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OH SO RUSTIC HOME GOODS STORE SUPPORTS LOCAL ARTISANS THROUGH SUNDAY MARKETS

By Olivia Clark



Visitors browse vendor tents at the Brandon Sunday Market, a community event that highlights handmade goods and local artisans.

The Brandon Sunday Market continues to bring together local artisans, small businesses and families through an outdoor market that highlights handmade goods and community connection.

Now organized by Oh So Rustic Home Goods Store owners Robert and Debra Ries, the market has become a gathering place where residents can shop local, discover unique products and support small businesses throughout the Brandon area.

The Brandon Sunday Market was created nine years ago by a group of crafters who wanted a place where they could sell handmade items and connect with the community. Since then, it has grown into one of the longest-running outdoor vendor markets in Brandon.

"It was and always has been designed by and for those who are in the business of selling handmade and unique items," said Debra Ries. "Our goal has always been to provide a venue for artisans in our community."

She and her husband became involved with the market as vendors before taking on a larger role in organizing the events.

"All the while we've focused on how to better organize the market and anticipate the needs of the vendors," said Debra Ries.

The market typically hosts 75-100 vendors during most seasons, offering handmade crafts, homemade baked goods and ethnic foods. Organizers also curate the vendor lineup to limit duplication and provide shoppers with a wide variety of locally made products.

"Our vendors offer a wide array of handmade crafts, homemade baked goods and ethnic delicacies," said Debra Ries.

Beyond shopping, the Brandon Sunday Market also emphasizes community involvement by providing free vendor spaces for nonprofits, schools and community organizations.

"In the spirit of community, we always provide a couple of spaces for nonprofit organizations and local schools at no charge," said Debra Ries.

The market also hosts themed events throughout the year. Upcoming events include the St. Patrick's Day Market on Sunday, March 15, followed by Easter at the Market on Sunday, March 29, which will feature photo opportunities with the Easter Bunny and activities for children.

"Our mission is simple," said Debra Ries. "We strive to provide a safe, clean and family-friendly atmosphere for local craftspeople, businesses and patrons that is affordable, unique and reflective of the community that supports us."

For more about upcoming markets, visit www.brandonsundaymarket.com.

NORM HARRIS 3-ON-3 BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT HONORS BELOVED COACH

By Olivia Clark

The third annual Norm Harris 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament recently brought players, families and community members together at the Campo Family YMCA for a day of competition and remembrance. Held on March 4, the event honored the lasting legacy of longtime volunteer coach Norm Harris while raising funds to support local youth programs.



Players compete during the third annual Norm Harris 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament at the Campo Family YMCA.

Harris served as a volunteer coach with the YMCA for 13 years and was also known in the community as a local business owner. According to Shawn Cierebiej, executive director of the Campo Family YMCA, the tournament was created to recognize Harris' dedication to youth sports and the positive impact he made on players and families throughout the community.



"The tournament was created to honor him and his passion for youth sports while raising awareness and funds for our youth programs," said Cierebiej.

Now in its third year, the annual event continues to grow as former players, friends and community members return to the court in Harris' memory. The tournament is open to participants ages 12 and older, with teams organizing themselves and registering under age divisions, including 12-14, 15-17, 18-29 and 30 and older.

While the tournament provides an opportunity for friendly competition, it also serves a larger purpose. Proceeds from the event support the YMCA's Annual Giving Campaign, which helps provide financial assistance for families who may not be able to afford the full cost of YMCA programs. Through these funds, the YMCA works to ensure that children and families throughout the community have access to youth sports, wellness programs and other activities offered by the organization.

For many attendees, the tournament is also an opportunity to reconnect and reflect on Harris' lasting influence.

"The tournament brings out friends, family members and former players that Norm coached over the years," said Cierebiej. "It's a way to remember his legacy and the contributions he made to the YMCA and the community."

For Harris' family, the event serves as a powerful reminder of how volunteer service can leave a lasting impact.

"Our contributions we make through volunteering with our community matter and have a lasting effect," said Jessica Harris, spouse of Norm Harris.

As the tournament continues each year, organizers hope it will remain both a celebration of Norm Harris' legacy and a meaningful way to support future generations of YMCA participants.

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BELL SHOALS ACADEMY INVESTS IN FUTURE WITH NEW HIGH SCHOOL

Staff Report





Bell Shoals Academy, a ministry of Bell Shoals Church, hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for its new High School Academic Building on March 2 at its campus, located at 2102 Bell Shoals Rd. in Brandon.

This historic milestone marks the next chapter in the academy's expansion into high school education, following the announcement of its high school program launch.

Established in 1965, shortly after the founding of Bell Shoals Church in 1961, Bell Shoals Academy has faithfully served the Brandon community for nearly six decades, providing an unrivaled Christ-centered education to generations of students.

The new academic building represents a significant investment in the future of Christian education in the region. Designed to support academic excellence, spiritual formation and student life, the facility will provide modern classrooms, collaborative learning environments and dedicated spaces to prepare students for college, careers and a life of spiritual formation.

"This groundbreaking represents more than a new building," said Daniel Padron, head of school. "It represents our continued commitment to inspiring and equipping the next generation. As we expand into high school, we are building a place where students will be challenged academically, grounded spiritually and prepared to live lives of purpose and impact."

The expansion into high school comes in response to growing demand from families seeking a comprehensive, faith-based education that nurtures both intellectual development and spiritual growth.

The high school program began enrolling students for the 2026-27 academic year and will continue to grow alongside the construction of this dedicated academic facility. Community leaders, families, faculty, students and supporters were invited to attend the groundbreaking ceremony on March 2 as Bell Shoals Academy celebrated this important step forward in its mission.

For more about Bell Shoals Academy and its high school expansion, please visit www.bellshoalsacademy.com/unrivaled.

FAMILY RETURNS NICU TO HONOR NURSES WHO CARED FOR DAUGHTER

Staff Report



The March of Dimes has selected Andrew and Amber Vassell as this year's Ambassador Family for Tampa Bay. The Vassells, parents of three children, including two born premature, are using their story to raise awareness of the March of Dimes mission and to support other families facing the challenges of premature birth.

Their youngest daughter, Aliyah, was born on September 4 at just 26 weeks old and weighed a little more than 1 pound. She was small enough to fit in the palm of a hand and required immediate and extensive care. Her condition was so fragile that her parents were unable to hold her when she was born. After 153 days in the HCA Florida Brandon Hospital neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), Aliyah graduated and went home in February 2025.

To honor the team that cared for their daughter like family, the Vassells hosted a special appreciation dinner from Amici's Catered Cuisine owned by Phillip Lin. They treated the nurses to dinner, as well as a custom T-shirt created to mark the occasion, nearly one year after Aliyah made her journey home.

"I want the NICU nurses to know how thankful we are for how they cared for our daughter. This is just a small way we can thank you. I feel like we can never say thank you enough," said Andrew Vassell.

"Caring for babies like Aliyah is both a responsibility and a privilege. Families place enormous trust in us during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives, and we carry that trust with great respect. Seeing Aliyah thrive and having the Vassell family return to share their gratitude means more to our team than words can express," said Dr. Kiran Dwara-kanath, NICU medical director. "Their strength and dedication to helping other families remind us why we do this work every day."

As the Ambassador Family of Tampa Bay, the Vassells will share their story throughout the Tampa Bay region and across the country to help other families feel seen and supported through their own NICU experiences. Their advocacy extends beyond Florida. They recently partnered with the San Antonio Spurs for a March of Dimes event supported by Andrew Vassell's brother, Spurs guard Devin Vassell. They also have a Harlem Globetrotters March of Dimes event on the horizon.

"The Vassell family is an inspiring example of strength and hope," said Carly Johnson, manager of March of Dimes donor development. "Their desire to give back to the nurses who cared for Aliyah is a meaningful reminder of how deeply the NICU touches families. We are honored to have them as our ambassadors this year."

The Vassells hope that by telling their story, more families will feel empowered to share their own NICU journeys.





LOCAL SHELTERS GIVE PETS A SECOND CHANCE AT A FUREVER HOME

By Emily Harper







Howling Hounds Sanctuary Rescue founders Mike and Cyndi Bland.

Howling Hounds Sanctuary

Howling Hounds Sanctuary Rescue, located at 12901 Lovers Lane in Riverview, is a private, home-based rescue in Riverview serving Hillsborough County along with surrounding counties. Its mission, as stated on its website, is to "protect the well-being and security of as many dogs as possible."

Founders Mike and Cyndi Bland have decades of experience advocating for dogs through volunteering. In 2019, they made the decision to start a nonprofit rescue, and in 2020 they officially started their work.

