Alan Howard and Co-Chair Gwen Gallagher-Howard with Co-Chair Carolyn Hawthorne and Rick Hawthorne

It's all about the Art

As the 90th Anniversary MOCA Classic arrived, the official celebration of years of outstanding achievements and strides in the arts for Jacksonville's coveted museum was treasured by proud patrons who gathered under the stars in Hemming Plaza. It was a rally around the sustained support for arts and outstanding programming that will continue for years to come.

SEE MORE .....PAGE 18

THE Resident

San Jose ····· San Marco ····· St. Nicholas

San Marco residents proactive in solving potential traffic problems

Concerned that area changes post-2006 not compatible with East San Marco

By Lara Patangan
Resident Community News

Driven by concerns that their neighborhood will be used as a cut-through once the East San Marco development is complete, surrounding residents are looking for ways to put the brakes on potential commuters.

Homeowners surrounding the immediate vicinity of the proposed project on the corner of Hendricks Avenue and Atlantic Boulevard are looking for solutions to curb additional traffic generated by the project, which will compose of a 240-unit apartment complex and an additional 46,000 square feet of retail space.

Shane Sheffield, a resident of Marco Place, is concerned that motorists will use his street to circumvent traffic created by the residentially dense project.

"My concern is that when there is a massive building project at the corner of Atlantic and Hendricks, it will create more congestion and more perceived congestion that will motivate people to cut through our neighborhood," said Sheffield.

While he says he is not opposed to the project, Sheffield thinks it's important to consider that many of the factors affecting traffic congestion have changed since the project was first approved in 2006.

He lists some of those as:

• A new traffic pattern in San Marco Square, which backs up motorists on Hendricks Avenue and pushes more traffic through his neighborhood as commuters cut through to get to Atlantic Boulevard.

• Landon Avenue was not previously blocked at the railroad crossing.

• Landon Middle School is now a popular magnet school with a full enrollment compared to an under-capacity school.

• Landon Middle School has recently changed its traffic flow for drop-off which has increased cut through traffic in the neighborhood surrounding the proposed development.

• A new on-ramp/off-ramp to I-95 as part of the Overland Bridge Project will make it more attractive to commuters to cut through area neighborhoods to avoid the congestion at the intersection of Hendricks and Atlantic.

"When the project was approved, these items weren't on the table, and had they been, maybe the outlook of the original development order would have been scrutinized more closely," said Sheffield.

.....See TRAFFIC on page 10

Lauren Bayliss and Alexis Espey outfitted in their best flapper attire

Hendricks gets help from Gatsby-era auctions

Proud parents arrived in their best 1920s attire, as Epping Forest Yacht and Country Club set the stage for a night to remember. The St. Nicholas-based private school relies on the donations and fundraising of parents who rallied around their favorite community – the Hendricks Day School community.

SEE MORE ..... PAGE 19

Juniors, seniors and in between run 36th annual benefit race

It was a record turnout for the 36th Annual Ortega River Run, with 2,465 registered in the 1-Mile Fun Run and the 5-Mile Grand Prix combined. Runners from all over Jacksonville, including San Marco, came out to support the benefit which fund's St. Mark's Episcopal Day School's financial aid/scholarship budget. Left, Candice Elliott holding Beckham Davidson, with Amy and Maddox Davidson, who ran the 1-Mile Fun Run portion of the 36th Annual Ortega River Run on March 1.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Small businesses find Jacksonville friendly 3
East San Marco project moved to full Council 4
Calling qualified female candidates 8
St. John's River dependent on healthy springs 12
Top realtors bullish on real estate market 14
Local docs rebuild village 30

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Back in the winter of 2013 it was announced that the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) would run its Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route through Riverplace Boulevard. In order to obtain federal funding 50 percent of the lanes from the Kings Avenue Transit Station to the Acosta Bridge would have been dedicated to buses while also serving as a bicycle lane.

Although the plans for Riverplace Boulevard had gone through a public planning process back in late 2000s, the condominium and apartment buildings at the curve have since become fully populated. The original BRT plans as shown in the rendering were much improved from the current street; however, they still did not meet the needs of the residential portion of the neighborhood.

On the positive side, there would be an outside lane shared by buses and bicycles and an inside lane reserved for automobiles (note the car westbound on the street is illegally using the right lane). The pedestrian crosswalk is wide and ties into a pedestrian friendly area at the front of the building. Also notice how the walk invites people to walk back between the two buildings and to the "new" Southbank Riverwalk.

The negative parts of the concept which were addressed in the public hearings were that even with a lower speed limit the engineering of the road would still allow fast traffic through the area. There is a combined bus and bicycle lane with neither able to pass the other. As the automobile above shows us there is nothing besides a white painted line to restrict auto access to the bicycle lanes. The situation was dangerous for cyclists, buses and automobiles.

This rendering looks at the original BRT Route Concept and was provided courtesy of Melody Bishop

Looking at the rendering, take a moment and imagine the scene with the concept changes proposed below by the public at the JTA hearings in early 2013. These were adopted by the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) under the leadership of Aundra Wallace, Prosser and Sub-consultants Diettrich Planners, Urbanonmic$ and Infinity Global Solutions, LLC. This Community Redevelopment Area (CRA)/Business Investment Development Element (BID) Team, with the conceptual initial renderings provided by Michael Balanky, owner of Chase Properties, Inc. and Doug Skiles with Envision Engineering & Design, determined the following elements should be incorporated:

- One through travel lane in each direction (*Writer's note: the lane will be used by automobiles, local delivery vehicles and buses running on the BRT Routes.)*
- Center left turn lane
- On-street parallel parking on both sides *(Writer's note: this will enhance access to the new Southbank Riverwalk and the St. John's River.)*
- Sidewalk with planters for street trees (shade) on both sides
- Protected bike lane on the outside edge (that will be the first of its type in Jacksonville!)
- Intersections that will be "bulbed out" to reduce the pedestrian crossing distances

The primary goal of their conceptual design is to generate a construction cost estimate for the CRA/BID that can be adopted by the DIA and City Council. After that, the final design would begin with workshops to facilitate community input.

The JTA was concerned that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) would deny the grants for the BRT Routes with last minute changes. Thanks must be given to JTA and especially to Suraya Teeple for going to bat for the citizens of Jacksonville and making certain that FTA agreed to fund the changes. The JTA has turned the design and construction of the new Riverplace Boulevard over to the Downtown Investment Authority. The renderings of the changes listed above will be completed and available in a few months.

– Bruce A. Fouraker

Passover in the matzo aisle

The Jewish Federation's Shalom Jacksonville will once again host one of the Jewish Outreach Institute's signature programs, Passover in the Matzo Aisle℠. Community volunteers will be stationed in the kosher/Passover food section of the stores to welcome and engage customers, offer samples of Passover foods, distribute holiday recipes and synagogue information on congregational Seders and gift shops.

According to Isabel Balotin, Shalom Jacksonville Director, "For five years Winn-Dixie has partnered with us to bring this very important program of welcome and awareness to our community. They have been extremely accommodating by providing us with space in the kosher food section, supplying free food samples for customers to taste and being helpful in keeping us apprised of new kosher products."

"In addition, they generously support the Winn-Dixie Emergency Food Pantry of Jewish Family and Community Services, which is available to people of all faiths. We are extremely grateful to Winn-Dixie/Bi-Lo for their dedication to the community in general," Balotin said.

Winn-Dixie provides free Haggadah (Passover prayer books that are used at the Seders) and has the largest selections of kosher foods for Passover and year round. "This makes the holidays and the observance of Kashrut (keeping kosher) much easier for the Jewish community," she noted.

The event will occur on Friday, Apr. 4, 10 a.m. to 4:30 pm at the Winn-Dixie Supermarkets in Lakewood (1520 University Blvd.) and Mandarin (11701 San Jose Blvd.).

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Jacksonville ranked #1 for small business starts

Editor's Note: *When my husband and I moved here in from Pittsburgh, it was more than just a desire to get away from the harsh winters that led us to make Jacksonville our pick city. Because we're active in boating we wanted to be on a river and considered half a dozen other "river cities" before making our decision. We first visited here in late July 2011 so there were would be no surprises later about the heat and humidity. Jacksonville was number one for us for its small-town friendliness, quick and easy access to Downtown, and we sensed that it was a city on the cusp of greatness. I was pleased to read that Jacksonville is considered the top city to start a business.*

By Kate A. Hallock
Resident Community News

Recently WalletHub.com analyzed the relative start-up opportunities that exist in the 150 largest cities in the United States in terms of population in order to help aspiring entrepreneurs – from restaurant owners to high-tech movers and shakers – maximize their chances for long-term prosperity.

The analysis noted that Jacksonville, Florida's largest city, boasts the country's second-highest five-year small business survival rate, as well as attractive corporate tax rates, a bountiful labor force and fairly accessible small business funding. Thus the WalletHub ranking of #1 in the country for small business starts.

The ranking is not a popularity contest based on public opinion. WalletHub used 14 unique metrics to gauge the relative entrepreneurial opportunities that exist in the 150 largest U.S. cities, based on population. The metrics considered the level of overhead involved with opening a business as well as the level of local business competition, the depth of the talent pool, and the cost of living to evaluate overall business friendliness among those cities.

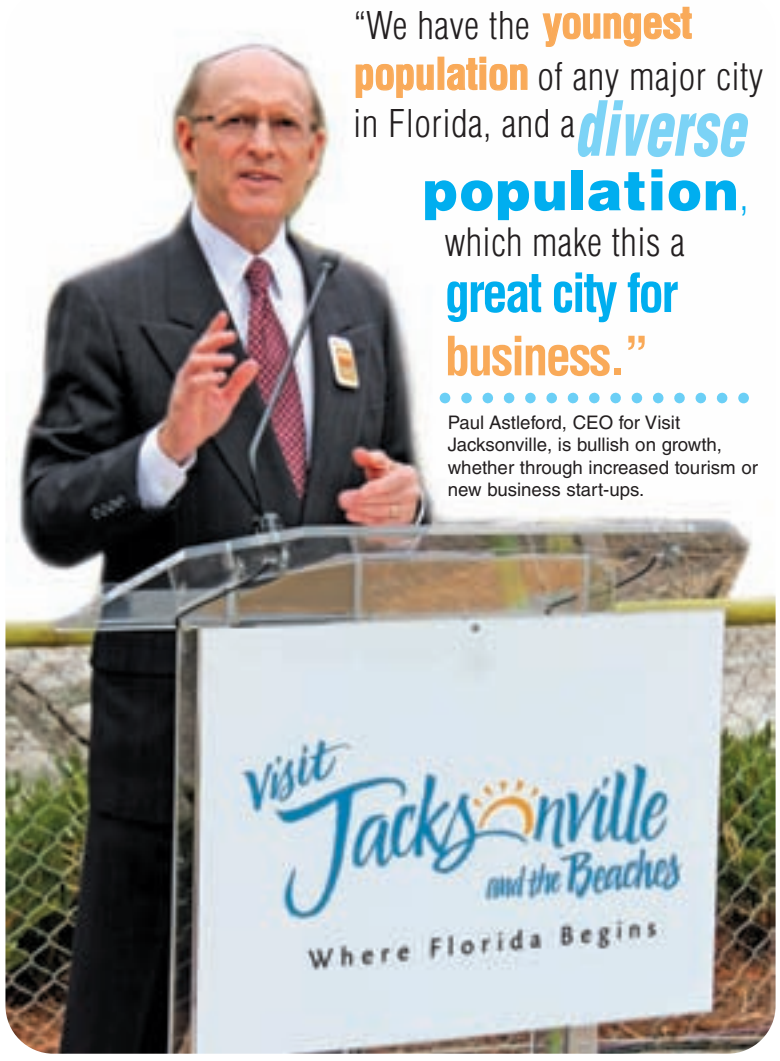
The Resident reached out to leaders in the community to validate WalletHub's findings with their own perceptions.

For Sandy Bartow, Vice President of Entrepreneurial Growth at JAX Chamber, the answer is clear why Jacksonville has earned this rank. "Because collectively we are cultivating a community of risk takers and our entrepreneurs see both opportunity and support in Jacksonville."

To sustain that growth, Bartow noted, "We need to continue to grow a strong infrastructure of support for all levels of entrepreneurship as well as celebrate our successes. We are fortunate to have strong entrepreneurial support organizations that collaborate to impact the entire region. The JAX Chamber, the US Small Business Administration, Small Business Development Center and Jacksonville Women's Business Center support business owners in moving through their fears by increasing knowledge and business acumen. We also need to shine the spot light on entrepreneurs who every day take risks and create jobs."

Visit Jacksonville's CEO Paul Astleford, formerly from Columbus, OH, said "Some of the attributes that make Jacksonville a great city to start a small business are similar to those we share with potential leisure travelers and meeting and convention planners in promoting the city.

"The cost of living in Jacksonville is lower than other Florida cities like Orlando, Miami and Tampa. Also, we have the youngest population of any major city in Florida, with a median age of 35, and a diverse population, which make this a great city for business – whether it's a large company or a young entrepreneur attempting to get a business established," he continued.



Paul Astleford, CEO for Visit Jacksonville, is bullish on growth, whether through increased tourism or new business start-ups.

Astleford, who lives in Epping Forest, also noted that the One Spark festival has been helpful in launching small businesses.

"It also doesn't hurt that, with One Spark and a growing number of technology firms being incubated here, along with many locally-owned restaurants springing up, Jacksonville is building a reputation as a young, cool city with a strong dining scene. That's definitely an attraction for people who are looking for a place to launch a new business."

Lori Boyer, District 5 Councilwoman, is positive, too about the potential for growth in the community.

"Jacksonville's recent ranking as the best city in the country for start-up businesses is certainly great publicity that will help foster additional entrepreneurial investments. Those small businesses are the core of our economy, and more than a few started here have grown to national and international stature," she said. "But, perhaps even more importantly, it may help us recognize what a wonderful city we call home and bolster our sense of civic pride and identity. Congratulations Jacksonville!"

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LUZ approves East San Marco development

Developer seeking equity partner

By Lara Patangan
Resident Community News

Changes were approved last month to Planned Unit Development 2014-131, which East San Marco developers needed to move the languished project from an empty lot on the corner of Hendricks Avenue and Atlantic Boulevard to a skyward stretching residential and retail space.

But things aren't completely looking up for the project's developer, Whitehall Realty Partners, who is having difficulty finding an equity partner.

Whitehall Realty Partners is under agreement to buy the property from Regency Centers and St. Joe Company and plans to build a 240-unit apartment complex above 46,000 square feet of retail space. After the build-out is complete, Whitehall Realty Partners plan to sell the retail component back to Regency Centers who will develop it.

Tom Fleming, Vice President of Investments at Regency Centers, is hopeful that the project will continue to move forward and is excited to get the zoning component completed.

"The commitment of the partners to move the project forward continues to be strong and we are optimistic that as we move through the remaining government approval processes that the business aspects of the project will also fall into place," Fleming said. "That is not to say that the project doesn't have its challenges, but we believe we are positioned to deliver a result that the community will be proud of and one that makes sense from a business perspective."

District 5 Councilwoman Lori Boyer acknowledged that Whitehall Realty Partners has had some difficulty getting financing, and that Regency Centers has been spearheading the approval process for the PUD.

"I have always long warned residents that they need to rely on the zoning, not on who owns the property," said Boyer. "It concerns me from the perspective of a delay, but not as much about the development because that has been sufficiently defined."

As ownerships inevitably change in real estate developments, the zoning is critical for setting the parameters of what will be built regardless of the investor. Boyer is confident though that whoever develops the property will ensure a certain quality since it is "a huge investment parcel."

Nailing down details

The original PUD, which was approved in 2006, planned for 125 condominium units and 57,000 square feet of retail space, but because of real estate market changes, that was no longer a viable option for developers.

Boyer's approach, which she explained at a February Town Hall meeting, was to focus on changes to the current plan, since the project had been previously approved. "We are not starting with nothing," Boyer explained. "We are looking at what was approved in 2006 and comparing it to the changes now."

For Boyer, who chairs the Land Use and Zoning Committee, the PUD process was about "nailing down the details" of those changes.

"People had a general understanding of the project from the renderings at the town hall meeting and, in general, the community was more supportive than not," said Boyer. "So, my primary responsibility was to make sure the two things matched from what was shown and what was in the PUD as far as the appearance of the building."

