
ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION

Hybrid Dementia and Alzheimer's Support Groups
for Care Partners of those with any type of Memory Loss

Third Tuesday of Every Month at 6:30 pm Meeting in Person & Via Zoom

Zoom Meeting ID: 993 4701 6039
Passcode: 459148
Join by phone: 833.928.4608

Fourth Wednesday of Every Month at 2:00 pm Meeting in Person & Via Zoom



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GET THE DIRT:
WINTER LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT

Winter here can last for several months. In West-Central Florida, however, we are very fortunate compared to other areas in the country. Now, normally, is a great time to go outside and garden. It has been quite chilly, aka COLD, in the mornings. Frosts and freezes occur occasionally in Central Florida.

Gardening tips for the next few months:

Plant Vegetables: For March and April, plant beans, cantaloupe, okra, southern peas and sweet potato. For more information, go to https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/vh021, where you can view the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide.

Mulch: Cool weather is always a great time to add mulch to your landscape beds if it is less than 3 inches deep. Mulch regulates soil temperature, adds organic value, inhibits weeds and retains soil moisture. Pine bark, pine straw/needles, eucalyptus, melaleuca and leaves are good options.

Manage Weeds: You can cover weeds with newspapers to smother them or use an environmentally friendly weed killer.





Prune: Check the 'Calendar' for what plants can be pruned and when. Pruning trains plants to grow in a certain direction, improves health by removing diseased stems, increases flowering and causes more abundant foliage.

Pests — Biting, Sucking and Chewing: The first step is to properly identify the insect to be sure it is a pest versus a beneficial insect. If you must, use the least toxic product. Spot treat plants as needed, not the entire landscape.

Inefficient Irrigation: Do you have broken irrigation heads, plants blocking the spray pattern or a rain shut-off device that does not work? Is your water bill for more than 20,000 gallons of water per month? If yes, call Will Stone at 813-744-5519, ext. 54133. He may be able to help you decrease your water usage.

Rewards of Winter Landscape Maintenance: You are outside, productive and enjoying nature.

Contact: labarber@ufl.edu.

ROTARY SPOTLIGHT:
ACTIVITIES, MEETINGS & MORE

Staff Report

FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club

The FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club continues to bring meaningful programs and community connection to its weekly meetings.

It was honored to welcome Dawn Myers, who shared valuable insights and inspired discussion among our members. Her message reminded the club members of how important it is to stay engaged, informed and committed to service.

The club also looks forward to hearing from Rachel Lane of Graze Academy, who will be sharing more about her organization's work and impact in our community. Supporting local initiatives and learning about innovative programs like Graze Academy is part of how Rotary strengthens partnerships and creates opportunity.

In celebration of St. Patrick's Day, Christopher Jones will be leading a festive and engaging program that reflects the fellowship and spirit that make Rotary so special. It's always a joy to blend tradition, community and service.

Between the laughter, the planning, the community projects and the moments of 'Who volunteered me for that?' — something powerful is happening.

"We are shaping our community. We are shaping young leaders. We are shaping hope," said the FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club.

As always, it remains committed to 'service above self' and invites community members to visit and learn more about how Rotary makes a difference locally and globally.

Rotary Club of Brandon Kicks Off a Busy Start to the Year

January and February mark the busiest — and most rewarding — months for the Rotary Club of Brandon. During this stretch, members rally together to host the club's two largest annual fundraisers: the Bill Harper Honorary Golf Tournament and the highly anticipated Wild Game Dinner.

These cornerstone events are more than just traditions; they are the driving force behind the club's charitable impact. Together, they typically generate more than $100,000, funding community initiatives, local nonprofit support and scholarships for deserving students.

What makes these events truly special is the full participation of the club's membership. Rotarians volunteer side by side, strengthening friendships while working toward a shared mission of service. The energy, camaraderie and commitment on display each year reflect the heart of the Rotary motto: service above self.