At their rescue, the Blands take in dogs who were abandoned in the wild, were surrendered by their owners or, when possible, are from shelters where they are on the euthanasia list or from shelters that are overburdened. In their care, these dogs are rehabilitated to their specific needs and rehomed to forever homes.

Mike Bland, as the director of operations, focuses on facility maintenance along with social media, such as graphics, web design and event displays. Meanwhile, Cyndi Bland, the executive director, is the face of the rescue to the public. She concentrates on adoption applications, event planning, working with volunteers and fosters and developing relationships with other businesses. Together, their passion and devotion for rescue dogs shows through their success in the community.

Specifically, recently, Howling Hounds was informed about a mother, named Sky, and her puppies along the Manatee River living under a local's house for shelter. Because the local individual knew about the rescue, the dogs were saved and all found their forever homes through the work of Howling Hounds Sanctuary Rescue. More information regarding this rescue can be found on its website, www.dogsrgr8.com.

Critter Adoption and Rescue Effort (C.A.R.E.)

Critter Adoption and Rescue Effort, located at 1528 27th St. SE in Ruskin, is a no-kill animal shelter for cats and dogs founded in 2000 by local veterinarians and others concerned about the high number of healthy animals being euthanized. This rescue welcomes animals that have been neglected, abused, abandoned or surrendered. All animals are medically treated according to their needs, thanks to C.A.R.E. partnership with Boyette Animal Hospital.

"We are small, but each animal is treated with love by our volunteers and employees as if they were their own pet. We get to know their habits, likes and dislikes and share this information with potential adopters," said board secretary and volunteer Joyce Maggio.

At its facility, animals have the ability to explore. The dogs are outside during the daytime, where they can roam and exercise in the fresh air. The cats are separated into rooms, based on age, with attached screened lanais, where they, too, can roam freely.

C.A.R.E. has rehabilitated many animals through its efforts and believes all have the right to thrive. For example, Archie was a young dog that came into its care with a severe injury to his eye, which had to be removed. As explained, Archie, who had been through a lot, enjoyed splashing in the pool and chasing sticks, which warmed the hearts of everyone. Through the work of this organization Archie's life was saved and he is now in his forever home, with his own TikTok account.

In celebration of 25 years in the community, C.A.R.E. is looking forward to breaking ground on its new location, which is a few blocks from its original facility. It is always accepting donations to help the lives of its animals, along with volunteers eager to make a difference in the cause. Visit its website, www.careshelter.org/.

Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center:

Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center serves as the county's animal shelter. Located at 440 N. Falkenburg Rd. in Tampa, this shelter holds cats and dogs of all types seeking their forever home.

"Pets can't speak. We can give them a voice. Whether it's us responding to reports of cruelty and neglect or you volunteering and fostering, when we advocate for animals together, we can improve their lives," as stated on its website.

If you feel inclined, this center also runs a foster care program to help with its population of animals. Through fostering, animals are able to flourish in an interactive environment with more individualized attention.

Additionally, the center has resources for lost or found pets in the Hillsborough area. Through its website, individuals can request and report missing animals, with the hope of finding their families. Visit www.hcfl.gov/residents/animals-and-pets.

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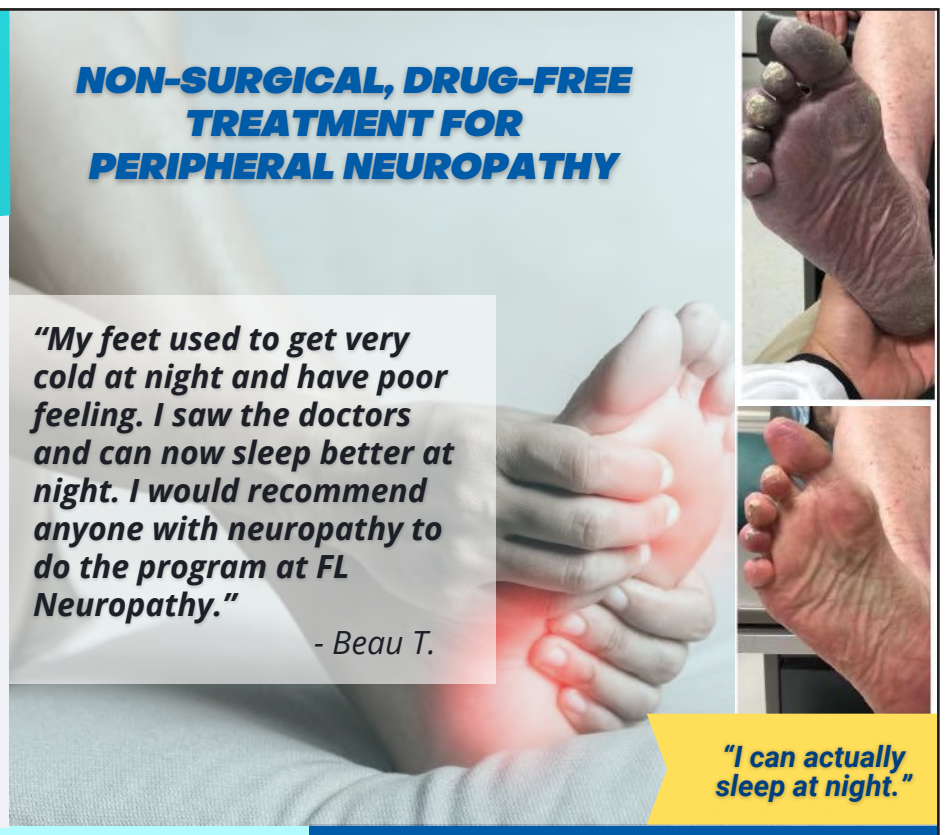
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FINDING JOY IN THE SMALL WINS: AN AUTISM ENCOURAGEMENT STORY

When a mother recently shared that her teenage son with autism had ordered his own meal at a restaurant for the first time, her voice cracked with emotion. To others, it might have seemed like a small moment. To her, it was a milestone years in the making built on patience, practice, encouragement and belief in her child's abilities.

Autism is filled with moments like this. Progress doesn't always look like giant leaps forward. Often, it shows up quietly: a new word spoken, a calmer transition, a brave attempt at something unfamiliar, a smile after a tough day. These small wins matter. They are signs of growth, resilience and hope.

For families walking the autism journey, here are a few gentle reminders and tips:

• Celebrate every step forward. Progress may be slow and uneven, but each victory, no matter how small, deserves recognition.

• Lean into strengths and interests. Passions can become bridges to learning, confidence and connection.

• Create routines that support success. Predictable schedules and clear expectations help reduce anxiety and build a sense of security.

• Ask for help and accept support. You are not meant to do this alone. Other parents, professionals and community organizations can offer guidance and encouragement.

• Practice patience and compassion. For parents and community members alike, kindness and flexibility create more inclusive, welcoming spaces.

Families don't need perfection; they need understanding, resources and hope. Organizations like Experienced Autism Alliance (EAA) exist to support families through every stage of life. EAA is a nonprofit dedicated to assisting, supporting and empowering individuals with autism and their families through resource connections, safety initiatives, social programs and vocational opportunities. From parent workshops and social outings to job training programs like SpectrumSqueeze, EAA helps families feel informed, supported and connected.

This column will continue to share real stories, practical tips and community resources designed to uplift families and build understanding. Autism awareness isn't just a moment; it's a lifelong commitment to inclusion, compassion and growth. For more information, visit www.autismalliancefl.org.

COUNTY EVENT TO HONOR VIETNAM VETERANS, WAR DOGS AND FAMILIES

Staff Report







National Vietnam War Veterans Day is commemorated each year in late March. But Vietnam-era Veterans don't just look in the rearview mirror. They look forward to community connection, camaraderie and caring for one another.

The Vietnam Veterans of America/Chapter 787, the Veterans Council of Hillsborough County, and Hillsborough County Veteran Community Services will present Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans & War Dogs Day on Saturday, March 28, at Veterans Memorial Park and Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins, Jr. Veterans Museum, located at 3602 N. U.S. Hwy. 301 in Tampa.

To salute Vietnam Veterans, their K9s and survivors, activities at Veterans Memorial Park will include:

8-10 a.m. — Classic Car Cruise-In

9:30 a.m. — Military Working Dog Demonstration

10 a.m. — Live '60s and '70s music by The Lint Rollers

10:30 a.m. — Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans & War Dogs remembrance ceremony with patriotic lapel "pinning" of all Vietnam-era Veterans and surviving spouses

11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. — Traditional Vietnamese cuisine and Lion Dance performance plus American-style refreshments

There will be on-site resources from James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, Veteran Community Services, the Pet Resource Center and Guitars4Vets.