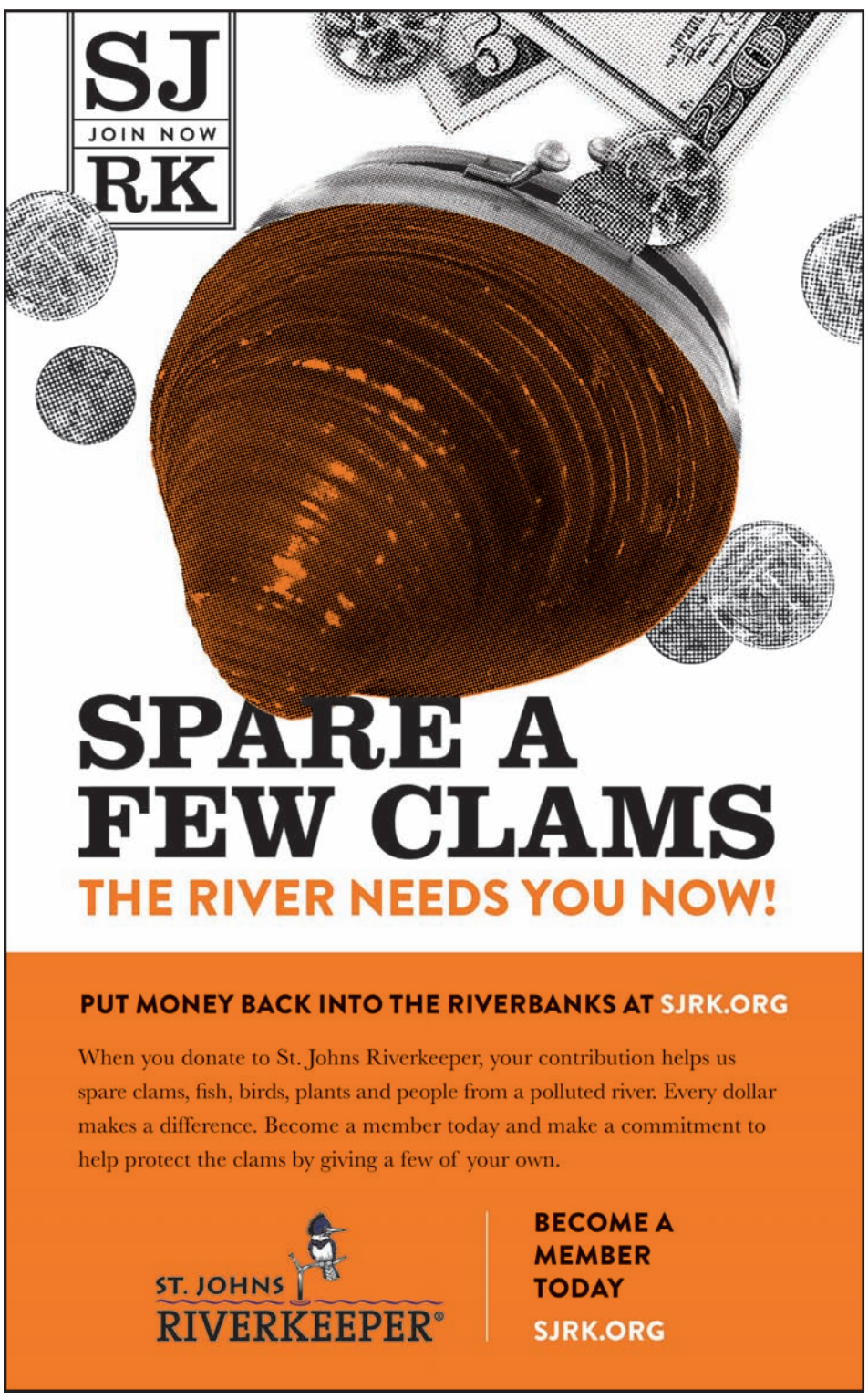
While both San Marco Preservation Society and San Marco Merchant's Association support the project, Boyer said there were two main concerns she heard from the neighborhood – the impact of traffic and the issue of "building mass" so that the structure would not feel out of scale for the neighborhood.

Boyer verified at the LUZ meeting that City staff agreed with the findings of England –Thims & Miller, the engineering firm the developers used to conduct the traffic study, that the scope of the development would not generate any more traffic than what was legislated in the 2006 PUD.

Among the details relating to building mass were efforts to clarify the structure's height set backs as well as details to the vertical plane of the building so that the architectural changes that had been made since the project was presented in 2006 could be minimized as much as possible.

According to Boyer, a lot of people originally felt that the building was too big for the neighborhood. Therefore, a large part of the 2006 design process involved implementing ways to offer architectural relief such as setting the building back and staggering it so it did not appear like a massive vertical slab.

Some of those features were scrapped due to high steel prices and a lagging economy which left the project in limbo until it was revived in 2013, with modifications to increase residential density, shift from condos to apartments, reduce the retail square footage and alter parts of the original architectural design.



Boyer said she wanted to clarify the "potential gray areas" of those changes ensuring they were included in the new PUD which outlines the percentage of the façade that can be a straight vertical plane and the percentage of the building that can reach the maximum height, which was reduced from 79 feet to 77 feet.

The frontage along Mango Place and Alford Place will be 69 feet high so the façade has a staggered appearance. The use of awnings, overhangs and balconies will be implemented to break up the vertical plane giving the illusion of "modulations and indentations." Commercial space will occupy the entirety of the bottom floor with five stories of residential space above it.

Boyer also said parking was clarified in the new PUD requiring more than one parking space for any unit bigger than 600 square feet, explaining it was very important to the neighborhood that this was a self-parking project.

Grocery store a dangling carrot

The developers will have a conversion option available which will allow them to simultaneously increase retail and decrease residential space, as long as it does not impact traffic more than what has been accepted in the existing agreement.

Boyer said the lure of the project from the beginning was the grocery anchor that would consume the majority of retail space.

"When people talk about the project they refer to it as the Publix development," Boyer said. "That has always been the impetus."

Stephen Day, a San Marco resident for 37 years, agrees that when the project was first proposed the supermarket was very enticing.

"Publix was the carrot that got dangled," said Day. "They didn't have to say anything after that."

But Day, who was the only resident to speak against the project at the LUZ meeting, said it's an inappropriate size and scope for the location.

Boyer doesn't disagree with Day, but said that decision was made in 2006 because people really wanted a Publix.

"People may be unhappy with the size of the building, but ultimately it's very similar in size to 2006," explained Boyer.

Day said while at the time the idea of San Marco having its own grocery store was "beyond anyone's wildest dreams," in the eight years that have passed, residents now have quick access to the Riverside Publix and will have yet another grocer to consider when Fresh Market is built in the new Brooklyn development.

Regardless of where residents push their grocery carts, Day said the development is "now an entirely different project" than when it was first proposed, citing the size of the units and the switch from condos "where the owners have some skin in the game" to rental apartments.

"These people will be transients pausing through my neighborhood on their way through life," Day said.

While Day believes the project is well designed with quality developers and that Boyer has done the best she can with it, he questions why we spent "all this time, energy and money to calm traffic" and then turn around and decide to build a development that will significantly increase the volume of residents.

"We've spent millions redoing the Square and on the renovation work upgrading San Marco Boulevard. The goal was to calm traffic and make the entire area a nice walkable neighborhood. Now we are going to put a building in it that is more appropriate for Downtown," said Day. "You have to drive 10 blocks in any direction to find another six-story building. The only part that makes this palatable is not the project itself, but the people behind it."

JTA enhances Bikes on the Skyway pilot program

The Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) expanded its Bikes on the Skyway Pilot Program last month to include (non-peak) Skyway hours of 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. and after 6 p.m.

"The JTA has been impressed with the amount of customers bringing their bikes onto the Skyway during our initial Community First Saturdays pilot program," said Lisa Darnall, JTA's Vice President of Transit Operations. "JTA has had several requests to accept bikes on the Skyway during the week. To accommodate customer requests, we will begin evaluating bikes on the Skyway during non-peak hours Monday through Friday."

During Community First Saturdays in January, the JTA provided 979 trips on the Skyway and 32 of those customers brought their bikes along. In February, riders increased to 986 customers with 38 bikes.

Riders who bring bikes on the Skyway are encouraged to avoid boarding trains that are full, keep bicycles away from all doors and retain control of bicycles at all times, and use elevators, not escalators, when taking bicycles in and out of Skyway stations. The JTA provides complimentary access to the Skyway. For a complete listing of Skyway hours, contact JTA's customer service line at (904) 630-3100 or visit www.jtafla.com.

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Many One Spark creator projects come from neighborhoods

San Marco Dining District to sponsor Food Village

By Kate A. Hallock
Resident Community News

Billing itself as the "world's" crowdfunding festival, One Spark, in its second year, can boast that it is a true global affair. Since the inaugural One Spark festival in April 2013, numerous international markets have contacted festival organizers expressing interest in partnering with One Spark to host festivals in their cities. One Spark Berlin (Germany) will customize its version to adapt to the Berlin market, anticipating approximately 200 creator projects to participate.

Meanwhile, here in Jacksonville, just three projects are coming from outside the United States – from Italy, Senegal and North Korea.

However, our own neighborhoods are great contributors to the event, responsible for 109 of the 632 creator projects, a respectable 17 percent.

Twenty-eight of the projects were registered by residents in San Marco/St. Nicholas (22) and San Jose (6). Eighty-one of those projects came from residents in Riverside (19), Avondale/Murray Hill (42), and Ortega (20), based on registered ZIP Codes.

Nearly 500 projects are based in Duval County (486, accounting for 77 percent), while another 23 percent are in Florida outside Duval County.

One Spark 2014 creator projects increased 56 percent over last year's event. Although 925 total creator projects are registered, matchmaking to 77 official One Spark 2014 venues for the Apr. 9-13 festival resulted in 632 (nearly 70 percent) receiving a host space.

Breakdown of creator projects by category are: innovation, 48 percent; art, 21 percent; music, 11 percent; science, six percent; and technology, 14 percent. In our neighborhoods, 40 percent of the creator projects were in the innovation category, followed by 28 percent in art, 18 percent in music, seven percent in science and nearly six percent in technology.

All One Spark 2014 creator projects have the opportunity to showcase in front of and receive immediate market feedback from 150,000-plus expected attendees. Projects also will be competing for their piece of the $200,000 crowdfund divided out based on attendee votes, $110,000 in top vote-getter and juried awards and private individual contributions from attendees. In addition, $3.25 million in potential capital investment dollars will be on the table, with private investors on the ground at One Spark 2014 looking for the next big thing.

Food Village – bigger, better

This year, the One Spark Food Village will offer more food options, seating and entertainment, promising "great food for every palate, from families and festival-fare lovers to vegetarians and foodies and everything in between." Gourmet dining options from San Marco Dining District restaurants BB's, Bistro Aix, The Grotto, Matthew's and Taverna will be available.

Jacksonville Food Trucks will also be serving up crowd favorites in a two-block span on Laura Street between Adams Street and Bay Street, plus night service in the One Spark After Dark lot from 8 p.m. to midnight.

Emerging artists invited to apply for grants

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida is inviting emerging individual artists from the First Coast area to apply for an Art Ventures Grant of up to $3,500. These grants are offered to help individual artists take the "next step" in their artistic development.

According to Amy Crane, Program Director, The Community Foundation, for Northeast Florida, "This is the 24th year that The Community Foundation has made Art Ventures Fund grants available to individual artists, and in that time we have made 139 grants of nearly $240,000. This year, we anticipate making 9 or 10 grants to individual artists, depending on the average amount requested."

Applicants must be at least 18 years of age, legal residents of Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau or St. Johns Counties and have resided in one of these counties for at least 12 months at the time of application. Due to the high demand for grants, artists may not receive grants in consecutive years and are only eligible for three Individual Artist grant awards in a lifetime. Individual Artist Applications are due by June 5, 2014 for grants beginning November 1, 2014.

"The generous benefactors who have given to our Art Ventures fund invested with the belief that a thriving arts community was essential to the quality of life in Jacksonville," Crane said. "As one of our funders (Mary Ann Bryan, herself an artist) put it, "We really want the First Coast to be a place that artists can call home."

Nonpartisan group hopes more women enter local politics

2015 municipal elections offer opportunities for women candidates

By Nancy Lee Bethea
Resident Community News

A growing grassroots initiative, Nine in '15, encourages qualified women to run for City Council seats, public policy boards and commissions and other offices in the 2015 municipal elections in Jacksonville. Scheduled for next March and May, voters will elect the Mayor, City Council members and constitutional officers to serve the city.

Nine in '15's primary goal is to raise awareness of the unique contributions women make to political discourse and action. Nine in '15 also strives to address the under representation of women in elected and appointed positions.

> "To represent the whole community, we need the perspectives and leadership styles of women."
>
> **Carol Thompson**
> Nine in '15 Organizer

• Plans take shape

Conceptualized during a shrimp dinner among friends, the organization now has educational materials, a logo, a mailing list and a chance to change the political landscape in Jacksonville, according to one of the group's organizers, Pam Paul. Paul spoke to a group of mostly women at a Nine in '15 meeting held Thursday, March 13 at WJCT studios.

Nine in 15's volunteer leader, Carol Thompson, also spoke at the March 13 meeting. In opening remarks, Thompson emphasized women make up half the population and half of the voters in Duval County. "To represent the whole community, we need the perspectives and leadership styles of women," she said.

• Targeting nine City Council seats

Focusing on nine City Council seats open in 2015 because of term limits, Nine in '15 exists to help women gain the confidence and harness the resources to navigate local political waters.

Eight candidates have filed to run for City Council through the Supervisor of Elections Office. Seven are women. "By no means do we support only women," she added. "We support qualified candidates, talented candidates to represent the diversity of our community."

Audrey Moran, Senior Vice President for Social Responsibility and Community Advocacy at Baptist Health, ran unsuccessfully for Mayor of Jacksonville in 2011. She backs the goals of Nine in '15.

"To support good candidates to run for office, we need to recruit great candidates with brains and abilities to be a real source of change," Moran said. "We need to encourage people and put together resources [for them]."

Moran believes more women on City Council would yield more serious debate and consensus building on important issues. In 2000, over half the City Council seats were filled by women, Moran said. "The City was booming," she added.

• Overcoming perceptions

Dr. Matthew Corrigan, Chair, Political Science and Public Affairs at the University of North Florida, attended the meeting. He said women make good leaders, but they are often reluctant to run for political office for various reasons.