With another season of fundraising underway, the Rotary Club of Brandon looks forward to continuing its legacy of giving back and making a meaningful difference in the community.

If you are interested in joining, please text Debbie Meegan at 813-601-2315.







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Together In Hope!

It's time again for Relay For Life, that terrific fund-raiser in which teams of all ages collect donations and take turns walking or running laps for up to 24 hours, always keeping at least 1 teammate on track. Please consider giving or getting involved! For details go to www.relayforlife.org or call 800-227-2345.

American Cancer Society
Relay For Life
A Team Event to Fight Cancer



Local Event Dates:

March 6 - University of Tampa
March 7 - Raymond James Stadium
March 27 - University of South Florida

I give free ad space to groups or events that improve our community. Call me with your ideas! — Ann Marie



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Let's Get Together In Real Estate, Too!

EXCELLENCE & ELEGANCE surround you at this magnificent, custom-built, 5,000-SF home in FishHawk's Kestrel Ridge! On a cul-de-sac half-acre in the security-gated enclave, the property features an impressive pool & spa lanai with a panoramic view of conservation woods & water. An outdoor kitchen & gas fireplace flank the heated pool on a travertine-tiled deck; triple pocket sliders open it all for great entertaining. Details are just as dazzling inside, of course: coffered ceilings, crown molding, columns & arches, gorgeous granite, diagonal-tile floors & backsplashes, decorative listello, raised-panel wood cabinets, walk-in wine closet & so much more. New to market this month at $1,485,000.



WHEN YOU KNOW, YOU KNOW! If you want & recognize quality upgrades beyond most in an upscale neighborhood, here is the home for you within wonderful Waterset! Inside & outside this Sandpiper by West Bay, you'll find improvements from a 400-SF screened lanai to $65,000 in casement hurricane-impact windows. Tile & LVP floors, decorator fans & fixtures, seamless gutters, salt-free water softener, 8-foot doors including full-glass French doors to the office & a frosted-glass entry with sidelight, security system with cameras front & back, even an electric vehicle charger in the garage await you. It's a 2,100-SF 3/2/2 with a customized office that can be a 4th bedroom. $500,000

















Better than when it was built! From new tile, LVP & epoxy floors to updated fans, fixtures, & other finishes, this thoroughly renovated townhome towers 4 stories above the Apollo Beach waterfront in the upscale boating colony of Sunset Bay. Get nearly 3,100 SF plus a tandem garage over 700 SF. $499,900



In Boyette Park, a tree-shaded, step-down park as part of your own fenced back yard gives this 2,180-SF 3/2/3 something extra! With a woodsy conservation view instead of a rear neighbor, this special spot is now a young family's playground but offers many creative possibilities. $459,900



This nearly new townhome outshines others! You'll find several reasons, but it starts with added sunlight, literally; end units like this get more windows thanks to having only 1 side up against a neighbor! It's a 3/2.5/2 with 1,860 SF in Madison Village, a small community in SE Tampa. $325,000

Just sold in FishHawk! Size, surroundings & some of the best schools in Florida drew my buyer clients to this home in FishHawk West. It's a 2,660-SF 5/3.5/2 just a short walk from Stowers Elementary, & they know how much their child will love it here. I negotiated a new roof for them for added value. $450,000



Pending sale FishHawk! In Encore, the 55-plus haven with resort-style amenities, here's the advantage of a minimal-maintenance villa! From roof & yard to exclusive club & community events, your comfort is covered in this well-appointed 2/2/2 with an extra room that makes the most of 1,600 SF. $350,000



For rent near FishHawk! Live just a mile east without deed restrictions on pets, boats, trailers, RVs, ATVs, etc! This 1,800-SF 3/2/2 on nearly 7 acres gives you privacy, flexibility & security with a fenced yard of 1-acre, gated driveway, & even lockable holding pens on a concrete pad. $2,750 monthly