The Vietnam War Memorial at Hillsborough County's Veterans Memorial Park features a special war dog memorial and a pair of famous U.S. Army helicopters. The American Bell UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra represent the Vietnam era in one of the region's most prolific showcases. Park hours are 7 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Events and parking are free.

For more information, contact Veteran Community Services at 813-635-8316.







ESPN2 TO AIR BIG BOY SOAP HOCKEY'S RIVERVIEW TOURNAMENT

By Nick Nahas



The Big Boy Soap Hockey League returns for its second tournament in two years in the Tampa area. The tournament takes place at the Showmen's Club, located at 6915 Riverview Dr. in Riverview, on Saturday, May 16, from 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. and will air on ESPN2 in August.

The first tournament was held in Brandon last year at the J.C. Handly Sports Complex and made its TV debut on ESPN2 in August 2025. Reruns on ESPNews are shown frequently throughout the year.

Bloomingdale High School graduate Nick Pletcher, who runs production company Glass Eye Creative out of Atlanta, Georgia, wanted to bring soap hockey to his hometown because of the potential interest he thought the game would garner. Over 100 people attended the filming of the event last year. The popularity of the contest made ESPN want to air another tournament this summer. Spectators are encouraged to attend the free event, which will have food trucks, a drum line and a live DJ to accompany the festivities. A new mascot called Duck Duck Dude will attend. The giant rubber duck with a water gun will harass the players throughout the afternoon.

The Big Boy Soap Hockey League, which was created by Pletcher and his friends, is back with new players, new uniforms and brand-new logos, along with some new concepts. Soap hockey is played on a giant 30-foot-by-40-foot, soap-drenched tarp and is usually three versus three.

Unlike regular hockey, soap hockey doesn't have very many rules but is also very rough and tumble. Players are allowed to grab other players sticks.

"I'm really looking forward to kind of trying to perfect this format and this tournament some more," said Pletcher.

"Year one was really about just getting together and physically making it when kind of figuring it out as we're going. I think we really figured it out and I think that we are going to catch lightning in a bottle, and we have some really cool stuff in store."

The event will consist of eight teams in a single-elimination format with 10-minute games and live commentators.

Popular Instagram hockey influencers from *On The Bench* will be the two power players that are allowed to sub in once a game for two minutes to help out a team.

Pletcher wants wants the league to grow in popularity like the Savannah Bananas, where they can tour and do more tournaments.

"If anybody is reading this and wants to be on TV and watch a really fun sport, they should come out and support," said Pletcher. "We'll have food, we'll have drinks and all kinds of fun stuff, so they should come out."

For more information, visit www.bigboysoaphockey.com. The league can also be followed on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube @BigBoySoapHockey.

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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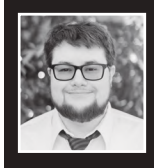
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SYLVIA THOMAS OFFERS SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER FAMILIES

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.

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For Adoptive and Foster Families
25 Years

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Impact's Got Talent, Easter Egg Drop, Shred-a-Thon & 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. 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.

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.

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

Autism Alliance Fundraiser At Voodoo Brewing Co.

Experienced Autism Alliance is hosting a music bingo fundraiser on Thursday, April 16, at Voodoo Brewing Co., located at 3432 SR 60 in Valrico. Sing, laugh and win prizes, all while supporting Autism Alliance. Proceeds from the event will help provide door alarms, locks and safety tools for families in our community. The doors open at 6 p.m., and bingo starts at 7 p.m. Tickets cost $25 for five games of bingo; there will also be a raffle and prizes. Food and drink will also be available to purchase from Voodoo Brewing Co. Visit www.autismalliancefl.org.



Ian Cribbs Named As Finalist In National Merit Scholarship Program

Ian Cribbs, a senior at Foundation Christian Academy, has been named a finalist in the National Merit Scholarship Program, one of the nation's most prestigious academic competitions. Finalists are selected based on exceptional PSAT scores, outstanding academic records, leadership, extracurricular involvement and a rigorous application process that includes an essay and a school recommendation.

Foundation Christian Academy President Jonathan Smith said, "Ian exemplifies the academic excellence, Christian character and dedication we strive to cultivate at Foundation Christian Academy."

Egg Drop And Family Fun Day

Hope for the Community, the outreach ministry of Living in Victory Christian Church, will host a free community Easter egg drop on Saturday, April 4, from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. at the church, located at 1603 Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico. The event will include a helicopter egg drop for children, carnival rides, games, giveaways, food, community vendors and more for the entire family. This event is free and open to the public.

Music Bingo Fundraiser

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.

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.

STRAWBERRY CREST BASKETBALL'S QUICK TWO-YEAR TURNAROUND

By Nick Nahas

The Strawberry Crest High School basketball team has flourished under second-year Head Coach Patrick Horn.

Horn took over a 4-22 team and made a quick turnaround. The Chargers won 17 games this season and are 30-22 overall in his two seasons. The 17 wins this season are the third-most in the school's 17-year history. This iteration averaged the most points per game (70) in the program's history.

Senior captain Max Von Ancken was a big reason for the team's success. The team MVP averaged 14 points per game, with 10 rebounds per game, averaging a double-double. He was Second Team Western Conference, an All-Academic All-Star and an East versus West All-Star Game participant.



Senior captain Max Von Ancken was a big reason for the team's success.

"He is the heartbeat of the team," said Horn. "He does everything with 100 percent effort all the time. He had so many points and rebounds the last two seasons, and he played with great passion and energy. His junior year he attempted zero three-point shots, this year he made 19 threes and shot 34 percent from three. That just shows the work ethic he has as a player and person."

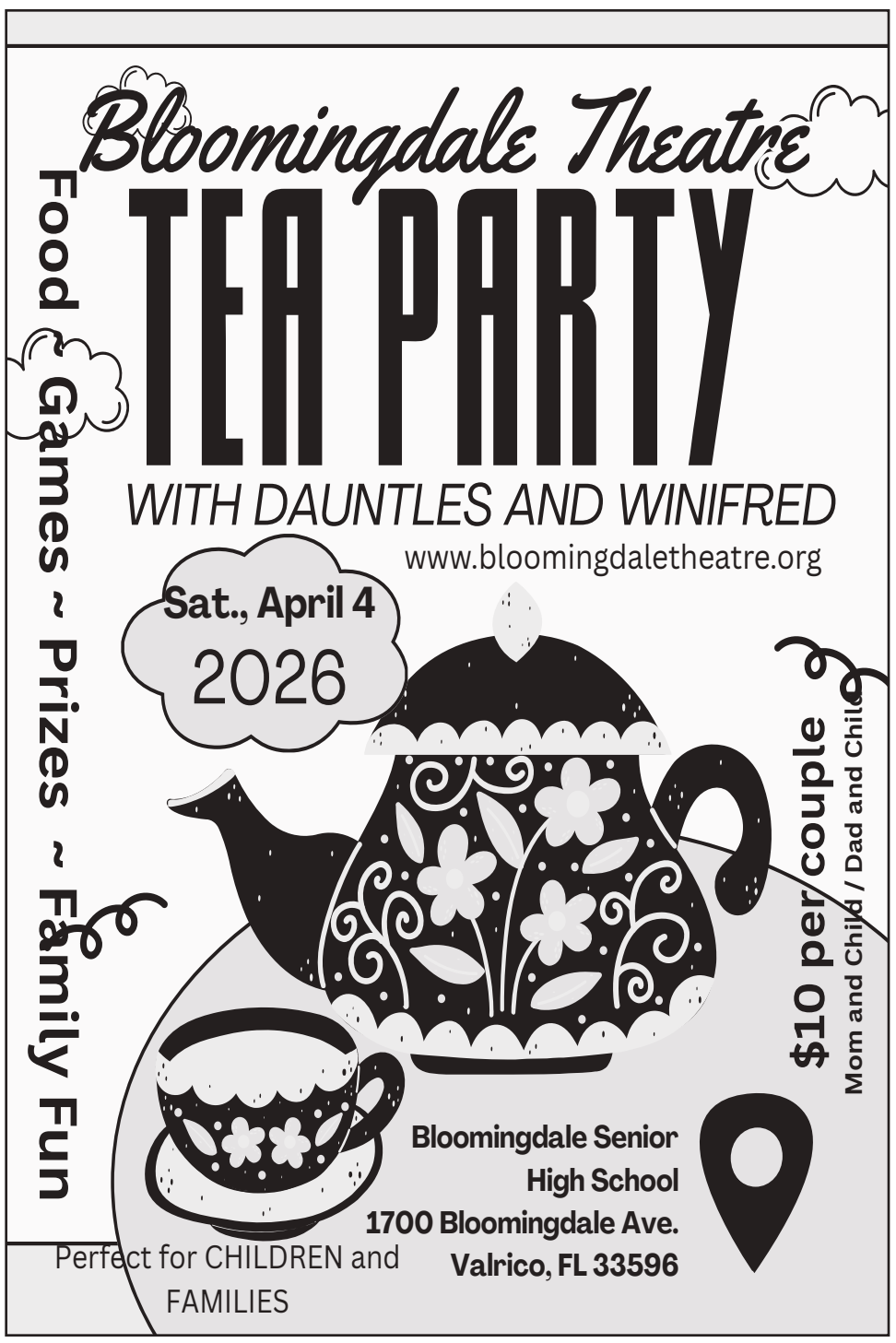
According to Horn, Von Ancken is a great rebounder, has amazing touch around the rim and plays great in transition. Off the court, he's a great communicator and is positive, reliable, responsible and a hard worker. He received a nomination for the Air Force Academy and West Point, where he hopes to earn a spot on the basketball team as a walk-on. He wants to become a pilot and major in aerospace engineering.