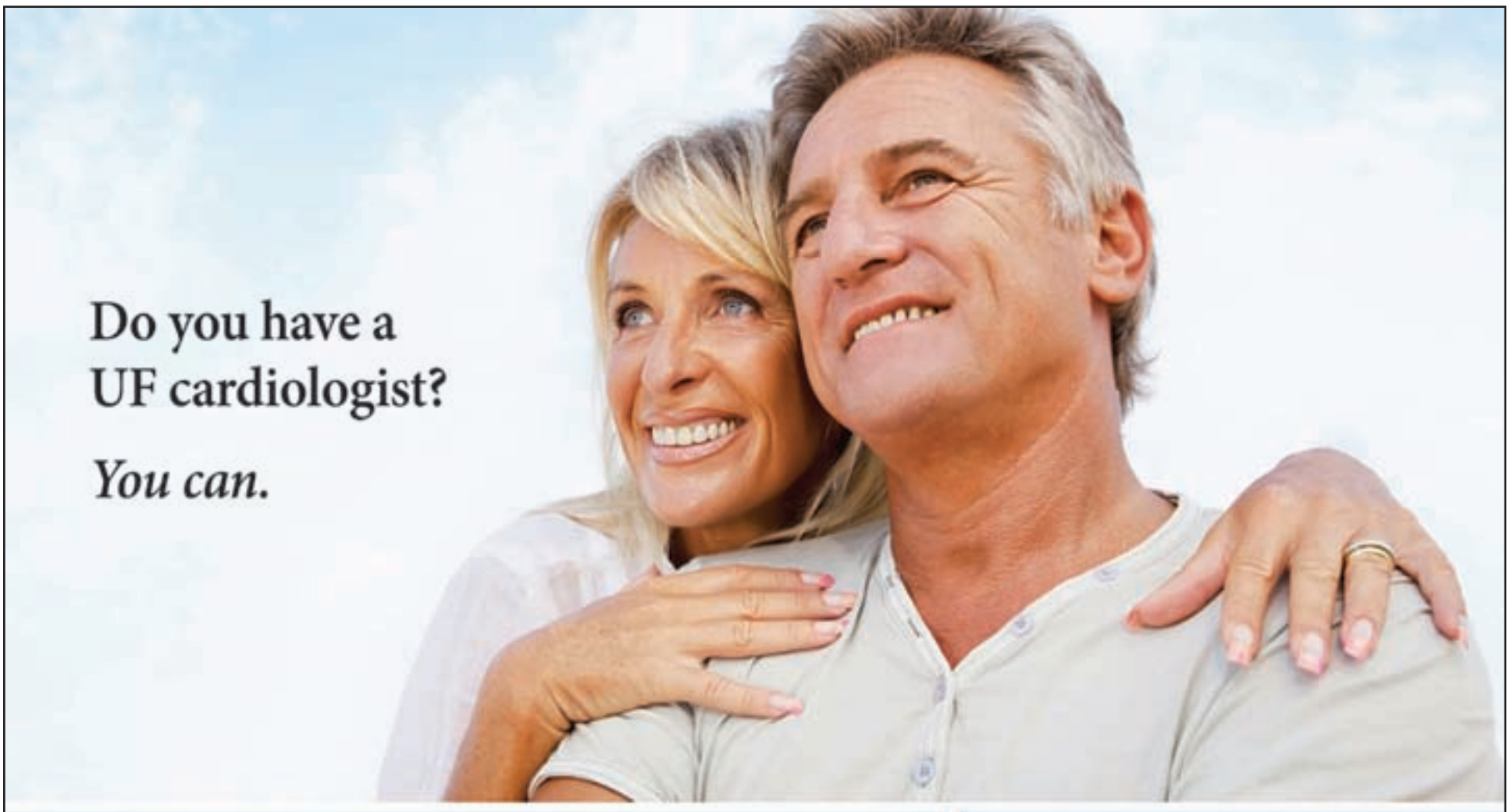
Women are much less likely than men to consider themselves qualified to run for office, Corrigan pointed out. He cited a study published by American University's Women and Politics Institute.

Female potential candidates are less competitive, less confident and more risk averse than their male counterparts. Women also react more negatively than men to many aspects of modern campaigns ("Men Rule: The Continued Under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics," Jennifer J. Lawless and Richard L. Fox).

Corrigan agrees. Women need to be encouraged, supported and funded during and after campaigns.

Nine in '15 is actually providing the encouragement, support and identification of resources, but at this time, it does not endorse or fund candidates.

To share your thoughts on Nine in '15, write to editor@residentnews.net.



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Female candidates reflect on races run and those yet to come

Jacksonville politicians, past, present and future, weigh in on running as a woman

By Nancy Lee Bethea
Resident Community News

Females are under-represented in Jacksonville's political offices. Women represent 51.5 percent of the population of Duval County, according to the 2010 United States census. Of 19 seats on City Council, only three are currently filled by women. Fifteen years ago, 10 women held City Council seats.

Is Jacksonville a man's town? Are women too intimidated, overcommitted or family-oriented to run for political office these days?

The Resident spoke to three women who have either ventured into the local political arena or plan to in 2015. All three agreed running for office is a tough decision for women. Reflecting on past races, present terms and future elections, the three shared their thoughts on women in Jacksonville politics.

"I would love to see more women run."

– Suzanne Jenkins,
Jacksonville City Councilwoman, District 4, 1999-2007

• Suzanne Jenkins

Suzanne Jenkins, an Englewood resident, began her political career as a citizen activist working within neighborhoods. Challenged by former City Council president Ginger Soud, who was Chair of Land Use and Zoning at the time, to consider running for office, Jenkins decided to run for City Council.

Successful in her campaign, Jenkins served two terms on City Council, District 4, from 1999-2007, and as Council vice president in 2001. Better communication existed between local government agencies and the Mayor's Office during her time on the Council, Jenkins said, partially due to more women holding seats. "People understood what the issues were, and how they would be voted on," Jenkins said. "With meetings now, I don't know what they're doing. There's no discussion."

Jenkins was fortunate to run for office when she did because people wanted to vote for women. This was partly due to scandals surrounding President Bill Clinton, she added.

Five candidates ran in the race, four Democrats and one Republican. "Everywhere, the Republican said, 'I'm the only Republican in the race.' So, I started saying, 'I'm the only woman in the race,'" Jenkins said. She won the run-off election even though the three Democratic candidates she defeated supported the Republican candidate.

Now co-owner of a public relations and communications firm, Jenkins said she will make herself available to anyone considering a run for political office. "I love to help people launch. I especially love to help women launch," Jenkins said. "I want to pass the baton.

"I would love to see more women run," she added. "A diverse mix is a benefit for the City. People's realities are different, and it's good to have a reflection of different realities."

• Lori N. Boyer

San Marco resident Lori N. Boyer currently serves as the City Councilwoman for District 5. Elected in 2011, Boyer said her decision to run took encouragement and reaching a point in life where she had time to commit to public service. She waited until her youngest child was in college.

In Boyer's case, the nudge came from the late United States Representative, Tillie Fowler. Boyer was nominated for an Eve Award in 2004. At an awards gathering, Fowler spoke, and she encouraged women to run for office. "It does mean something when another woman encourages you to run," Boyer said.

Currently, Boyer serves as chair of the Rules and Land Use and Zoning Committee and chair of the Task Force on Consolidation, among other things. Working with her husband, Circuit Judge Tyrie W. Boyer, and attending the Jacksonville Political Leadership Institute helped prepare her for public office, she said.

Like Jenkins, Boyer appreciates viewpoints Council members bring to the table. "Everyone has different perspectives. It enriches debate," she said.

Boyer would like to see more women on City Council. "Fifty percent of the population is women, yet the Council is not 50 percent women," Boyer added.

"It's a challenge to get women to make the commitment to run," Boyer said. "Women need a supportive spouse and family to do it. They do not need to feel guilty about time they're not at home."

As for the grassroots initiative Nine in '15, Boyer agrees with the group's efforts. "Women need to be encouraged. They might need more of a nudge [than men] to run," she added.

• Tracie Davis

Deputy Supervisor of Elections Tracie Davis said making the decision to run for Supervisor of Elections in 2015 was not easy. The Springfield resident made the decision after being encouraged by coworkers, praying and discussing pros and cons with her family.

Davis has worked at the Supervisor of Elections office since 2001, first as an Education Specialist then as both Director of Community Outreach and Director of Education and Communications. Davis was named Deputy Supervisor in 2011.

"Even though I've filed, and I'm in it to win it, I'm still going into something unknown as a woman," Davis said of her campaign. "There's a difference for women because you have a family to think about, and women provide so much, but it's not that different from men running," she added.

Her biggest challenge has been name recognition outside of the political arena. She confronts it by attending events and getting her name out there, she said.

Davis is qualifying to run by petition, so she needs 5,573 signatures or one percent of the population to support her candidacy. She's using the signature process as a marketing tool, Davis said. "People ask about me, and that leads into a conversation," she added.

The best part of running is the buzz Davis witnesses when people find out a woman is running for office. "When people hear I'm running at the events I go to, first there's surprise, then applause. It's been empowering and exciting," she said.

For more information on offices up for election in 2015 and current candidates, visit the Supervisor of Elections web site at www.duvalelections.com.

TRAFFIC FROM 1

Starting the discussion now

While Sheffield knows the increase in traffic is inevitable, he wants to be proactive about finding ways to resolve the anticipated issues.

"I don't really care what the solutions is – I just want to have a very proactive conversation about finding a solution and not get tied up in a bunch of bureaucratic back and forth," explained Sheffield. "I just want to discourage traffic from wanting to cut through our neighborhood to begin with."

District 5 Councilwoman Lori Boyer agrees that the neighborhood has an existing problem that will likely be exacerbated by East San Marco. But, she also sees cut-through traffic affecting many other areas of San Marco and thinks finding ways to slow it down is key.

"I am not disagreeing with them. In all of our more urban neighborhoods we are dealing with cut-through traffic. It's happening more and more and we have to address it," explained Boyer. "I would like to see us find a solution we can apply to other places because they are not alone."

She said the neighborhood is being hit with a "double whammy" because the new traffic pattern in the San Marco Square backs up traffic on Hendricks Avenue and the changes to Landon Middle School's drop off/pick up lane both encourage cut through traffic.

Acknowledging that it's unlikely that motorists are going to stop looking for a short-cut, Boyer said "The question becomes 'How is cut-through traffic managed in a way that is safe for children on those streets and the residents backing out of their driveways?'"

Joe Mark, a resident of Broadmoor Lane, shares Sheffield's concerns that potential solutions will just be "ping-ponged" around without any final resolutions.

When Mark and other residents met with Boyer in February, he said they came to the consensus that the easiest and most cost-effective solution was to add stop signs.

But another neighbor, Lisa Leuthhold, is opposed to additional stop signs, citing information from the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

According to this excerpt from the MUTCD, stop signs can actually cause motorists to drive faster: "…studies also showed that while speeds were sometimes reduced in the vicinity of the stop signs, the speeds between the intersections with stop signs were actually higher than they were before the stop signs were installed."

Traffic calming alternatives

Jim Robinson, the Director of Public Works for the City of Jacksonville, agrees that stop signs may not be the most effective solution in this situation.

Robinson is working with residents on alternatives and stresses the importance of following MUTCD guidelines, which are based on national research and set by the federal government.

"The reason the MUTCD is such an important document is, by following the set guidelines and mandates, there is a presumption of safety," Robinson explained. "When we depart from that, we take on risk for the City."

Dale Farrow, who lives on Avoca Place walks two of his children to preschool holding their hands "as tight as I can" while cars whiz by sometimes in excess of 50 mph. He said City government gets "so involved looking at what the manual says that they don't focus on common sense. All they need to do is walk our neighborhood between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. to see what we are talking about."

Farrow has seen verbal exchanges between frustrated residents and motorists and worries that it will eventually escalate into an altercation or an accident.

Robinson said there are several traffic calming techniques that can be used to slow traffic and discourage motorists from using certain streets.

These include speed bumps, roundabouts, narrowing the streets by using landscaping, or interrupting an intersection by forcing traffic to go one way and thereby making a straight path more circuitous.

In the case of Marco Place, Robinson thinks narrowing the extra-wide street with a curb-side island may be an effective solution.

As it is, Sheffield already sees cars speeding down his street during the morning rush hour.

"Marco Place being a big wide street – people just floor it," explained Sheffield.

Final solution needs consensus

According to Robin Robinson, former San Marco Preservation Society Board Member, there was a median planned for Marco Place on the neighborhood's original plat.

While that was obviously never built, Sheffield is concerned that building a version of that now will not only be expensive for the City to install, it also brings up the issue of who will maintain it.

According to COJ's Robinson, while the cost of these curbside islands is actually relatively low, the neighborhood would have to compete with other city projects for funding. In addition, residents would be expected to pay 50 percent of the cost of the preferred traffic calming technique.

As far as who maintains the associated landscaping treatments, Robinson said that would be the neighborhood's responsibility.

Before the City can move forward with any traffic calming technique, there has to be a 75 percent consensus from residents on the effected street via a petition process.

Mark is eager to find a resolution before construction begins and undesirable traffic patterns become ingrained.

"I support responsible growth in our community, and I also support safe roads for our children and pedestrians," explained Mark. "I believe common ground can be achieved through continued dialogue with the City of Jacksonville and our City Council representative."

Sheffield agrees.

"I am not an expert on this and I know there are pros and cons to everything. I just want a productive conversation that is forward thinking and solution oriented – not one geared toward inaction," said Sheffield. "I want it to be a pain in the neck for people to drive through the neighborhood."

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Graffiti 'ghost' artist arrested

By Kate A. Hallock
Resident Community News

On Mar. 18, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office arrested artist Kevin "Chip" Southworth as the man behind the utility box graffiti done in the fashion of the former New York artist Keith Haring. Southworth signed his work as KHG or Keith Haring's Ghost.

A petition being circulated on MoveOn.org by graphic/environmental designer Stacey Harper asks that Southworth be released without fines or jail time. His artwork on 11 utility boxes around the city has purportedly resulted in more than $1,100 in damages. The local artist could face up to five years in prison and a $5,000 fine.

"After living in Jacksonville for more than 10 years, I consistently found myself in conversations discussing Jacksonville's lack of culture, being just ordinary and what can we do as artists to make it more exciting," Harper said. "Many of us from the art community have been so excited about seeing Chip bring Keith Haring back to life in San Marco, taking away an ugly eye sore to replace with such positive inspiration artwork from the past."

According to his attorney John Phillips, Southworth, 42, is a lifelong resident of Jacksonville, a veteran of the U.S. Navy Presidential Guard and very active in the San Marco community. He has worked with the Chamber, the City Council and the Cultural Council regarding his art. Some of his art is currently hanging in the Cummer Museum and he was recently commissioned by the City of Jacksonville to paint a portrait.

The online petition also states that Southworth's wife is undergoing treatment for breast cancer and requests that the City instead commission Southworth to repaint all of the silver utility boxes around town to help pay for his wife's treatments.

City officials have stated that the dark colors Southworth used on the boxes can increase the temperature inside and cause equipment failures. City workers have been repainting the boxes with two coats of an aluminum colored paint at a cost of $110 per box.

What do you think?

Art or graffiti? Does the punishment fit the crime or should Chip Southworth be commissioned to continue his work (using appropriate paint colors to avoid damage)? Let us know what you think! Send your thoughts via email to editor@residentnews.net.

City adds accountability pages to website, scores high rating

By Kate A. Hallock
Resident Community News

Last month, City of Jacksonville Mayor Alvin Brown launched two new webpages that will provide residents information on accountability, performance and progress.

The Mayor laid the groundwork two years ago, establishing the Public Accountability Office to better manage public information and build stronger avenues of access for Jacksonville residents. In August 2012, he appointed Alexis Lambert as the new Public Accountability Officer. Lambert previously served as the Florida Attorney General's Sunshine counsel.

One of the first projects was a collaborative effort between the Public Affairs Office and the Information Technologies Division to launch JaxScore 1.0, a public-facing dashboard to provide information on the city's performance and progress toward the administration's top priorities. The online tool was previewed by COJ's Deputy Chief of Administration Cleveland Ferguson with a JAX2025 subcommittee back in November 2013 and then launched in early March.

JaxScore currently offers 35 static "scorecards" with specific performance information, such the percent of live releases under Animal Care & Protective Services (80.98 percent as of October 2013). In future versions, the City intends to provide more in-depth and interactive access to finances and performance measures that will provide more transparency and accountability into City operations. Clicking on a scorecard (www.coj.net/jaxscore-1-0.aspx) will serve up 2013 data as a PDF. The data is primarily quarterly, year over year back to 2011; however some of the information has not been updated since June 2013.

• City scores high, transparent

Later in March, during Sunshine Week, the City announced that the First Amendment Foundation rated the City of Jacksonville's website as the most transparent city website in Florida with a high score of 80 (the average score in the survey was 50 out of 100 points), and Mayor Brown announced the launch of a new transparency web page. The new web page (www.coj.net/Transparency or www.coj.net/public-accountability.aspx) provides a central location for information about the city budget, public meetings, the Mayor's Office, City Council, and city departments.

Five of the 11 buttons take the user to another page on coj.net, where navigation to one's desired goal can be more than a few clicks. The other six buttons open up a new browser window for independent websites, such as the city's Procurement Division, Building Inspection Division, the Clerk of Courts, the Property Appraiser, 630-CITY, and the Duval County Tax Collector.

Water issues bubble to surface in legislative session

By Lisa Grubba
Resident Community News

Two bi-partisan bills moving through the current legislative session could impact the health of the St. Johns River.

Senate Bill 1576 and House Bill 1313 would protect some of the state's crucial springs, provide funding for septic tank and sewage treatment plant improvements, and set deadlines for the state to monitor pollution levels in the springs.

"If we don't do what's right, our springs will get to the point where we can't fix it," said Senator Bill Montford, D-Tallahassee, at a public rally on the Old Capital steps in February. Montford is co-sponsor of SB 1576, along with four Republican senators.

The St. Johns River is "only as healthy as our springs," said St. Johns Riverkeeper's (SJRK) Lisa Rinaman. "The river is fed by 85 freshwater springs."

Florida's springs are world famous for their iridescent color from a combination of clear water, white sandy beds, and limestone rock. Now, many are algae covered and lifeless. As Florida has grown, so has pollution, from fertilizer runoff, livestock runoff, leaky septic tanks, and commercial discharge. At the same time, the water pumping into the springs from underground has decreased, reducing the ability to flush out pollutants.

The reasons for reduced spring flow are in dispute, and finger-pointing among polluters is heating up. But one fact is clear: as the springs decline, so do lakes and rivers. And that's got the attention of politicians from all across the state.

"Let this be the year that protecting our waters in Florida is cool again," said Rep. Alan Williams, D-Tallahassee, at the February rally, where he shared the podium with a dozen politicians, both Democrat and Republican.

The bi-partisan sponsorship has generated a lot of buzz among capital watchers. It's an "unusual alliance of…five strongly committed senate committee chairs," said Ryan Smart of the Florida Conservation Coalition, an environmental group started by Senator Bob Graham.

SB 1576 was drafted by Sen. David Simmons, R-Altamonte Springs, and was initially opposed by business and agricultural groups. Twenty-four groups got together, including the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Farm Bureau, and Boat U.S., and sent a letter with their concerns to the co-sponsors. One concern was that the bill required business, homeowners and municipalities to comply with stricter regulation even if state funding isn't available. Sen. Simmons amended language early in the session to address that concern.

The letter also said that new legislation isn't needed. "Florida has the regulatory tools it needs to meet the kinds of water supply and quality challenges this legislation seeks to address. These programs simply need to be fully funded and conscientiously implemented," it reads. But FCC's Smart said because there are deadlines, the legislation "forces policies that have been on the books 30 or 40 years."

House Speaker Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, initially said he didn't expect to see water policy addressed this year. He said funds would be put toward restoration, but not prevention. But fellow Republican Sen. Simmons pushed back on that at the February rally. "I've spoken with other legislators and it's growing. We will establish a water policy in this state, not only for this year, but every year."

SJRK's Rinaman said she sees Weatherford's position "softening" due to public input and bipartisan support. At the least, 2015's incoming leaders have expressed a willingness to tackle policy issues.

The projected $1.3 billion state budget surplus makes projects of all types easier than in recent years. Governor Rick Scott's proposed budget includes $1.4 billion in water restoration projects, after years of cuts to environmental budgets. Of that, $55 million is earmarked for springs.

But Rinaman said that about half of the springs budget, or $25 million, is for developing alternative water supply plans, such as the proposals to pump water out of the St. Johns River. SJRK's position has been that the state should increase water conservation and tighten withdrawal permits before spending the money to siphon water from the river. "It's robbing Peter to pay Paul," said Rinaman.

The bills will likely be amended as they move through various subcommittees during the two-month session. To track the bills and their votes, go to www.myfloridahouse.gov, click on "bills" in the top toolbar, and enter bill number 1576 (Senate) or 1313 (House) in the box below. The session ends in April.

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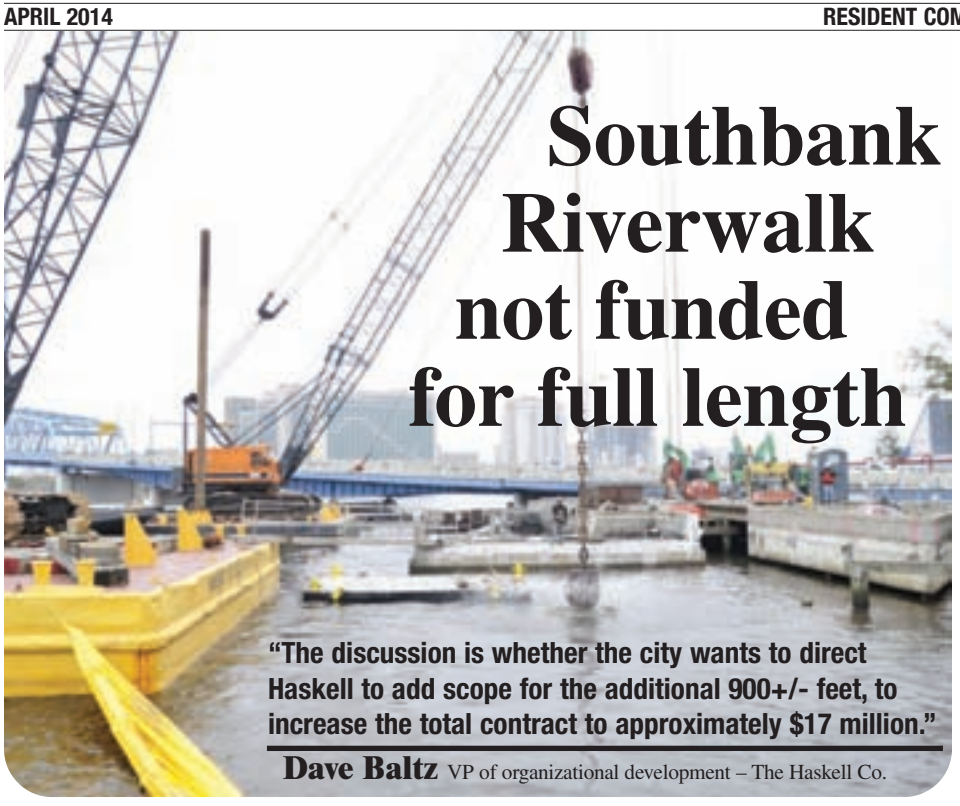
Southbank Riverwalk not funded for full length



"The discussion is whether the city wants to direct Haskell to add scope for the additional 900+/- feet, to increase the total contract to approximately $17 million."

Dave Baltz VP of organizational development – The Haskell Co.

By Kate A. Hallock
Resident Community News

Last September Mayor Alvin Brown and Chief Administrative Officer Karen Bowling announced the official kickoff of the Southbank Riverwalk project with intentions of completing it within a year, to the tune of nearly $15 million.

Recently, the project has come under scrutiny by members of City Council for what appears to be a $2 million budget deficit needed to complete the last 900 feet of the boardwalk from the Wyndham Jacksonville Riverwalk Hotel to the Duval County School Board building.

When legislation was filed back in 2010 for funding of three major Downtown improvement projects (Southbank Riverwalk replacement, Friendship Fountain restoration and Metropolitan Park redevelopment), the improvements were to include replacement of the current Southbank Riverwalk structure with a more durable walking surface that would add 40 years to its life span, and update Riverwalk fixtures such as trash receptacles, lights and railing.

According to a legislative summary issued on Jan. 14, 2010, City Administrative Bill 2010-0062 appropriated $11,894,138 from various downtown project accounts to provide funding for substantial rebuilding of the Southbank Riverwalk.

Eight years ago an earlier bill (2006-932) was enacted to appropriate $700,000 from the Riverwalk Development Account to provide funding for engineering work on the Southbank Riverwalk and $1,335,000 for evaluation and maintenance of bulkheads along the St. John's River under the 2005-2010 Five-Year Capital Improvement Program.

Further, Bill 2010-0062 also amended the 2009-14 Capital Improvement Program to establish the Southbank Riverwalk Improvements Project for a total amount of $32,636,073, of which $16,270,669 was slated for expenditure in FY09-10.

In summary, the Southbank Riverwalk project had somewhere between $13,929,138 and $16,270,669 set aside for its replacement, yet the project was kicked off in September 2013 at $14.9 million.

Scope creep or insufficient RFP?

A legislative fact sheet dated Jan. 4, 2010 relating to Bill 2010-0062 indicates that when the Office of [then] Mayor John Peyton and the Public Works Department approved the bill there was no contract/agreement approval or negotiations ongoing with a developer. The RFP (request for proposal) had not yet been issued, but city officials must have been confident that the project would not exceed the high end of the amount set aside, that is $16,270,669.

The question is whether the RFP included the 900-foot section extending past the Wyndham Hotel.

Work crews started demolishing the 3,600-foot section in February, but the City's $15 million replacement budget would only build back 2,700 feet according to Public Works Director Jim Robinson, who believed that there was no more money in the budget.

Without the additional $2 million, the walkway around the Duval County School Board's offices and part of the Wyndham Hotel would not be replaced.

According to Dave Baltz, vice president of organizational development with The Haskell Co., the developer for the project, Haskell's contract is for approximately $15 million for the currently contracted scope of work, which apparently did not include the 900 feet in question.

"The discussion is whether the city wants to direct Haskell to add scope for the additional 900+/- feet, to increase the total contract to approximately $17 million," stated Baltz in an email. "We are within the contract budget for the currently authorized scope of work. Which is to say, there is no 'overrun' with respect to our contract."

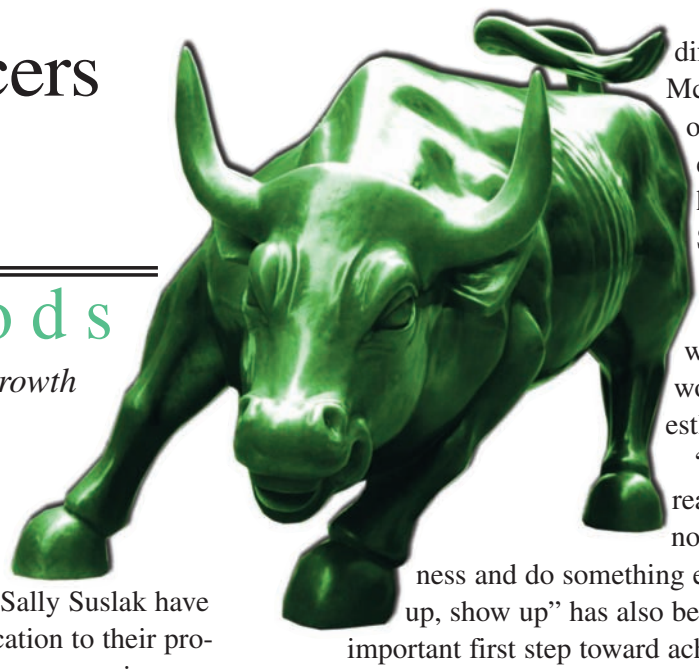
Public Works Department Director James Robinson said "The last 900 feet was deducted from the project in order to comply with the $15 million budget for the project. The price and length was negotiated at the same time, based on the design and build process by Haskell."

District 8 Councilwoman Denise Lee introduced a bill late last month for "emergency approval" to transfer the money for the project, ensuring the 3,600-foot Downtown boardwalk would be completed; however, the emergency bill fell short by two votes as other Council members wanted to take time to confirm that $2 million would cover those 900 feet. The bill was to head to the committee level the week of Mar. 31.

New NEFAR officers are bullish on neighborhoods

McMorrow and Suslak look forward to continued growth

By Susan D. Brandenburg
Resident Community News



Real estate royalty in Jacksonville, Linda McMorrow and Sally Suslak have earned their sterling reputations through hard work and dedication to their profession. Even the names they have chosen for their respective companies, Legends and Traditions, are testimony to their determination to maintain an ongoing standard of excellence.

McMorrow and Suslak are president and president-elect of NEFAR (The Northeast Florida Association of Realtors), which provides its more than 5,000 members promotional activities, professional development, standards administration, media relations, and political advocacy. In addition to representing the entire Northeast Florida area, as realtors and residents on either side of the St. John's River, the two women have the two "fiercely loyal" ***Resident Community News*** neighborhoods well-covered.

During what she calls the recent "little difficulty" with the economy, Linda McMorrow noted that NEFAR meetings and other regular places where realtors gathered were not well-attended. She rallied her agents at Legends of Real Estate in San Jose, encouraging them to "Get up, dress up and show up!"

When people asked her repeatedly when (or whether) she thought the market would recover, McMorrow responded honestly that she was "cautiously optimistic."

"You have to be optimistic to be in the real estate business," she said. "If you're not, you might as well get out of the business and do something else." Today, her motto of "get up, dress up, show up" has also become familiar to NEFAR members as an important first step toward achieving success in life as well as real estate.

Sally Suslak of Traditions Realty in Riverside has been a licensed realtor since 1977 and says that she has seen more than one recession during her career. "Even when interest rates rose to 17 and 18 percent, people still bought and sold houses," she said. "It's a matter of being creative."

The "big boom," as far as Suslak is concerned, was artificial as evidenced by the fact that it became easier to qualify for buying than for renting. "The market today is very much on the upswing," Suslak said. "And one of the things we can do as a group at NEFAR is to help make people more aware of the value of using a trusted realtor in a real estate transaction. People are being cautious with their choices and actually taking the time to look for exactly the right house to buy, and that's good for all of us."

During what she calls the recent "little difficulty" with the economy, Linda McMorrow noted that NEFAR meetings were not well-attended. She rallied her agents at Legends of Real Estate in San Jose, encouraging them to "Get up, dress up and show up!"

Upbeat, can-do attitudes inspire

Positive and upbeat … both Suslak and McMorrow reflect an optimistic and confident attitude that is certain to inspire others.

"If you're a real estate agent, this is a wonderful time to be in the business," said McMorrow. "For instance, we brought 900 new members into NEFAR last year and this year, we're off and running. If you're a seller, it is a great time to put your house on the market because our inventories are so low and prices are going up again."

For buyers, McMorrow noted, the interest rates have somewhat stabilized – still under 5% - and new construction in the State of Florida in 2013 went up 32% over 2012 – and it's still climbing. So it's a good time to buy, as well.

"My passion and specialty is in any and all aspects of residential and investment property in older established areas," said Suslak. A resident of an historic home in Riverside, Suslak is a past Riverside-Avondale Preservation Chairman and board member who helps older neighborhoods educate themselves and determine whether or not a historic designation is right for them.

"I've lived in urban and suburban historic districts my entire life," she said. "Today, younger people are looking toward historic neighborhoods because they are closer to Downtown and family appealing. As with most of the historic districts, Riverside and Avondale have achieved high walkability scores on a national scale. That's important to a lot of people nowadays – having the grocery store and school within walking distance of your home. There is also a warm neighborhood feeling…talking to people as you walk and making friends as you go."

"If you're a real estate agent, this is a wonderful time to be in the business."

Linda McMorrow

"One of the things we can do as a group at NEFAR is to help make people more aware of the value of using a trusted realtor in a real estate transaction."

Sally Suslak

NEFAR in good hands

And, speaking of friends, Linda McMorrow has been a friend and partner to her identical twin, Selby Kaiser, all her life. Co-brokers at The Legends of Real Estate, the sisters have achieved legendary status as leaders, individually as well as together. Each of them has been named NEFAR's Realtor of the Year and chosen as a NEFAR Circle of Honor recipient for achievements during their 30 years of service to the community.

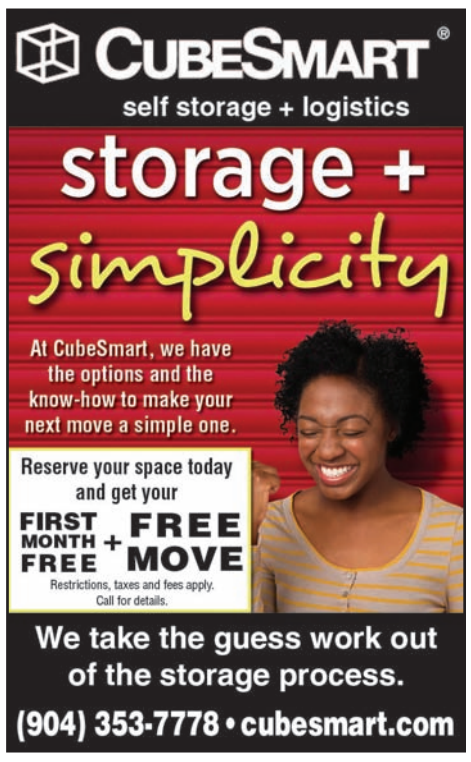
"Selby was a school teacher before real estate and when you're a good teacher, you're a good manager. She has a way of motivating people and focusing on what they need to do, while I'm pretty good at providing a level of service to my clients that keeps them coming back. We're a good team," McMorrow said, smiling, "and we now have a fabulous group of 40 agents in our three Legends locations."

McMorrow and her husband, Tom, live in Epping Forest, not far from the Legends of Real Estate location in San Jose. "We have three wonderful grandsons, two who live in San Marco and attend Bishop Kenny High School," she said. "We're blessed that they are so close."