"I really enjoyed the bond that I formed between my teammates, allowing us to gel as a team and significantly improving our record over the last two years," said Von Ancken. "My favorite memories are when we had very close games and we had to rally together as a team to pull out the win."

In the offseason, the team will play in a summer league and attend a live period in Gainesville. Horn's ultimate goal is to win a district championship and go from there. He is building a unique atmosphere at Strawberry Crest, where he hopes to achieve a winning tradition.

"The relationships you build with the players, parents, other coaches, fans and the community are very rewarding," said Horn. "We were voted best atmosphere to play in, and we had the band for a game and four themed home games. Our student section was fantastic, and it's growing year after year."





KIWANIS CLUB OF BRANDON TEES UP IN SUPPORT LOCAL YOUTH

By Kelly Wise Valdes



The Kiwanis Club of Brandon is gearing up for a high-energy 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 much-anticipated event is the club's largest and most essential fundraiser of the year, fueling the youth-focused 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/.





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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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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TROOP BRINGS ART TO UNDERSERVED FAMILIES WITH SERVICE PROJECT

Staff Report

Girl Scout Troop 33530, part of the Fossil Valley Service Unit of Girl Scouts of West Central Florida (GSWCF), has completed a meaningful community service project focused on increasing access to arts and crafts for children in underserved communities across Hillsborough County.



Girl Scout Troop 33530 a ssembled Children's Art Bags to encourage creativity.



Led by troop leaders Jennifer C. Loader-Wohl and Melody Gershkoff, the Girl Scouts identified a need among families living below the poverty level, including those experiencing housing instability, who often lack access to basic art supplies at home. In response, the troop designed and assembled Children's Art Bags to encourage creativity, family bonding and confidence through hands-on art activities.

To date, the troop has created 180 Children's Art Bags, which are being distributed through the Hillsborough County Children's Board Family Resource Centers at six locations throughout the county. The bags include age-appropriate craft kits; younger children receive a paper windmill craft with colored pencils, while older children receive a wooden-boat kit with paint supplies. Each project allows children to create, keep and take pride in their own artwork.

The project was designed to support child development by promoting creativity, fine motor skills, focus, language development and confidence. It also provides families an opportunity to spend quality time together while creating art with materials they may not otherwise have access to.

This project was completed as part of the troop's leadership and service efforts and is being submitted for consideration for a Girl Scout Bronze Award, the highest honor a Junior Girl Scout can earn. Regardless of award status, the project reflects the Girl Scout mission of making the world a better place through service and community engagement.

Community members interested in learning more about the project or supporting future efforts are encouraged to contact the troop leader directly.

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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."

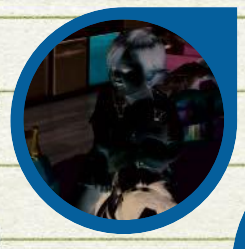
If you would like to learn more about PamElla Lee Photography or hire her for your next event, you can visit her website at www.pamellalee.net or call 813-372-7916.

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TWO RIVERS RANCH AIMS TO PRESERVE LAND WHILE PLANNING FOR FUTURE GROWTH

By Brian Bokor







Robert Thomas, owner of Two Rivers Ranch, a working cow/calf cattle ranch, is seeking to apply a land-use framework he helped create nearly two decades ago to 7,944 acres the family has stewarded and preserved for nearly a century.

The Thomas family, with leadership from patriarch Wayne Thomas, Robert Thomas' grandfather, has long been known for its environmental stewardship and philanthropic land donations. Over the decades, the family has donated land for public parks, conservation and community uses, including land that helped establish Hillsborough River State Park and Camp Dorothy Thomas for the Girl Scouts. Additional donations have supported historical preservation efforts such as the restoration of Fort Foster, as well as Scouting America and other institutions.

But now, as the largest private landowner remaining in Hillsborough County, Robert Thomas would like to create a legacy that will continue environmental stewardship while embracing the inevitable growth of the county.

While touring his property in Thonotosassa recently with its cow/calf spring calving season in full swing, the pride of ownership is easy to see.

Robert Thomas explained that through Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) 25-37, he is asking Hillsborough County to apply the Planned Environmental Community – 1/2 (PEC 1/2) designation to the property, which allows up to one home per 2 acres overall.

The CPA does not approve construction, site plans or building permits. If approved, separate rezonings would still be required before any development could occur. Those rezonings would involve detailed site plans, traffic studies, environmental review and additional public hearings.

Robert Thomas said the amendment's timing reflects generational planning considerations. The PEC 1/2 designation was created in 2005, and he said he wants it applied to the ranch before future ownership transitions.

"This land's been under our family's care for nearly 100 years," he said. "We want to be proactive and ensure PEC 1/2 is locked in for the future."

If applied, PEC 1/2 would require at least 40 percent of the site to remain open space and mandate clustered development rather than lot-by-lot subdivision. The designation requires an environmental management plan and centralized potable water and wastewater service before development can proceed. It also increases wetland setbacks along the Hillsborough River and Blackwater Creek areas. Under the current future land-use designations, the maximum residential potential is approximately 706 units.

Under PEC 1/2, the theoretical maximum increases to 3,972 units. After accounting for wetlands and environmental constraints, the applicant estimates roughly 3,279 units could ultimately be developed.

"This isn't about just adding houses," he said. "It's about providing a framework for the future of how the land changes."

For comparison, more conventional residential categories could allow higher densities, with roughly 8,000 units at one home per acre or about 32,000 units at four per acre. Any such development would still require rezonings and approvals.

Speaking from a wood bridge over Blackwater Creek on the property, Robert Thomas explained that the Army Corps of Engineers actually built the bridge in the 1930s, and he added that a portion of the ranch currently carries an Agricultural/Mining designation under the comprehensive plan. Under the existing policy, mining-related activities are allowable, subject to permitting.

PEC 1/2 would remove mining as an allowable future land use and prohibit certain industrial activities. Robert Thomas said the family has no plans to pursue mining and instead wants the long-term land-use designation to reflect residential and open-space framework. If the amendment is denied, the current future land-use designations, including Agricultural/Mining, would remain.

Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission voted to find CPA 25-37 inconsistent with the comprehensive plan in February, citing rural preservation policies and river corridor protections. The planning commission's recommendation is advisory, with the Board of County Commissioners making the final determination.

Two Rivers Ranch spans land that includes native pasture, preserved wetlands, the Hillsborough River and Blackwater Creek and a permitted 977-acre wetland mitigation bank regulated under state and federal oversight. The Thomas family also owned the Crystal Springs property and established the Crystal Springs Foundation in 2005 to support conservation and education.

In 1934, Wayne Thomas donated approximately 500 acres that helped form Hillsborough River State Park. In 1944, the family donated land that became Camp Dorothy Thomas, now part of the Girl Scouts of West Central Florida. Additional acreage later supported the restoration of Fort Foster. Wayne Thomas also donated almost 500 acres in Lithia to the Boy Scouts for Camp Alafia in 1973 and later relocated elements of the camp to the ranch property. He also said the family donated land for Jesuit High School in Tampa.

Whether commissioners view PEC 1/2 as a long-term planning framework for the property or as an increase in residential density within the rural service area will shape the future land-use policy for the site.