Married to Walter Suslak for 42 years and very much a "traditional" neighbor in the historic district where they reside, Sally Suslak of Traditions Realty, LLC, says she always falls back on her mother's favorite advice: "Just do the best you can and don't worry about what anybody else is doing."

She noted that there is plenty of business for everyone in today's market and she has become a "go to" person for other realtors who have questions about historic districts. She looks forward to furthering that leadership role at NEFAR next year, and for now, is gladly shadowing Linda McMorrow.

"Linda is fabulous," said Suslak. "She is a pro and a great role model. When you take on a job like the presidency of NEFAR, representing more than 5,000 members, it's important to have a strong role model in place. Linda McMorrow is that person."



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MOVERS & SHAKERS

Girl Scouts honor Women of Distinction at 25th annual luncheon

Women of Distinction: Jennifer Chapman, Carmen Townsend, Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, Marsha Oliver, Allison Korman Shelton and Dr. Pamela Chally

The 25th Annual Women of Distinction luncheon, held Mar, 12 at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, honored six local women and benefited the Girl Scouts of Gateway Council. Co-chairs Cheryl Riddick and Karen Wolfson were excited about this year's honorees, and about raising much-needed funds for Girl Scouts.

"The first time I was ever president of anything was my Girl Scout troop," Karen Wolfson said. "I think if Girl Scouting could become an opportunity for more girls, then some of the other issues we have in our community for young women might not exist."

The honorees were Jennifer Chapman, a director with Fidelity Investments, an entrepreneur, and a community advocate; Dr. Pamela Chally, Dean of the Brooks College of Health at UNF; Marsha Oliver, spokesperson for Duval County Public Schools whose leadership experiences have earned her numerous honors; Allison Korman Shelton, Vice President, Marketing and Community Relations for Stellar and who serves on the boards of many non-profit organizations; Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, a foreign policy expert, serving on numerous presidential campaigns and a Visiting Distinguished Scholar at UNF; and Carmen Townsend, a remarkable woman and the mother of the late J.T. Townsend, who started the J.T. Townsend Foundation.

Girl Scouts of Gateway Council serves over 13,000 girls in North Florida. Membership is open to any girl age 5 to 17 and all adults over 18. For more information, contact Jennifer Simmons at (904) 421-3487 or jsimmons@girlscouts-gateway.org.

R&S Framing celebrates 40 years

In 1974 Tom Reninger started R&S Picture Framing, providing local artists with a source for ready-made picture frames. The business soon expanded and began offering custom framing as well at 5923 St. Augustine Rd. In 1991 Tom's son Sean and his wife Sara bought the business.

This year marks a milestone for R&S Picture Framing as they celebrate 40 years in business. While the recent economic downturn has provided some tough challenges they feel their attention to customer service has seen them through the worst of it and they are looking forward to serving the community for many years to come.

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San Jose resident named Social Worker of Year

Jennifer Martin, manager of Psychosocial, Bereavement and Community Grief at Community Hospice, was awarded Social Worker of the Year for 2014 by the regional chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The award recognizes an individual who has made an impact in their community through advocacy, education and support.

"Being nominated and selected by social work peers means so much to me because it shows there is appreciation for the work I do on behalf of clients, patients, their family members, and the social work profession in leading and supporting up and coming social workers," said Martin. "Having said that, my own success can be attributed to tremendous support, encouragement, and guidance from so many others over the years, be they social workers, nurses, doctors, friends and family."

Beth Shorstein, LCSW, chairperson of the Northeast Florida Unit of NASW, said the work Martin performs is of vital importance within the community, as families and individuals are particularly vulnerable at the end of their lives.

Martin began her career with Community Hospice in 2004. She earned her Bachelor of Social Work in 1989 and master's degree in social work from Florida State University.

San Marco Bookstore hosts cookbook signing

Several of the contributors to the new Intuition Aleworks cookbook participated in a book signing at San Marco Bookstore on Mar. 6, including co-author Robin Rutenberg, Taverna owner and Chef Sam Efron, photographer Laura Evans, co-author Cari Sanchez-Potter, Jodi Kasten, Chef Scott Schwartz of 29 South and San Marco Bookstore owner Desiree Bailey. Guests enjoyed Intuition beer samples and a Taverna beer cheese fondue.

BOA honors JFCS as Neighborhood Builders award recipient

Bank of America hosted a festive reception on Feb. 26 honoring Jewish Family & Community Services as the 2013 Neighborhood Builders Award recipient. Held at The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, the event brought together the Who's Who of Jacksonville nonprofits in a celebration of JFCS and the award, which recognizes a local high-performing nonprofit that has made a significant impact addressing needs related to community development, critical needs or workforce development and education. As a Neighborhood Builders Award recipient, JFCS receives a $200,000 unrestricted grant and leadership training from Bank of America.

Stephen Goldman (Board Member of JFCS and SVP & Sr. Leader for NE FL, Commercial Banking at Bank of America), Colleen Rodriguez (Executive Director of JFCS), Francine Kempner (Board President of JFCS), Greg Smith (Market President for Bank of America)

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Sorority alumni group celebrates 100 productive years

The Jacksonville Alumni Panhellenic Association (JAPA) will celebrate its centennial anniversary this year. The 130-member group gave over 15,000 volunteer hours in 2013 through work with local churches, libraries, Scout troops and more. Members also raised money togive four scholarships to area girls who graduated high school in 2013, totaling approximately $6,000.

Neighborhood residents who belong to the association include Martha Van der Mallie, Janet Booth, Marilyn Kerr, Molly Knight, Jane Chadbourne, Beverly Helganz, Holly McMurry, Kellie Prusieki, Amy Swift, Emily Williamson, Beverly Barrs, Peggy Clark, Paige Hayes, Theresa Lahey, Barbara Maurer, Nancy Mahon, Carol Michael and Lynn Mickler.

Watson Realty earns highest honor for second year in a row

The Diamond Award was presented to Watson Realty Corp. during an event that drew a record audience of 2,500 top real estate professionals from nearly 20 countries.

Watson Realty Corp. was awarded Leading Real Estate Companies of the World's (LeadingRE) highest honor, the Diamond Award, at the network's annual Conference at the Wynn Las Vegas on Feb. 26.

Presented annually, the award recognizes outstanding performance in all of LeadingRE's business programs and is given to only one affiliate of this global organization. This is the second consecutive year Watson Realty Corp. has won the Diamond and the fourth time in the award's 12-year history.

"It is an honor to have won the Diamond Award four times," said William A. Watson Jr., founder and chairman of Watson Realty Corp. "This incredible accomplishment illustrates the hard work and extra efforts by the entire Watson Realty Corp. family and its affiliated companies. It is a true example of the type of teamwork we apply to every single transaction we handle. Our sellers and buyers can rest assure that they will they will receive the same exemplary service for their transaction."

In addition to the Diamond, Watson Realty Corp. received other prestigious accolades, including awards for Outgoing Referral Production, Outgoing Sales Production, Top 5 Most Outgoing Closings (third place), Top 5 Pinnacle Award (second place), Institute Outstanding Participation, OUR WORLD Community Engagement and the Rainmaker Lead Generation Award. The Watson Realty Corp. marketing department also received honorable mention for internal and consumer promotions.

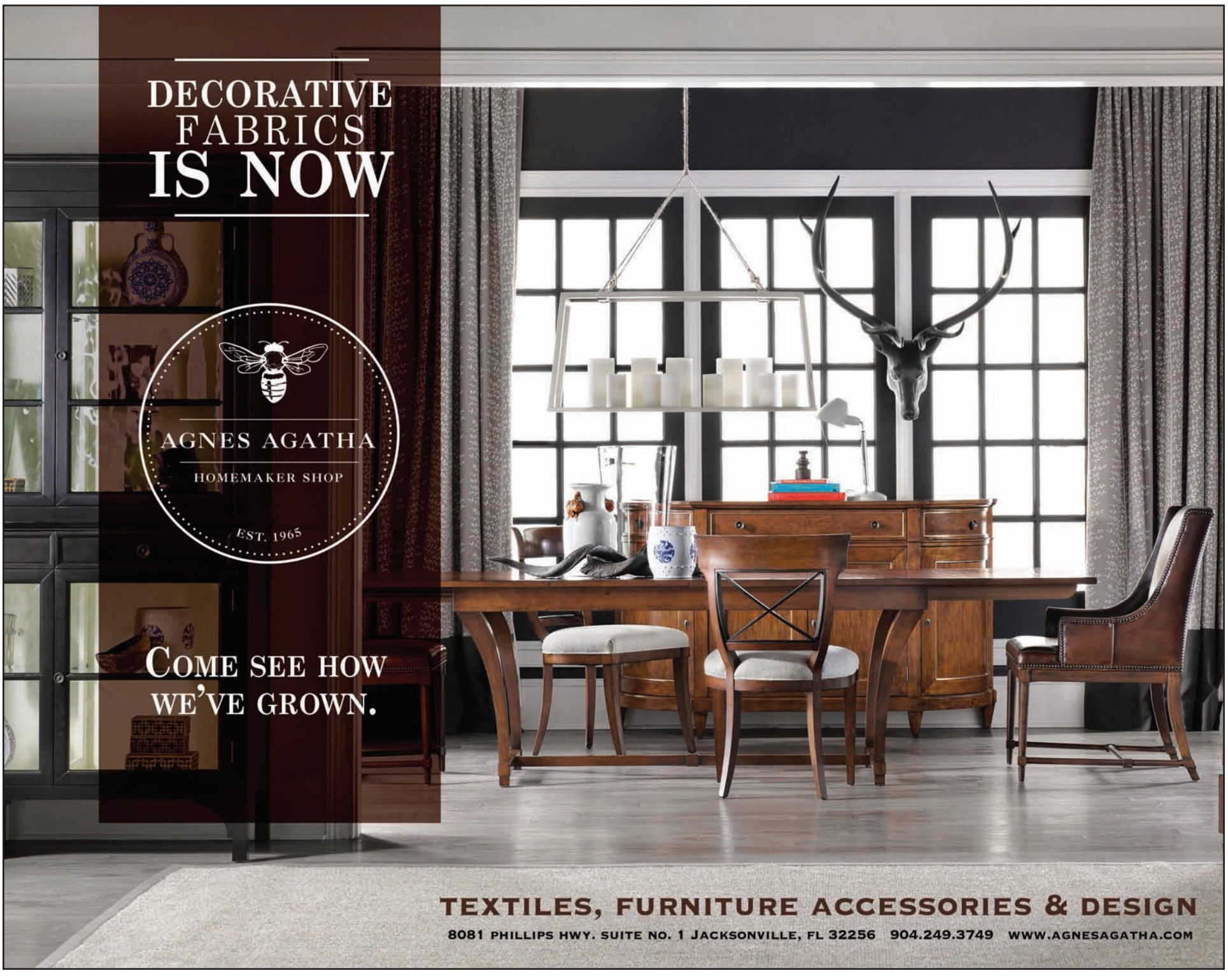
New neighbor arrives on San Marco Boulevard

Client Focused Media (CFM) has a new headquarters to run their operations in Jacksonville. The newly acquired building, located at 1611 San Marco Blvd. will house the multi-media group in the San Marco-area, after a move from their former headquarters in the WJCT Studios at 100 Festival Park Ave. The new space incorporates two floors and approximately 4,700 square-feet of space for the company. CFM President Mike White, when asked about his move to the area, was proud of their impact on the local area already. "We have clients that we take out to lunch and I would be willing to bet we've already spent $1,000 on lunches in our first week," said White.

Sidney Gefen pens his Second Edition

As if climbing another mountain was what longtime civic leader Sid Gefen needed to do at his ripe age of 93, regardless, he's still at it in a literary sense. In his latest release– titled, Still Climbing Mountains, Still Planting Trees, Gefen continues to tell the stories that have led him through an extraordinary life as a businessman and pioneer of the tourism industry.

In the second edition to the original titled, Climb Another Mountain, Plant Another Tree, stories resonate about the love of family, recent accomplishments and memories that were yet to be told in the first edition. The book is a great take home for any history buff who wishes to learn about one of Jacksonville's greatest contributors. Copies of Gefen's latest book can be signed out at the Main Library Downtown. This compilation of achievements and celebration of a life well lived will forever be remembered by his family, friends and others he has touched along the way.



Paula Skitsko, Karen McCombs with Honorary Chair Elli Zimmerman

MOCA CELEBRATES A MILESTONE IN STYLE

With a cocktail party under the stars, fine art auctions and elegant décor throughout the museum, MOCA's most dedicated patrons arrived poised and ready for the MOCA Classic – celebrating 90 years. Throughout the history of the arts in Jacksonville, one thing has remained a constant during the years of transition from official titles and physical locations, the commitment to the highest quality art programming and the outpouring of support throughout the region. The transcendence from a Fine Arts Society to the Jacksonville Art Museum, then the Jacksonville Museum of Modern Art and now MOCA, the future continues to look bright, despite the trials and tribulations of modern times.

Brandon McCray with Ken Klein

Chase Zimmerman, Lisa Page and Elle Camp

Jim and Susan Towler

SPRING FOR THE ARTS INDEED

The 10th Annual Cathedral Arts Project Spring for the Arts gala celebrated its mission– while raising over half a million dollars in one evening. The goal of helping enrich the quality of life in Northeast Florida by celebrating the creative spirit of Jacksonville's youth was in full effect, as a youth performance kicked off the live auction.

The milestone fundraising effort will go a long way in providing access to instruction in the visual and performing arts. Cathedral Arts programs empower underserved, school-aged children to succeed in all areas of their lives. Currently, the programs serve 2,145 students two afternoons each week during the school year and summer, providing quality, standards-based instruction in dance, music, theatre and visual arts at no charge, thanks to support from patrons and donors. The ever-growing event was held at the Deerwood Country Club on March 7 and tallied over 650 in attendance.

Jeff and Debbie Parker, Rebecca Callahan, Linda and Ed Salem, Michael Koren and Elana Schrader

Dave and Robin Albaneze with Sue and Voyne Stepp

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8. Hesitation to exercise or loss of stamina
9. Persistent lameness or stiffness
10. Difficulty breathing, urinating, or defecating

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A GATSBY-STYLED SOIREE RAISES A TOAST, FUNDS

The parents of Hendricks Day School students gathered at Epping Forest Yacht and Country Club for a festive and fun Gatsby-themed event. The evening fundraiser titled, Bright Young Things, raised much needed funding that helps to reduce rising costs in education. "Tonight is a night of celebration of the fact that we're such a wonderful family at Hendricks, and of course, all of the proceeds to the evening go toward supporting the children," said Hendricks Day School's Head of School, Linda Jackson. In addition, each faculty member has donated their services as offerings for fundraising, as they all have something fantastic to share when it comes to enrichment of the whole child. The event took place March 8.

Aronson Kagiliery and Christine Light

Julie Luken and Melanie Rodgers

Hendricks Day School Board Chair Jeffrey Durfee with his wife Regina with Head of School Linda Jackson and her husband Steve

Holt and Jessie Harrell with Leslie and Will Navidi

Baptist Health CEO Hugh Greene with CAP Executive Director Rev. Kimberly Hyatt and Florida Blue CEO Patrick Geraghty

JFCS GALA A HUGE SUCCESS

Jewish Family & Community Services, a 96-year-old social service agency for children and families, drew several hundred people to its "You Can Count on Us" gala Mar. 6 at the Marriott Southpoint.

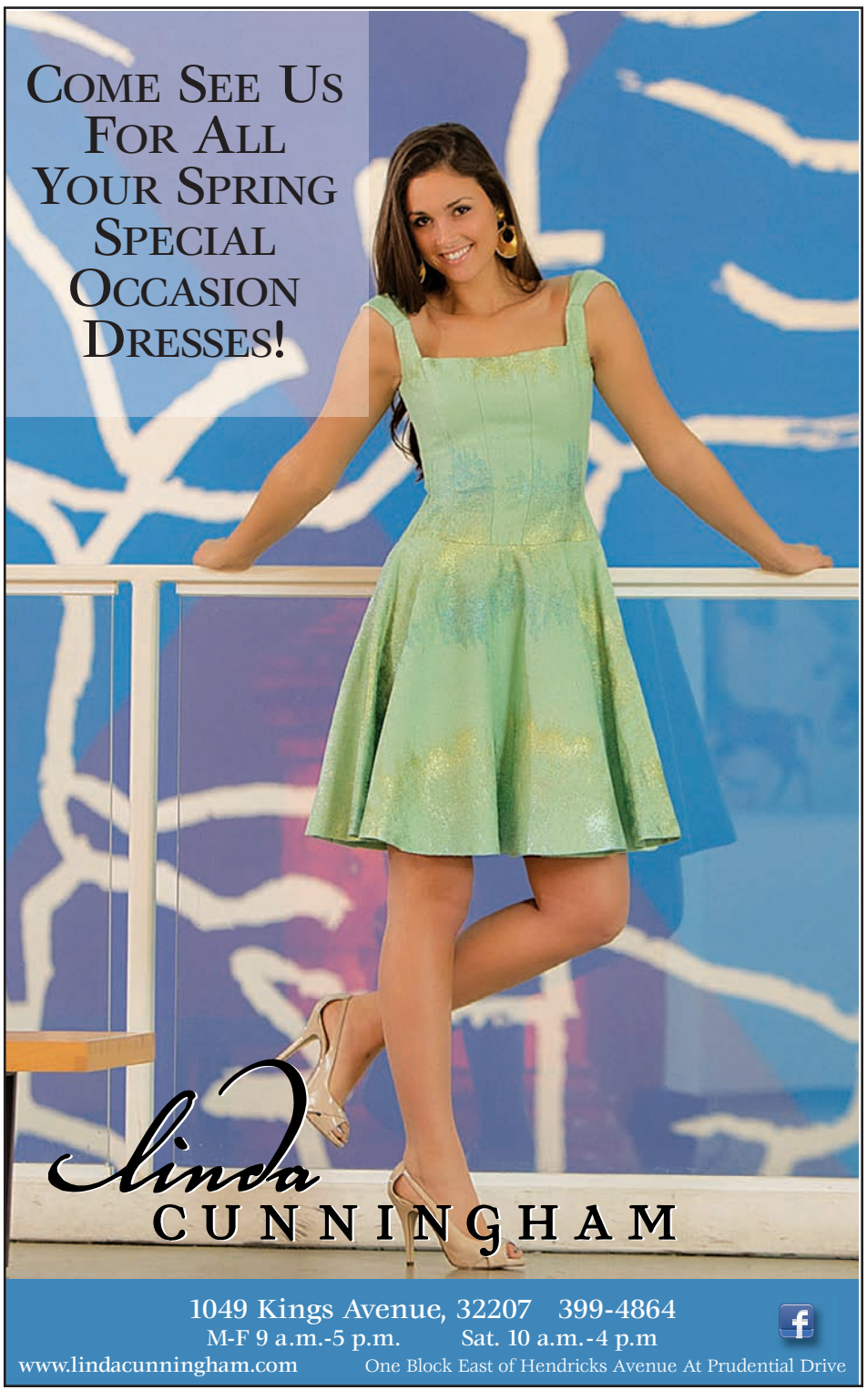
Wayne and Delores Barr Weaver and Lawrence and Linda DuBow served as honorary co-chairs for the event, which celebrated JFCS' work, and raised money for its programs, which serve about 15,000 people a year in Northeast Florida. Former PGA Tour and WNBA executive Donna Orender emceed the event.

Former JFCS Board Presidents Jim Kempner and David Garfinkel

Stu and Kathy Triebwasser with Ken and Jeri Braiman

Wendy and Dr. Barry Efron, Paul and Lorry Rothstein and Gail Furman

Howard Caplan, Chairman of the JFCS Board with Mark Green, Jewish Federation of Jacksonville Foundation President



Special Olympics Summer Games kick off April 5

Special Olympics Florida serves over 24,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities, including more than 1,000 in Duval County. Those athletes have been training to participate in track and field, bocce, soccer and tennis for the Area 5 Summer Games at Atlantic Coast High School on Apr. 5. A kickoff breakfast was held last month for supporters, including Sally Hazelip, Executive Director, North Florida School of Special Education, Beth Meyer, Acting Chief of Disabled Services, City of Jacksonville, Kelley Boree, Director of Parks & Recreation, Carolyn Williams, Deputy Director, Jacksonville Public Library and Sherry Wilson, Chief of Recreation & Community Programming (pictured right).“The City of Jacksonville is honored to partner with Special Olympics as we celebrate the ability in all of us!” said Meyer.

Westside woman’s home renovated thanks to Sawyer Gas

Employees of Sawyer Gas, 4110 University Blvd. Ct., spent a rainy morning late last month sprucing up the Plymouth Place home of Jo Ann Brinkley. They painted walls and will put in some new flooring, but more importantly, Sawyer Gas District General Manager Derek Morgan unexpectedly found – and corrected – a wiring problem that could have later resulted in a fire.

Sawyer Gas, the largest propane gas supplier in the area, has a history of serving others in the community, but this partnership with Operation New Hope, a nonprofit community development company, was a first time venture. The gas company also presented Operation New Hope representative Robert Ownby with a check for $1,000.

“We’ve put about $10,000 into the home already and when Sawyer Gas reached out to us we knew there was such a need for this individual, it seemed like a great fit,” said Ownby.

The owner of the home was thrilled with the project. “I’ve waited two years and they are doing a marvelous job,” said Brinkley. “I’m so appreciative.”

The Blood Alliance gives back to local organizations

Donors who gave blood and supported The Blood Alliance (TBA), Northeast Florida’s sole provider of blood to all area hospitals, during the last quarter of 2013 contributed to feeding the area’s hungry and helped to fund critical research for children suffering from deadly rare myopathies. Checks were presented to two local organizations, Second Harvest and the Joshua Frase Foundation on Feb. 26 at The Blood Alliance at Deerwood. Wayne Rieley, president and CEO of Second Harvest, and Paul Frase, president of the Joshua Frase Foundation accepted their checks from The Blood Alliance’s COO, Ed Lawson.

The Blood Alliance donated $1 to the Second Harvest North Florida food bank for each blood donation made at any of its donor centers during the week before Thanksgiving. TBA also donated $1 to the Joshua Frase Foundation for each blood donation made at any of its many area donor centers throughout the month of December -- to honor the brief life of Joshua Frase, and the future lives his Foundation will save with funding for critical medical research in Myotubular Myopathy.

This is the third year that The Blood Alliance has given back to Second Harvest and the Joshua Frase Foundation by way of matching funds to donors who have made blood donations.

Children hang on every word of celebrity storytellers

Lee Kaywork, CEO of Family Support Services, poses with one of the teens in the FSS Just Like Me theatrical program. Mikia said that it was his first time in costume as a jaguar, but he enjoyed the opportunity to help the Episcopal Children's Services Wild Reading Safari benefit. Kaywork read portions of *Oliver Twist*, a fitting story for the St. Nicholas-based children's support center.

The Honorable Ashley Smith-Juarez, Duval County School Board, Family Support Services board member, and Northeast Florida Regional Director for the Clinton Foundation, holds on to her hard hat as she reads *Jackhammer Sam* to the audience at the Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens' Playpark stage.

Children's Home Society honors child advocates

Children's Home Society award recipients along with Executive Director Kymberly Cook, Chair of Board of Directors Trish Kaputska, and Board member and event Emcee Rob Sweeting

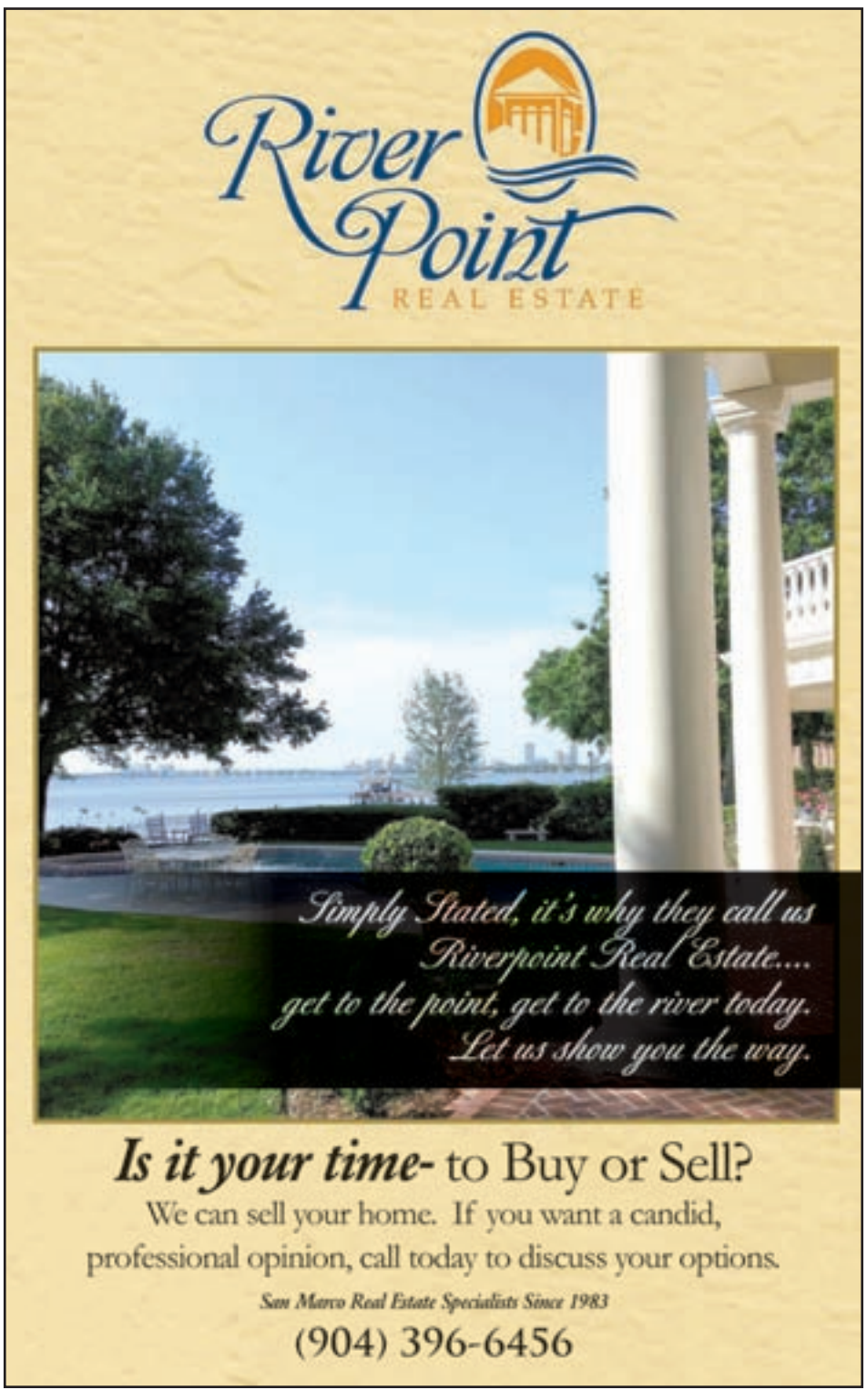
The Children's Home Society of Florida honored the excellent work of individuals and organizations in assisting fragile children in the community at its annual Under the Tent Awards Luncheon on Mar. 26.

This year's honorees include Michael D. Aubin, president of Wolfson Children's Hospital, as Child Advocate of the Year; Donald and Mary Riggle as Volunteers of the Year; District 4 Councilman Don Redman as Public Official of the Year; Acosta Sales & Marketing as Corporate Citizen of the Year, and Vanessa Austin as Foster Parent of the Year.

"It is one of our greatest pleasures to recognize those who make such wonderful contributions to the lives of our community's children and families," said Kymberly Cook, executive director.

Children's Home Society of Florida, Buckner Division serves approximately 10,000 children and families throughout the Northeast Florida each year, offering services that help break the cycles of abuse in families, heal the pain for traumatized children, guide teens to successfully transition into adulthood and create strong, loving families through adoption.

Reese Riggle, president of the San Marco Preservation Society, with his parents Mary and Donald Riggle, who were named Children's Home Society Volunteers of the Year



Annual River Cleanup Day

The 19th annual River Celebration and Cleanup was a success by every measure. There were more than 70 cleanup sites (up from 50 sites in 2013) over greater Jacksonville. The numbers include over 1,100 volunteers (pretty much the same as last year) who collected hundreds of pounds of trash from the streets and river banks, where a Jacuzzi tub, mattresses and children's play cars were found. People came out in organized groups or on their own to help keep the city and its neighborhoods beautiful.

Debbie and Jeff Parker, their son Josh Parker and his friend Matt Flynn, both students at Bolles School, cleaning up at Riverfront Park (River Rd and Landon Rd). Josh is the president of the River Dogs Club, whose mission is to promote awareness and appreciation for the St. Johns River

Bolles student Alexander McIntyre at Southside Park

Site captain Andrew Dickson, Parks Chairman of the San Marco Preservation Society, with Steve McIntyre

Alexander McIntyre with his younger brother Paul at Southside Park

Bolles student Jack Swinson cleaning up at Southside Park

Harry and Kathy Macaulay cleaning up Balis Park in San Marco Square

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That time of year again

Watering and fertilizing reminders

By Lisa Grubba, Resident Community News

The next time you buy a case of bottled water, open up half of it and pour it out onto your lawn. If that seems like a waste, it's what the experts say we Floridians do all the time. From JEA to the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) to the University of Florida Extension Service (UF IFAS), all warn that we are using 50% of our fresh drinking water to irrigate our lawns.

And now that the SJRWMD is projecting that we are reaching our limit for groundwater pumping, all are united in the same message: wise watering and reducing fertilizer runoff are more important than ever.

The SJRWMD has established watering limits, adopted by the City of Jacksonville. Under the Clean Air Act, the city is also required to establish fertilizer ordinances, which cities around the state have been doing. Both SJRWMD and the City refer to UF IFAS for best fertilizer practices.

Below are quick guides to post and refer to throughout the growing season.

Irrigation

City irrigation ordinances changed with Daylight Saving Time. From March to November the following rules apply:

- No watering between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Odd number addresses, no address, or those ending N – Z: Wednesday and Saturday
- Even number addresses or those ending A – M: Thursday and Sunday
- Non-residential addresses: Tuesday and Friday
- Apply up to 3/4 inch or less water per cycle, but not more than one hour per zone (SJRWMD).
- Exceptions: hand-held watering devices, micro-watering devices, establishing new landscaping, after fertilizing, or system maintenance and repair.
- The ordinance applies to all water sources, including private wells, but not golf courses, agricultural crops, nurseries, athletic fields, or other intensive recreational areas.

Additional Resources

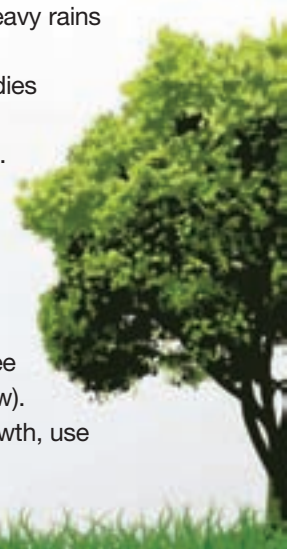
- Training for homeowners, landscape professionals, builders and developers from Florida Yards a nd Neighborhoods (University of Florida Extension Service), http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu or (904) 255-7450. JEA has a free service to check sprinkler systems and tailor an irrigation schedule: call 866-664-8644. JEA is sponsoring workshops to help homeowners perform a free Do-It-Yourself Home Energy and Water Evaluation survey. Classes are from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, Apr. 12, May 17, or June 14. Register at www.greenteamproject.org.
- Searchable Plant Database to help select site specific plants, St. Johns River Water Management District, www.sjrwmd.com/waterwiselandscapes/
- For a checklist of river-friendly yard practices, see www.stjohnsriverkeeper.org/river-friendly.
- To obtain information and the submission form for a soil sample, see http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu/documents/Howtotakeasoiltestsampleweb.pdf
- For City of Jacksonville ordinances, go to www.coj.net, and search under "irrigation and fertilizer."

Fertilizing

- The numbers on the front of the fertilizer package refer to the percentages of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Nitrogen and potassium are the worst contributors to water pollution.
- For nitrogen, the amount should be equal to or double the amount of potassium and in slow-release form.
- For phosphorus, the SJRWMD website states, "Florida soil is naturally high in phosphorus, so a "no phosphate" fertilizer is fine for most mature lawns." Phosphorous should be between 0-2, according to the city, but the St. Johns Riverkeeper agrees with SJRWMD: none is best.