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- Do my current beneficiary designations reflect my wishes?
- Do I have any accounts without beneficiary designations that I want to update?
- Have I discussed any beneficiary special needs and the legal and tax consequences of my beneficiary designations with my estate-planning team?
- Are there any default beneficiary designations I need to be aware of contained in my retirement account's custodial agreement, insurance policy or annuity contract, or 529 plan prospectus?

I would be happy to sit down with you to discuss your current beneficiaries and potential next steps.

Edward Jones, its employees and financial advisors are not estate planners and cannot provide tax or legal advice. You should consult your estate-planning attorney or qualified tax advisor regarding your situation.

Please call or stop by today to schedule an appointment.



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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.

RECORD NUMBERS FOR BLOOMINGDALE HIGH SCHOOL'S ANNUAL RUNNING OF THE BULLS 5K RACE

By Jane Owen



Bloomingdale Senior High School's ninth annual Running of the Bulls took place on January 17. A record number of 354 community members participated in the event, with hundreds more in attendance spectating and volunteering. Participants included runners and walkers from all over the area, current students, Bloomingdale High School alumni, Bloomingdale Principal Dr. Rodriguez, school board member Lynn Gray and Superintendent Van Ayres.

The Running of the Bulls includes a 5K and a half-mile distance. The event supports Bloomingdale's Rajun' Bull Band and provides two scholarships for Bloomingdale High School seniors, which will be presented at the Senior Awards Banquet in May.

Jordan Fraze, Bloomingdale High School director of bands, expressed his gratitude for the longtime support from the community for the event and band program.

"I am so grateful for all of the community members who participated in and supported our 5K. Seeing familiar faces return year after year to support the Bloomingdale Band truly makes our race special. We also saw many new faces this year, marking a record number of participants for the Running of the Bulls," Fraze said.

Bloomingdale alum Christine Robbins, class of 1995, has run the 5K for eight years.

"I love the opportunity to return to campus as an alum and as a parent to support the music dept. It's like a big reunion, only very early in the morning. You never know who will be there — a current friend, my former dance students, my kids' friends or my high school classmates. This year was the first year I didn't win for class of 1995, since Alana crossed the finish line ahead of me," Robbins said.

The Running of the Bulls is made possible by local business sponsorships, and this year's event had the largest support yet with 39 businesses donating. The 2026 title sponsors were Acropolis Greek Taverna Riverview, The Jeep Depot and Reed & Reed.

Malik Millet, Bloomingdale class of 2022, won the 5K with a time of 16:41. Natalie Donovan, a Bloomingdale High School senior, was the overall female winner with a time of 21:45.

To find out other ways to give to Bloomingdale's Rajun' Bull Band, please contact Fraze at jordan.fraze@hcps.net or visit www.bloomingdaleband.com.

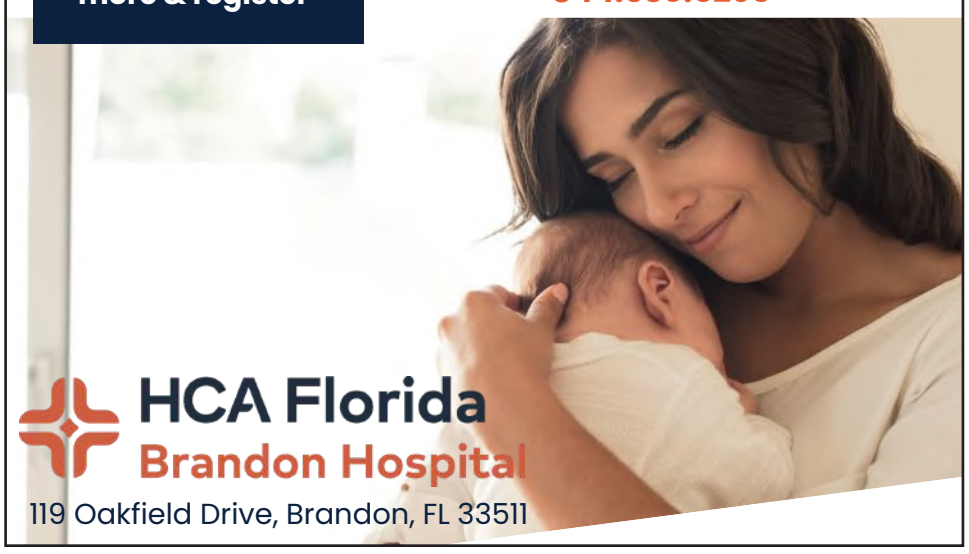
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52ND SUN 'N FUN AEROSPACE EXPO PROMISES HIGH-FLYING FUN AND FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

Staff Report



Aviation enthusiasts and families alike are gearing up for the 52nd SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo, set for Tuesday through Sunday, April 14-19, 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 on Saturday, April 11. Registration for camping opens on Tuesday, April 7.

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 p.m. 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 wing walker. Kyle 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 Franklin continues to push the boundaries of airshow entertainment while honoring his family's decades-long tradition.

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

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.