Other practices:

- Don't apply fertilizer during storm watches or floods. Heavy rains my carry fertilizer into the river.
- Leave a 6-foot "no fertilizer" zone adjacent to water bodies (SJRWMD and SJRK recommend 10 feet).
- Don't blow grass clippings into the river or storm drains. Fertilizer can leach off into the river.
- Fertilize just twice a year during the growing season (March and September).
- Spot treat weeds rather than use a weed and feed product, which can cause pesticide runoff.
- Perform a free soil test from the Extension Service to see what nutrients your yard is lacking (see UF resource below).
- To green up a lawn in the summer, without spurring growth, use chelated iron or iron sulfate.



A great turnout for Gettin' Jiggy

Captain Ron Schurr and Andrew Sashy

In River or Ocean [or IROO], a locally based nonprofit, continues to up the ante for anglers and conservation minded outdoor enthusiasts. Their latest roll-out of the Gettin' Jiggy series was no exception, as the banquet room at Mudville Grill was crowded with interested anglers on March 11. With Captain Ron Schurr of North Florida Fishing Charters leading the program and Andrew Sashy of the National Weather Service following his lead, there were plenty of tips and tricks to take home for any savvy outdoorsmen.

As the festivities kicked off, Captain Schurr put together an outstanding presentation of inshore angling tips, tricks and strategies for catching the species that win tournaments and please charter guests. With redfish, trout and some flounder tips, Schurr shared GoPro video footage of schooling reds and strategic lure choices to help navigate the differing tide changes. Captain Schurr knows how to find fish on the waterways and he's placed in too many tournaments to mention. To have his advice is to get a sure leg up on the competition.

John Barnard with John Runion

As Schurr wrapped up, Sashy rolled out a program that was sure to inform most anglers on both inshore and near shore weather trends. For those who are fascinated by the changing patterns in weather, the presentation delivered even more resources for those wishing to prepare and plan properly for trips to the great outdoors. As the evening drew to a close, the auctions were tallied and those in attendance took home some rather generous information shared by both presenters.

If you are seeking a great place to learn more about the river, the outdoors and how to support IROO, go to http://www.inriverorocean.org, or email Fishwithclay@gmail.com. The Clay Roberts Memorial Inshore Slam fishing tournament is right around the corner, get registered today.

DU Sponsors get together, celebrate success

Chase O'Steen, Jeremy Roberts, Pat Orman and Steve Orman

The local Ducks Unlimited chapter in Jacksonville has been growing in the past few years, thanks in part to young leaders in the trenches. As the chapter gains strength, the most important elements is taking care of those who brought out the big guns in sponsorship support during the year-end banquet. Speaking on behalf of this year's big event, longtime DU member Russell Grooms said, "I thought it was a terrific success – about 200 people raised good money and I think everyone had a really good time," he continued, "We had some tough years organizationally, the last four or five years have been encouraging."

Ryan Tiedeberg takes his turn while John Pope looks on

In celebration and thanks, the traditional "Sponsor Shoot" has become a big draw, as the facilities at the St. Augustine Rod and Gun Club provide a great time for a fun shoot with like-minded friends and DU supporters. "We're just having a really great year revitalizing the chapter, we got a lot of great support. We're just trying to continue to grow and do as much as we can for wildlife conservation," said President Baker Berg, when asked to comment about this year.

Elizabeth Cassidy with DU President Baker Berg

The evening made its way indoors following the range shoot, as dinner, refreshments and more talk of DU progress was on the docket. The tradition continues with ribeye steaks, baked potatoes and plenty of cold beverages. Sponsors also get an opportunity to bid on silent auction items that have been held for this special occasion– after all, a non-profit organization never forgets to make the most out of a room full of bidders.

Residents learn of bug and plant dependency

Speaking at The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Doug Tallamy, professor and chair of the Entomology and Wildlife Ecology Department of the University of Delaware, made a case for native plants by showing how dependent individual insects are on specific plants. Since 80 percent of the nation's food supply is pollinated by insects, it is important that their population is protected. Tallamy's bestselling book "Bringing Nature Home" lists a number of ways natives can be incorporated into Historic District landscapes.

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Navy personnel from NAS Jacksonville volunteered their time to help beautify Hemming Plaza on the first day of clean up March 7

Mayor Alvin Brown stopped by to thank Greenscape Executive Director Anna Dooley (right) and Valerie Feinberg, Downtown Vision Inc.'s Director of Strategic Partnerships

Green UP

Hemming Plaza greens up, thanks to Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo team members joined other community members for a volunteer event on Mar. 22 to clean and beautify Hemming Plaza, in time for the One Spark festival, Apr. 9-13. Downtown Vision, Inc. received a $35,000 grant from Wells Fargo in support of its Hemming Plaza beautification project. Wells Fargo, one of America's leading community banks and the nation's largest home mortgage lender, launched its NeighborhoodLIFTSM program in Jacksonville in 2012. The program included a $7 million commitment to provide down payment assistance grants, homebuyer education and support for local priority initiatives. Grants to support local initiatives were focused in five key areas: transitional and permanent supported housing, shelter and support services for the homeless; homeownership, affordable housing construction, rehabilitation, and counseling for low- and moderate-income residents; neighborhood beautification and improvement; workforce development programs; and small and micro-business assistance.

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The Way we Were

George Wise remembers Times Square and his best friend

By Laura Jane Pittman
Resident Community News

Eighty-three years ago, George Wise was born at home, in a house in St. Nicholas that was just recently demolished to make room for improvements to I-95. The owner of George's Auto Sales since 1956, Wise was "born a mechanic," as he likes to tell it.

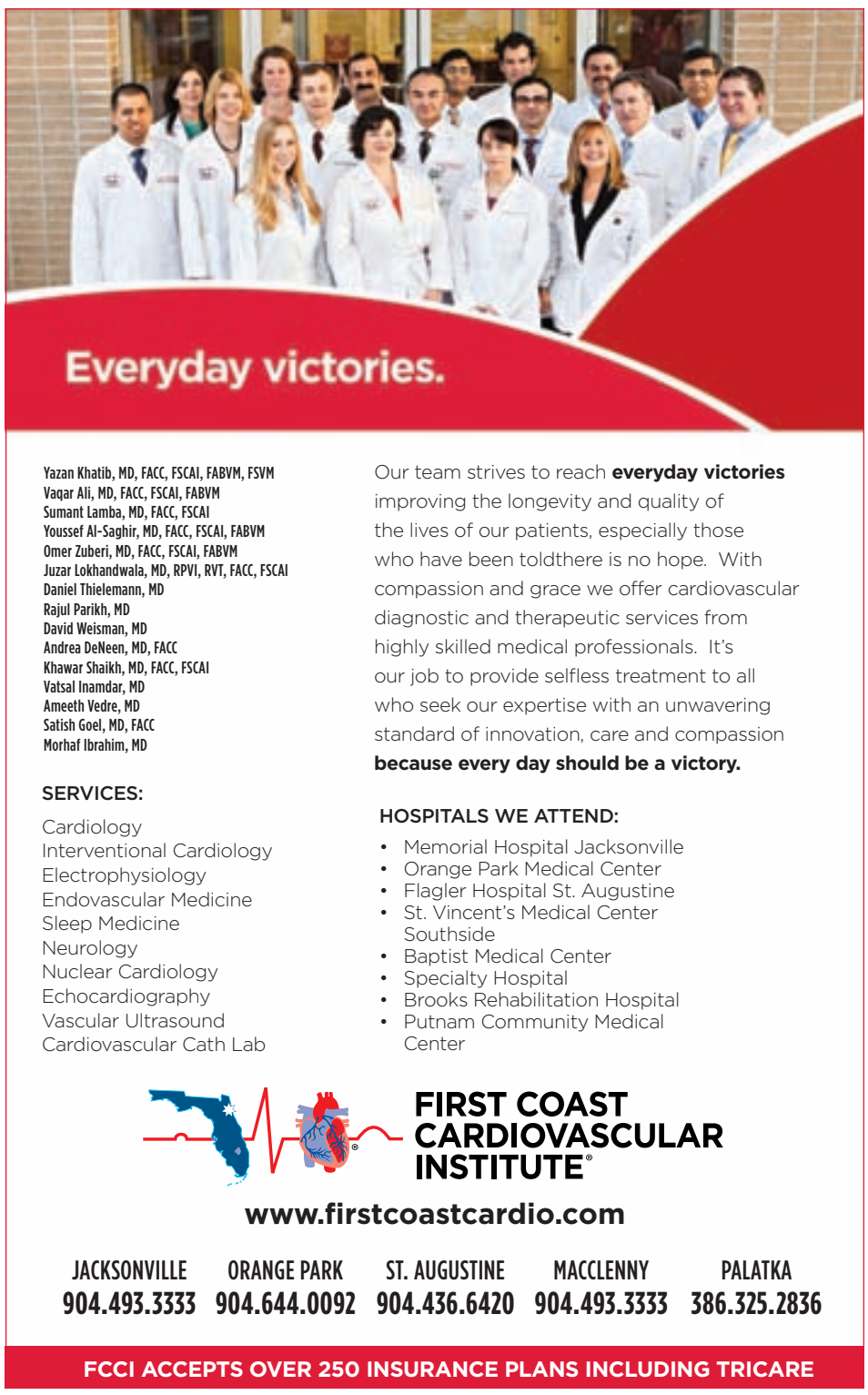
"I always loved cars, and I mark time by remembering what the year and model of cars were. I started my car business out on Hendricks Avenue across from the pool [where the San Marco Library is today], but in 1957, I got the opportunity to buy a speck of land on Philips Highway. Been there ever since."

Wise's business is located just six blocks from the former "Times Square" area of the city. Having spent his whole life there, Wise is an expert on the history of the small stretch of Jacksonville in the vicinity of Kings Street, Atlantic Boulevard, and Olevia Street. Today, I-95 runs right through the middle of the area, and Olevia Street is currently a holding ground for construction equipment for future improvements.

But back in the day, Times Square (considered the edge of town – beyond it was the "country") was a vibrant district with plenty of shops, restaurants, and bustling activity.

"The father of my best friend, Everett Richardson, owned a barbershop there. Next door was the Miramar Bar, and Lou Bono cooked his first barbeque in the backyard there. There were two wrecking companies, Milford Brothers and Jack Montgomery's, who used to take old wrecked cars and leave them on the corner for a while to remind everyone to drive safely. There were hardware stores, Week's Cash Grocery, an A&P grocery and a feed and grain store," recalls Wise. "There were two phones on telephone poles across the street from each other. I remember two 1937 white Ford police cars would sit in front of the police phone on one side and wait for the phone to ring with the call to go help someone. Then they would go take care of business, come back, and wait by the phone some more. Times Square was also the end of the streetcar line, so the streetcar operator would park there after his run and wait for a call on the other phone across the street to tell him when to come back."

Speaking of streetcars, Wise actually lived in one. When the Jacksonville trolley system went out of business, it sold the individual cars. Wise's father bought a



1931 Ford, previously owned by the author

Southside Grammar School #7 and a 9-year-old George Wise

George Wise with best friend Everett Richardson

trolley car, a lot on Emerson Street (which was pretty much a dirt road then with nothing on it), and an outside privy, or outhouse, for around $125.

"We lived in the streetcar, kind of like a trailer, and over a period of about five years, my father built a house piecemeal around it. Then he pulled the trolley car out back when it was close to being finished. Then we had the trolley and the house side-by-side, with a kitchen and bathroom, and we lived in both."

Best friend Everett Richardson was a fixture in Wise's life until he passed away. Richardson worked as a shoeshine boy at his dad's Times Square barbershop when they were younger. The two friends got into plenty of trouble tooling around in Wise's father's 1930 Ford Roadster, which he regularly stole to go joyriding.

"My momma would threaten to tell my father, but she never did. I would drag a big branch down the sand driveway to cover up the car marks and hide the evidence. Eventually, he gave me that car."

While Wise started his business, Richardson went on to college and then law school, eventually becoming partners with Ed Austin [former Jacksonville mayor]. When Austin became State Attorney, he tapped Richardson for a position.

"Everett had the opportunity to become a judge, but he needed to change from Democrat to Republican. He came to me and said, 'What do you think I should do?' I said, 'It doesn't make a difference in the world whether you are a Democrat or a Republican – you are still the same person.' So he became Republican and went on to be a chief circuit judge. Everybody liked him, and he was a great man."

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GO GIVERS

Jim & Marcella Price

By Julie Kerns Garmendia
Resident Community News

Jim and Marcella Price have lived in St. Nicholas since 1978 and love their community. Jim is retired from the FBI, U.S. Army Reserve and District of Columbia National Guard Military Police, and Marcella is a former English teacher. Their patriotism and desire to help others has led them to teach English literacy and reading to illiterate adults and citizenship classes to immigrants re-settled in Jacksonville. They support any effort to aid the illiterate, homeless and children.

"Marcella was a born volunteer," Jim said. "When we lived in Virginia and Birmingham she volunteered for literacy programs, and in the '70s as part of Jacksonville's Learn to Read Program she taught and trained others to teach. Since 2002 she has taught English as a second language and literacy to non-reading adults, and more recently to the Karen (Kuh-wren), Christian immigrants from Myanmar (formerly Burma)."

The Karen refugees, who attend Southside Baptist Church, fled the violence in their country and were forced to live, some their entire lives in squalid refugee camps as large as cities. They were re-settled in several U.S. locations through U.N. humanitarian relief. Price said the Karen are hard-working and family-oriented; his focus the past three years has been to help those who wish to become U.S. citizens.

"English literacy, citizenship and cultural assimilation go hand-in-hand. From October to May we teach citizenship classes, coordinated with English classes to prepare them to read, understand, speak and write the answers to 100 questions on U.S. government and history required for citizenship," he said. "They need education to function here, to apply for jobs, fill out school forms and all the literacy tasks required for everyday life. We're so proud that the first three sisters to arrive have become citizens. Many others have jobs and are even buying homes."

Price said that his reward is seeing them take off on their own, be successful and happy. His greatest satisfaction is when they take the citizenship oath, raise their right hands and smile so joyfully it is unforgettable.

"At that moment they become part of the fabric of U.S. society, part of the history of our great country. We are all descended from immigrants, except the native American Indians," he said.

Price served the community for 15 years as a member of South Jacksonville Civitan Club where he worked on programs to prevent and find cures for childhood birth defects and disabilities. Since 2002 he has served on the board of The Towers, federally assisted housing for low-income elderly, where he is committed to personally working to ensure that residents are happy, cared for and enjoy special holiday meals and activities.

The couple has one son, John, and his wife Ashley who live in Fruit Cove. They love to travel and do everything together, including sharing their passion for family history and helping others learn to research their own genealogy.

Marcella with Karen students in English class

Right: Swearing in as new U.S. Citizen - Caroline Loo Po on left with Marcella & Jim Price at downtown Jax Federal Courthouse

Below: Southside Baptist Church quilters present each new U.S. Citizen with a red, white & blue quilt.

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GG

Caroline Morris

By Julie Kerns Garmendia
Resident Community News

As a Bolles High School student, Caroline Morris, now the Bolles college counselor, was a young volunteer who started the first youth satellite student organization for Greenscape, according to Anna Dooley, Greenscape's Executive Director in Jacksonville. Greenscape sponsors tree plantings and works with the community and city to support environmental efforts to protect and beautify Jacksonville's tree canopy.

Dooley said that Morris, 36, has lived a life of volunteerism and was an outstanding example to her peers in high school of what teens can do for their community. Now she has come full circle as a committed adult volunteer and mentor to students she counsels.

"I remember my mother, Drema Farmer, always active in the community. I see her as a super volunteer, helping the Wolfson Children's Hospital Women's Board, Junior League charities and the American Heart Association. My dad, Guy, is an attorney who always supported her efforts. The first things I did during junior high and high school were plantings at elementary schools with little or no trees or landscaping. Then there were fundraising events to buy trees for more plantings," Morris said.