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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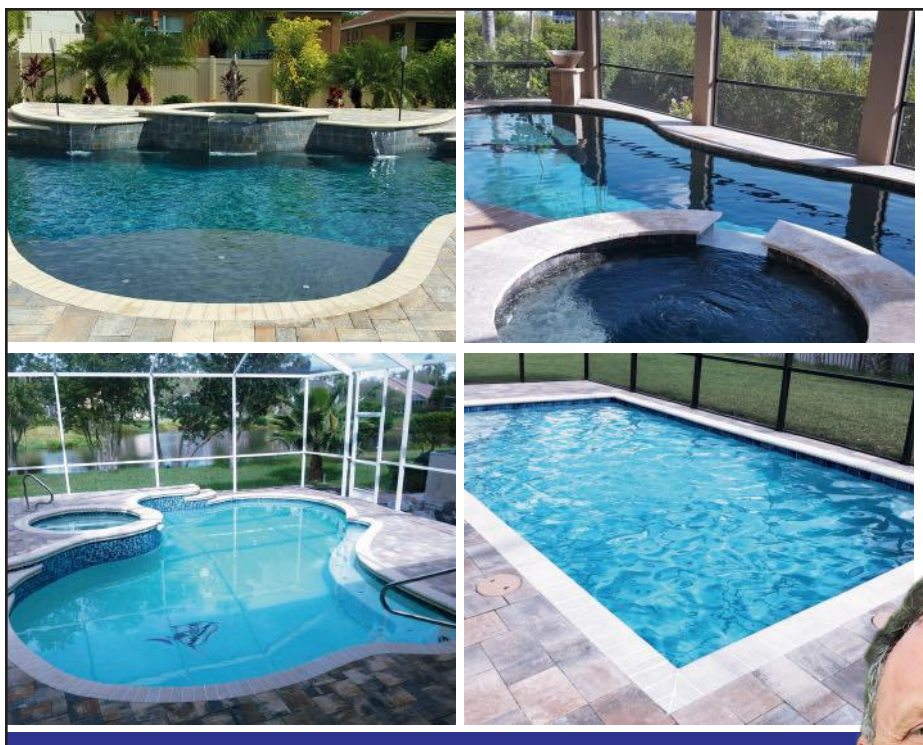
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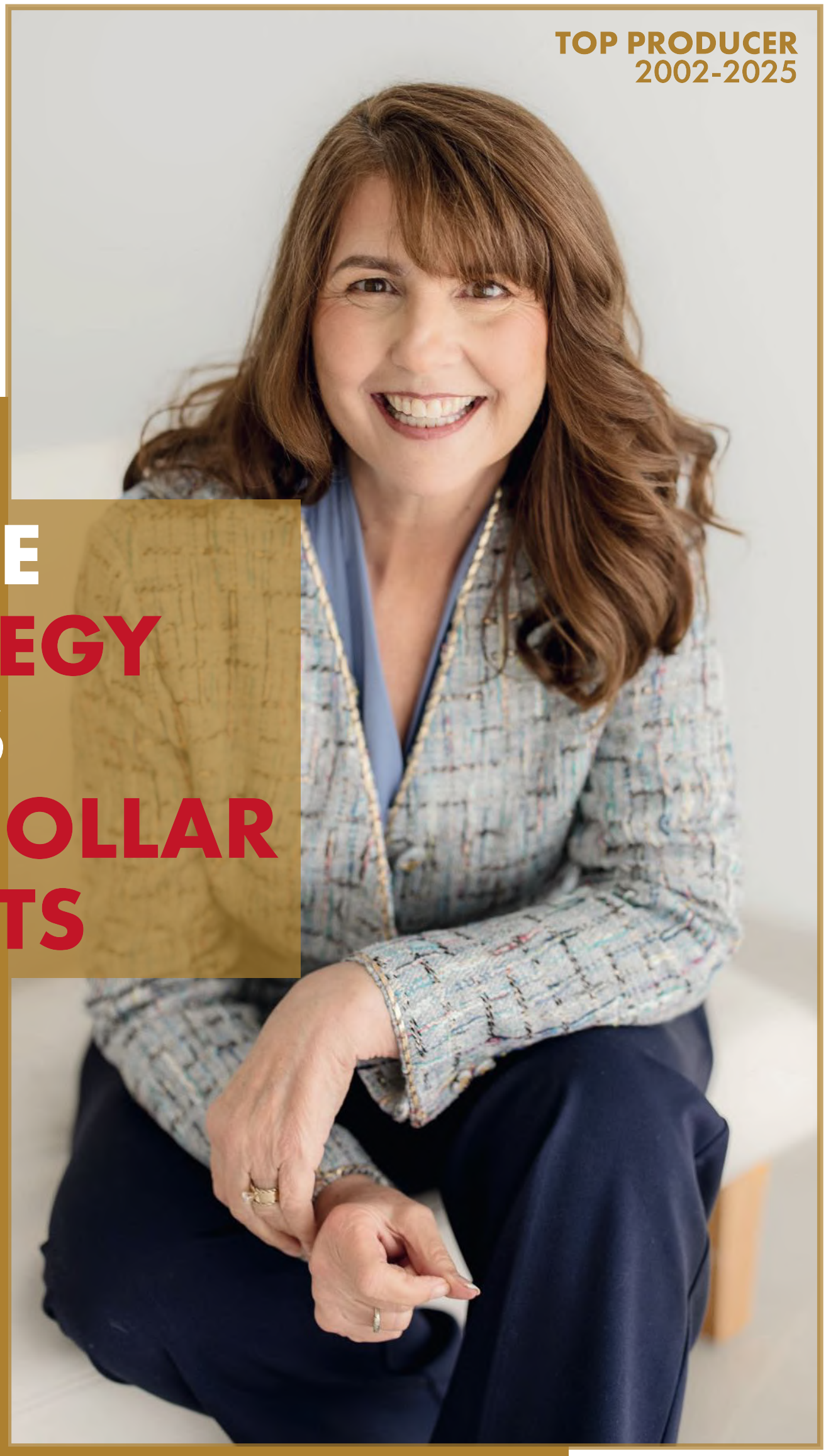
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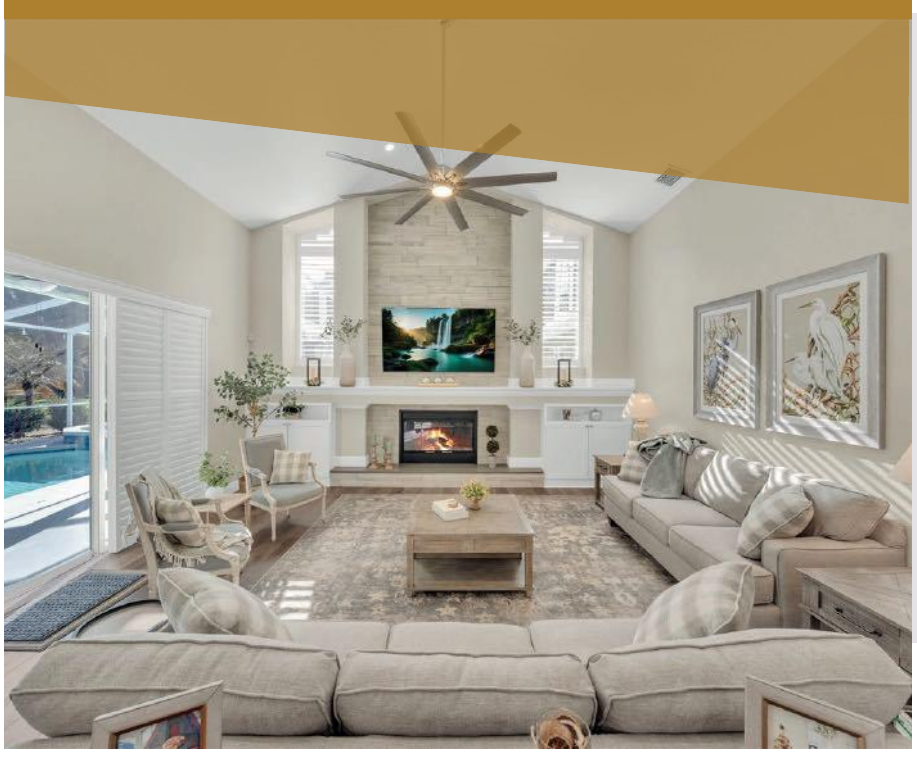
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VALRICO FISHHAWK CHAMBER KICKBALL TOURNAMENT RETURNS APRIL 11 TO BENEFIT LOCAL CHARITIES

Staff Report



The 2026 VFCC Annual Kickball Tournament is right around the corner! Join us on Saturday, April 11th, at Camp Cristina, our venue sponsor, for a high-energy day of fun, networking, and community impact to support our 2026 Charities of Choice, Seeds of Hope, and We Are the Essentials.

Sponsorship interest is always strong for this event, and several opportunities have already been claimed, but we are still on the hunt for a Title Event Sponsor! The Medal Sponsor and one base sponsor are no longer available. Additional sponsorship levels remain, and details-including benefits-are outlined in the attached information sheet.

If you are interested in sponsoring or would like to learn more, please contact Nikki Seace at nseace@southernconstruction.net or Mike Neill at kickball@valricofishhawk.org. Sponsor information can also be found on the Chamber Website at www.valricofishhawk.org. Look for the event on the calendar. Sponsor and Team registration links can be found there or at the following: https://valricofishhawk.chambermaster.com/eventregistration/register/9106

Important Team & Event Details:

• Teams are limited to 14 players under the $325 team registration fee - additional players may be added at $35 per player

• Our goal is to have team rosters finalized by Friday, March 20th, so start recruiting.

• The tournament can accommodate up to 16 teams. Teams do not need to be affiliated with the Chamber to participate. If you know of a business or organization that may be interested, please have them reach out.

• Each Team must have a minimum of 2 female players on the field at all times.

• Minimum age to participate is 13.

We are looking forward to another fantastic event. Partial proceeds from the tournament will directly support the above-mentioned charities, helping to make a meaningful impact on our local community.

Can't wait to see everybody out there on the fields!

UF CROC DOCS: WOMEN LEADING CONSERVATION IN THE EVERGLADES

Staff Report



University of Florida Croc Docs Wildlife Research Laboratory manager Duwa Ansari.

In chest-deep waters, on midnight airboat runs and along remote Everglades roads, women scientists are carrying out some of Florida's most demanding conservation work. They capture alligators, track invasive pythons and protect fragile ecosystems few people ever see.

They are the UF Croc Docs.

At the University of Florida Croc Docs Wildlife Research Lab, women make up half of the research team — a notable shift in a field where women still represent less than 30% of scientists globally, according to UNESCO. Their work is reshaping both conservation science and perceptions of who belongs in it.

Much of that work unfolds after dark. On moonlit airboat runs through the Everglades, researchers Alexis Pupo and Bryna Daykin conduct routine alligator health checks, carefully capturing and measuring animals before releasing them back into the water. The process may repeat a dozen times before sunrise.

"These are the kinds of moments you don't imagine for yourself in high school," said Pupo, a South Florida native who once questioned whether a science career was realistic. "Now I get to help conserve the wildlife I grew up with."

When daylight comes, attention often turns to one of the Everglades' greatest invasive threats: Burmese pythons. Wildlife ecologist Melissa Miller and biologist Michelle Bassis lead efforts to reduce python populations using radio and GPS telemetry, drones and thermal cameras. By tracking tagged male "scout snakes," researchers locate breeding females and remove multiple snakes at once, reducing impacts on native wildlife.

Night surveys extend onto South Florida roads, where field biologist Patricia Rodriguez-Gonzalez and intern Gabriella De La Fe document invasive reptiles and amphibians as part of the lab's regional monitoring program. The data they collect helps wildlife managers respond quickly to emerging threats.

Croc Docs research also reaches beyond Florida. Wildlife ecologist Venetia Briggs-Gonzalez leads long-running international conservation projects in Belize and serves on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Crocodile Specialist Group, helping guide global protection efforts.

Behind the scenes, laboratory manager Duwa Ansari keeps operations running smoothly, while other women on the team contribute through wildlife management research, photography, filmmaking and emerging technologies like AI-powered smart traps.

Together, the UF Croc Docs represent the full spectrum of modern conservation science — and a future where skill, passion and dedication define who leads the work.

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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.

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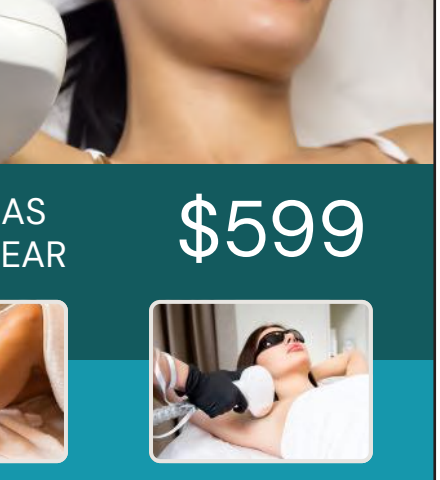
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SUMMER CAMPS 2026

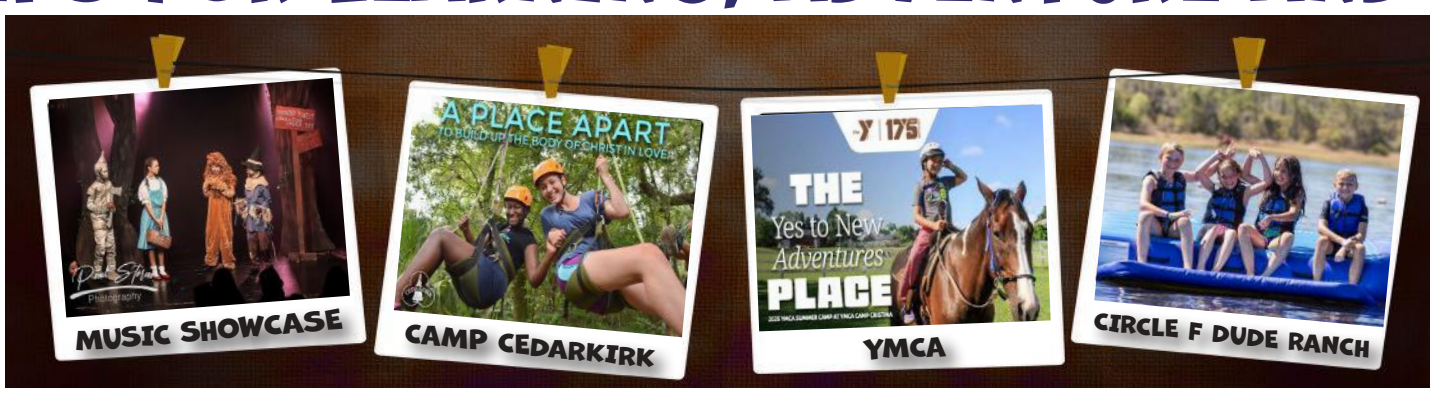
Special Section, More Inside!





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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.

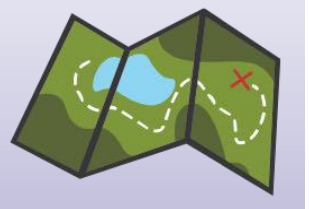
Families looking for outdoor or traditional camp experiences will find plenty of options, including Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center, Circle F Dude Ranch and Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, which blends thrilling rides with animal encounters and education. Horse lovers can saddle up at TLC's Gypsy Haven, 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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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 aged 3 through adult.

Each summer, the conservatory opens its doors to those who want a 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 week-long camps costing $475 and multiweek intensive programs charged at higher rates depending on the length of the program. There are scholarships with the financial aid priority deadline being Friday, February 28. Auditions or placements are required for some programs before registration, and early enrollment is recommended since enrollment is limited.

For a complete schedule or to register, go to www.patelconservatory.asapconnected.com or www.patelconservatory.org. For more information, call 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.

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

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& 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 BRANDON 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.

"We're proud to be a Step Up for Students provider, making personalized math learning accessible for more families," added McDaniels. Learn more about Summer Camps at www.mathnasium.com/math-centers/brandon or call 813-655-6284. Mathnasium is located at 1048 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico and Mathnasium of Brandon West, 1930 W. Brandon Blvd, Brandon. Call 813-798-MATH (6284) or visit the website at www.mathnasium.com/brandonwest





SUMMER CAMPS 2026





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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 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.

Campo Family YMCA in Valrico features specialty camps that include sports, creative arts, and teen leadership programs. Spurlino Family YMCA in Riverview offers many athletic and enrichment camps, along with popular options for teens. 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. to 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. A nonrefundable deposit of $10 per week, per camper is due at registration, with separate deposits for specific teen leadership programs.

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.

Registration is available online at the website www.tampaymca.org, where families can view session weeks and age group details. 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.







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SUMMER CAMPS 2026







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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 line-up 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. to 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, go online to https://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.









& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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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 through 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. Their 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. During the eight-week summer program, each participant earns approximately 100 community service hours while building leadership skills, confidence and public speaking experience.

The program begins June 1 and runs through 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. The application deadline is Friday, March 27. Applications can be found at www.whatisimpact.com/students. Completed applications should be emailed to Joy Miller at jmiller@whatisimpact.com.

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/.



At Circle F Dude Ranch Camp, we foster grit, growth, and a love for the outdoors. With the perfect blend of Western flair and classic camp fun, we give kids the kind of summer they'll never forget. Located in Lake Wales, campers 6 to 16 enjoy our overnight experiences for one, two and three-weeks sessions.

DATES & RATES

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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 sleep-away 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 House scheduled for 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 information, visit the park website at www.buschgardens.com.

Jam Room Music

Jam Room Music is a new concept in music stores, combining retail and lounge areas with space to jam. It knows the unique joy that occurs when musicians create music together and believes everyone should have that experience. Its goal is to build up the local music community by providing everything musicians of all skill levels need and creating a welcoming environment to spend time around music. Jam Room Music is offering half-day summer camps from Monday, June 8, through Friday, July 10, at its Valrico location at 1040 Bloomingdale Ave. Visit www.jamroommusic.com or call 813-709-7822 for information.

FELLOWSHIP SPORTS SUMMER CAMPS

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- **Flag Football Camp** – $150
- **Cheer Camp** – $180
- **Basketball Camp** – $150

DAILY SCHEDULE:
- **9:00AM** to **12:30PM** each day

SCAN THE QR CODE TO EXPLORE CAMPS

FELLOWSHIP CHURCH







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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.







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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.

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.

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.

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.

Kids 'R' Kids

For more information, visit its website at www.kidsrkids.com/circa-fishhawk/programs/summer-camp.

Easterseals School For Limitless Learning — Inclusive Summer Camp For Neurodiverse Learners

Get ready for an exciting and inclusive adventure designed specifically for neurodiverse young learners and those with other disabilities in kindergarten through second grade. Packed with hands-on and interactive STEAM activities, it's a supportive space where every child can explore, grow and thrive. The Easterseals School for Limitless Learning is located at 2460 Bloomingdale Ave., Ste. 170, in Valrico, and the summer camp is available for six weeks from Monday, June 15, to Friday, July 24, with morning, afternoon and all-day sessions available. Visi tits website at https://florida.easterseals.com/get-support/areas-of-support/early-childhood-care/easterseals-school-for-limitless-learning.





& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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

Staff Report



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

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.

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.





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/.

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.

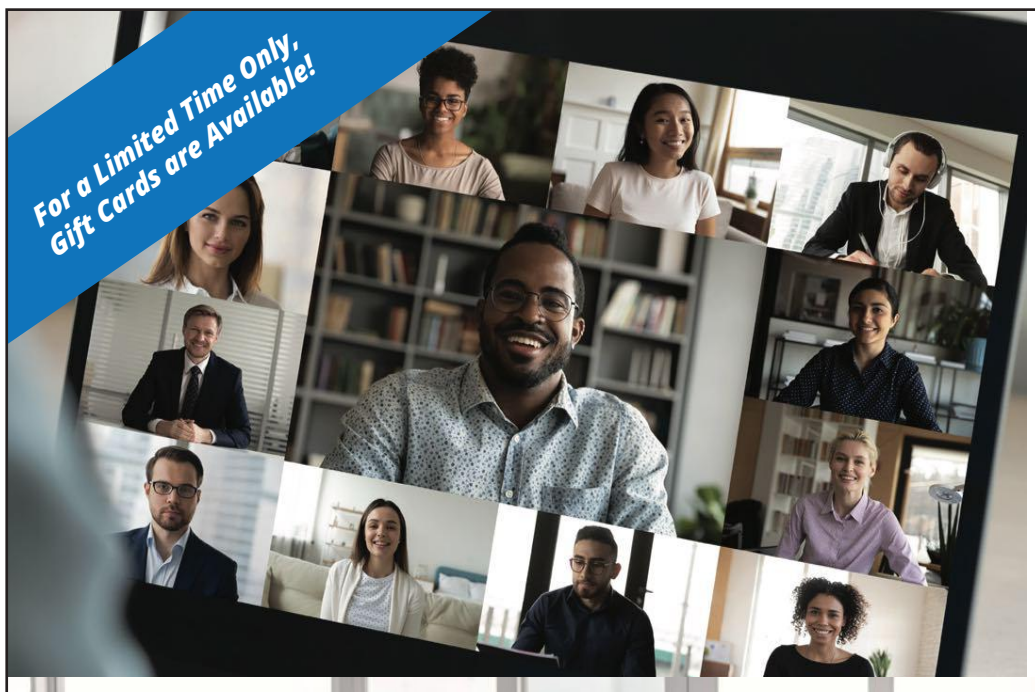
She began her career with the district as a P.E. teacher at Newsome High School, where she was also the varsity girls basketball coach and was named Western Conference Coach of the Year. She later became an assistant principal for student affairs at Lennard High School and Bloomingdale High School. She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





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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."

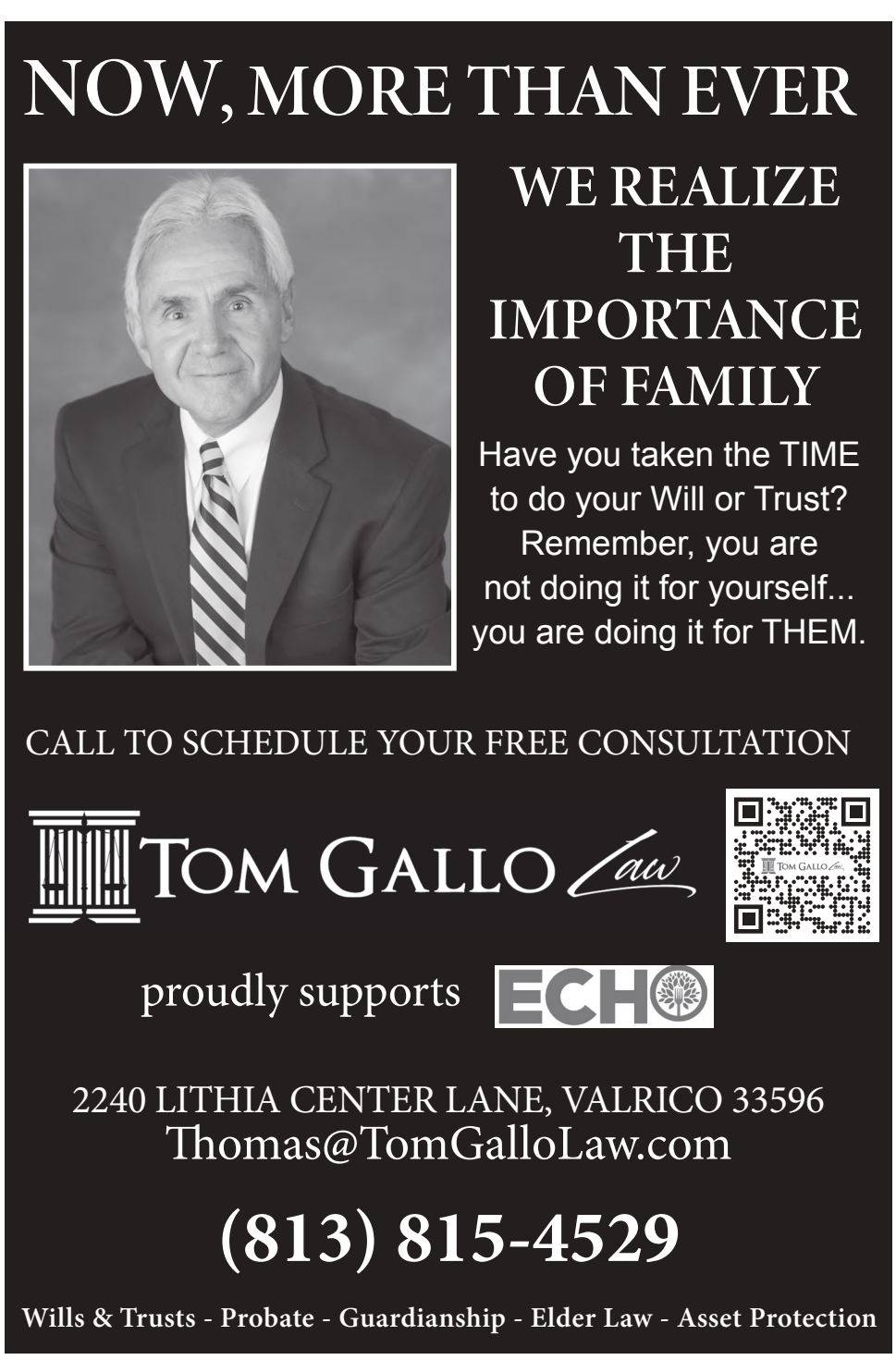
Tickets are available now, and organizers encourage residents to act quickly due to limited capacity. For more information about tickets, sponsorships or donations, contact admin@sohopefl.org or visit Seeds of Hope's website at https://sohopefl.org/.

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









OSPREY OBSERVER VALRICO EDITION MARCH 2026 Vol. 23, Iss. 3

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Edited by:
Jenny Bennett

EYE ON BUSINESS

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

Brandon BBQ On Demand

David, the owner of Brandon BBQ on Demand, has been barbecuing for over 25 years and has perfected his techniques, created his own BBQ rub and everything, including all sides, are homemade, secret recipes. He offers the usual BBQ staples, such as brisket, pulled pork and ribs, but also less common items, like smoked chicken wings, smoked steaks, smoked salmon and even smoked prime rib. Right now, Brandon BBQ on Demand is focused on catering for small events, such as parties and office functions, and it is able to accommodate anywhere from 10-100 people. There is no storefront, only online and phone ordering, with delivery or pickup available. A 72-hour notice is required, and all orders are custom-made. View the menu on its website at www.brandonbbqondemand.com or call 813-693-1819.



New Retail 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. She is excited to serve the area and looks forward to helping you find the perfect flooring for your space.

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.

Blooming Communications

Blooming Communications is a public relations consultancy founded by FishHawk resident Caitlin Gardner. Built on the belief that leaders should show up with clarity and calm confidence when the stakes are high, Blooming Communications partners with entrepreneurs, executives and organizations to strengthen their visibility, protect their reputations and tell their stories with confidence. In addition to strategic public relations and executive communications consulting, Gardner is a professional speaker known for her work on high-stakes communication, leadership presence and calm confidence in moments that matter. She speaks to associations, growth-minded teams and community organizations across Florida and beyond. Gardner also teaches entrepreneurship at the University of Florida. Blooming Communications proudly supports local businesses while serving clients nationally. The firm was recently recognized as a finalist as Emerging Business of the Year by the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce and is committed to helping leaders bloom under pressure — onstage, in the media and in everyday leadership moments.

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

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. Grounded in Christian principles of truth, integrity and service, it offers unmatched precision and clarity — ensuring that every property, from the foundation to the rooftop, is seen with excellence and purpose.

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 approved by the HUD 203k consultant program and is available to serve all of Florida.

Apex Sight Solutions is located at 11232 Boyette Rd., Unit 2088, in Riverview. Visit https://apexsightsolutions.com/ to find out more.

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 its website at www.royalcleanerllc.com or call either 321-368-1556 or 918-519-1164 to find out more.

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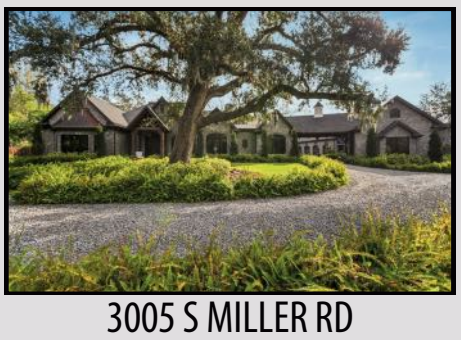
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2903 W IVY ST
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2109 LITHIA PINECREST RD
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5125 PALM SPRINGS BLVD #3104
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$225,000



228 HARDCASTLE PL
2BR/2.5BA + BONUS ROOM
$219,000



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$750,000



685 BOCA CIEGA POINT BLVD
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