When Morris left for college she volunteered with charities through her sorority, Alpha Delta Pi, and especially enjoyed helping at the Ronald McDonald House. After she finished graduate school, married and had children, there was little free time until 2002 when she began to help Wolfson Children's Hospital by fundraising and recruiting young supporters. By 2007, when Dooley contacted her, Morris felt re-energized to help Greenscape and excited to introduce her children, 3-1/2-year-old twins Olivia and Matilda, and five-month-old infant girl Graham, to planting.

"Now planting is a family activity. My husband Stewart and I take our children to the planting days and it's so much fun to do things together. Olivia was helping and the next thing we knew she had climbed completely into one of the big pots," Morris said. "I also help with Greenscape's biggest fundraiser, the Root Ball, held in February." Stewart, 37, is a UF Health Jacksonville pharmacist who often brought groups of his fellow students from pharmacy school to help with plantings and events.

Morris also teaches Sunday school at Southside United Methodist Church and is volunteer webmaster for the local Jackpotts, a support group for Jacksonville parents of twins and triplets. They meet bi-monthly for social gatherings, educational and informational events and most importantly – Mom's Night Out.

The couple enjoy Boone Park tennis teams, but have decided they "do better playing separately and not against each other!" Stewart is a distance runner and the whole family enjoys doing anything outdoors. Grandparents Guy and Drema spend plenty of quality time with the children and Stewart's parents visit from their home in Australia.

Local author in third printing with second book

San Marco author Dorothy K. Fletcher is enjoying a little success with her newest book L*ost Restaurants of Jacksonville,* which has sold over 2,000 copies. The book evokes memories of a gracious time gone by, as does Fletcher's first book, *Growing Up in Jacksonville.*

"That [volume] technically puts it into the third printing, but because this book was selling so well, History Press did a larger than normal second printing," said Fletcher. "Usually they print 1,000 per run, but they printed 1,500 this time."

One of those bygone restaurants was The Lobster House, on the Southbank between the Acosta and the Main Street Bridges. "It was a 'happening place' with live music and great seafood that tourists loved," Fletcher said. "It also provided a few scenes in the movie Revenge of the Creature." The wooden structure burned to the waterline in 1962, and because it could not be rebuilt on the pier where it had been, the owners never replaced it.

At the moment, Fletcher doesn't have anything in the works, but recently served as a Celebrity Chef in the Salvation Army's annual fundraiser, serving Neenie's Chess Pie. "Neenie was my paternal grandmother, and her pie is to die for," she shared, "if I do say so myself."

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Local doctors on a mission to rebuild a village

Photos of typhoon devastation courtesy of Dr. Ted Esguerra

According to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, it is estimated that 2,435,958 homes were destroyed by the massive typhoon.

By Lara Patangan
Resident Community News

While according to an old proverb it takes a village to raise a child, a group of local physicians are putting their own spin on the adage by endeavoring to build the village itself.

The Philippine Medical Society of Northeast Florida (PMSNEF) is raising money to build a village of 22 houses in an area of the Philippines devastated by Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

According to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, it is estimated that 2,435,958 homes were destroyed by the massive typhoon.

While that would have a significant impact on any country, one-third of the 94.9 million people who occupy the string of islands live below the poverty level making them most vulnerable to the destruction wrought by typhoons, floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that plague the country.

Dr. Francis Ong, a plastic surgeon and member of PMSNEF, is involved in the fundraising effort to raise $150,000 for typhoon survivors. An organization in the Philippines similar to Habitat for Humanity, "Gawad Kalinga" which translates into "Gives Care," will build the homes.

Each home costs $3,500 to build and can house between four and seven people.

Ong, a San Jose resident, has been involved in doing mission work with PMSNEF since 2005. Since then, volunteer doctors have treated more 18,000 patients and completed almost 1,500 surgeries. He said usually the organization focuses on the delivery of badly needed medical care, but wanted to do something more in the wake of the typhoon.

As part of the fundraising effort, PMSNEF is holding a $50-a-ticket raffle for the chance to win the grand prize, either a brand new Ford Focus or $14,000. Only 3,000 tickets were printed. Ong said any money raised beyond the cost of the homes would be used to support the medical component of the mission including the cost of the shipment of five 40-foot containers filled with medical equipment such as stretchers, dental chairs, surgical supplies and medicines.

Plastic surgeon Dr. Francis Ong and his wife, Dr. Carmencita Ong, anesthesiologist, are raising funds to rebuild homes destroyed by Super Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines

Both Ong and his wife Carmencita, who is an anesthesiologist, are from the Philippines and go on the mission trips together.

Ong has also recruited one of his San Jose neighbors, general surgeon Dr. Oswaldo Contarini, to go on the mission trips. While Contarini says the physicians wake up at 5 a.m. and don't return home from the hospitals until late in the evening, he feels like it's remarkably rewarding.

"I don't feel like I am giving, I am receiving a lot," explained Contarini, whose heritage is Italian but considers himself an adopted Filipino, saying the country has a piece of his heart. "I love to go there. There are very poor people, but unlike in other places, they are still very happy. They smile at you and it comes from the heart. They live with nothing and they are extremely grateful for our help."

For Ong, the mission is all about giving others a chance.

"We are doing this for people who can't help themselves. No matter how difficult it is to do, when you see the people you are helping it feels easy," said Ong. "It's a chance for me to give back. I had a chance to better myself, they should have a chance too."

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Two San Marco women leave much behind in Cuba

By Lara Patangan
Resident Community News

While the United States has enforced an economic embargo on Cuba since 1960, two members of Southside United Methodist Church (SUMC) have an unrestricted amount of joy and fellowship to share with members of its sister church in Havana whom they met during a recent mission trip.

Bridget Booth and Betty Taylor

Bridget Booth and Betty Taylor, both residents of San Marco, were tasked with rekindling the relationship with the Methodist church, Santiago de Las Vegas in Cuba.

> *The women took toiletries, over-the-counter medications and children's books written in Spanish and in English. They also left as much as they could as far as their own sheets, towels and even their own clothes.*

Booth said the relationship, established years ago by a former pastor, had lapsed so she and Taylor were sent to the Caribbean island to renew it. Due to the existing embargo, entry into the country is only allowed for religious or educational purposes.

While the primary goal of the trip was to reestablish relations, they were also sent to assess the needs of members, which Booth said are significant because many residents live on only $10 a month.

The women took toiletries, over-the-counter medications and children's books written in Spanish and in English that they collected for members of the Santiago de Las Vegas Church. They also left as much as they could as far as their own sheets, towels and even their own clothes.

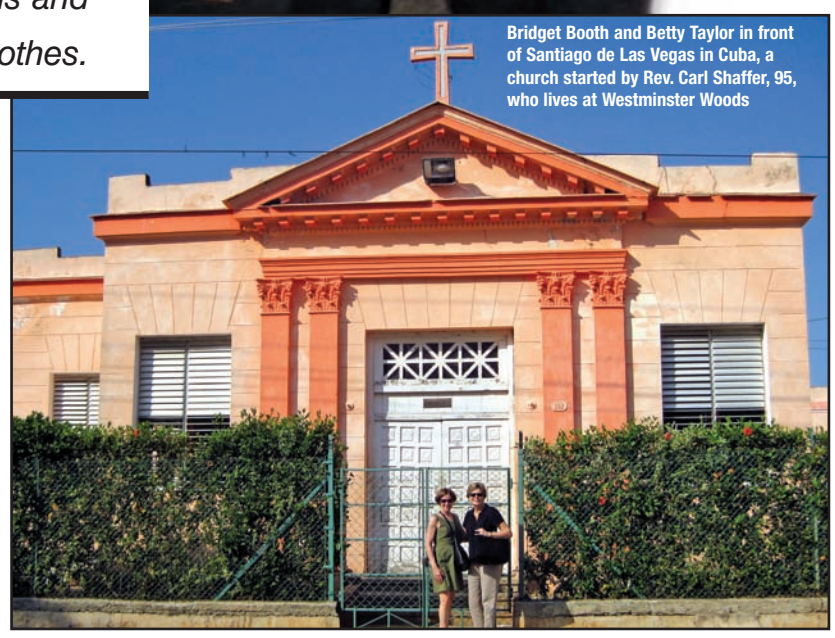
But, Booth and Taylor weren't the only ones g iving. Each place they went they were given a handmade gift by locals.

"The people were extremely gracious and warm," said Booth. "They are clearly in need, but they find joy in everyday events. They have an energy and spontaneity and an ability to find joy in another's company, family, friends, song and dance."

Booth was also impressed by their adapted ingenuity.

"The Cuban people are outrageously resourceful. They rehab, renovate and recycle everything they can," said Booth. "I like to say you get the biggest bang for your donation there because of the way it's stretched. They know how to do a lot with whatever little is available to them."

Jacksonville residents will have a chance to get a bang for their $15 donation by attending fundraising dinner on May 5 at SUMC offering Cuban cuisine,



Bridget Booth and Betty Taylor in front of Santiago de Las Vegas in Cuba, a church started by Rev. Carl Shaffer, 95, who lives at Westminster Woods

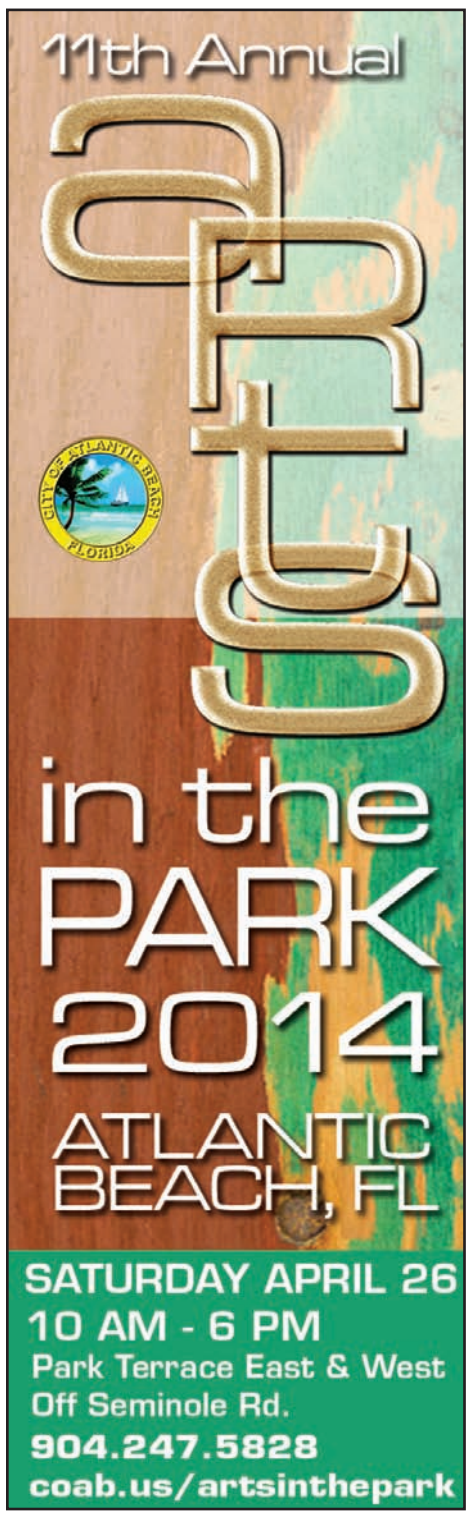
Cubans photographed during the trip

a silent auction, door prizes and entertainment by Vintage Players.

For Booth, who maintains contact with some of the people she met on the mission, the trip has had a huge impact.

"For me, despite years of deprivation and oppression and maybe it's because of that, they have incredible hope. They focus on the non-material priorities. There are no distractions, no ambiguity," said Booth explaining their unrestricted capacity to find joy in small things. "They focus on the positive and the possible."

For more information on the event, contact Linda Mickler at (904) 732-4985.



Principal makes good on her promise

Students exceed walk goal by 25 percent

The Friends of Hendricks celebrated the success of the 2014 Walkathon with a first-ever broadcast "flag raising" to the entire school on Mar. 7, when winners of individual and classroom challenges were revealed.

The walkathon goal was $50,000, and through the combined efforts of school families and business partners, they raised $48,790 (with money still coming in) to purchase Mimio TeachTM technology and supplies for classrooms.

There were 373 Hendricks students and siblings in addition to parents, grandparents, other family members and neighbors "walking for Hendricks." Principal Lacy Healy issued a challenge for Hendricks students to walk 500 miles, promising to kiss a pig if they met the challenge. Hendricks students blew past that goal, walking 625 miles (5,001 laps). Hendricks families joined the effort by walking another 2,456 laps (307 miles) for a total of 7,457 laps (932 miles) around the track at the Walkathon.

Congratulations to Alexis Foster, Gabe Singleton and Nick Snyder, the top lap walkers, and to Jack Bogan, Mac Jones and Bella Kennedy, the top three fundraisers.

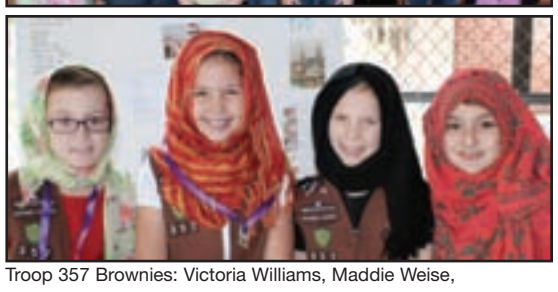
Aaron Watkins of Black Hog Farms holds Walker as Miss Healy sticks to her promise to "Kiss the Pig"

Girl Scouts celebrate World Thinking Day

Girl Scouts of all ages (from kindergarten through high school) came together more than 150 strong on Feb. 22 in celebration of World Thinking Day. Twenty-five local troops represented 16 countries in costume and exhibits as part of a worldwide event promoted annually by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. The troops created information booths and wore ethnic costumes. The Indian Creek Service Unit, which includes girls from San Marco, San Jose and St. Nicholas, also collected school supplies to send to Haiti.

Troop 1008: Molly Vought and Addison O'Neil; front, Chloe Vought

Troop 10


Troop 357 Brownies: Victoria Williams, Maddie Weise, Samantha Harrell and Natalie Navid

BUSINESS PROFILE

San Jose Catholic School parents proud to share accolades, growth

Parents of students attending San Jose Catholic School (SJCS) know they have discovered an educational gem in their parish school. Nestled in historic south Jacksonville is a beautiful and serene PK2 through 8th grade school campus that has been part of our local community since 1961. Like its surrounding area, the school is steeped in rich heritage and strong traditions.

Parents attribute student achievements to a stellar faculty committed to the highest academics and supported by an involved community of parents, grandparents and alumni. "Our students are winning more honors than ever before," said Brian Giddens, an SJCS parent of a 2nd and 6th grader. "We are happy with their high academic standards and feel blessed to be a part of such a faith-based environment."

SJCS students go on to attend many area high schools, but the majority go on to attend Bishop Kenny, where for the past 5 years, 70% have graduated with honors. Another worthwhile statistic is that 95% of SJCS students qualify for Bright Futures Scholarships, according to SJCS Principal Brian Wheeler. "We're proud of our tremendous accomplishments," said Wheeler. "We are impacting hundreds of lives in Jacksonville with our commitment to education and faith."

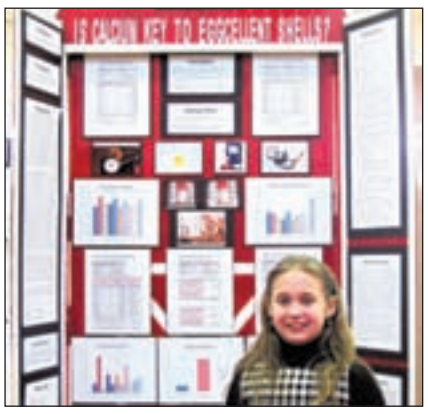
In addition to standard curriculum, SJCS also offers many enrichment programs and classes no longer available at some public schools, such as Art, Cultural Activities, Music, Spanish and Theatre.

Equally important are spiritual values and compassionate outreach, demonstrated city-wide by San Jose Catholic students. Ongoing charitable activities include Angels in the Outfield, where students play baseball with special needs children; collections of food and toys for the underprivileged and contributions, such as the $42K raised (over the past 15 years) by their annual play for the Guardian of Dreams Schools.

"In addition to academics, we send our children to SJCS because the faculty and parents are committed to helping our children know, love and serve God," said Dr. Steve Barsky, father of two SJCS students. "That is something no public or charter school can do."

Spiritual growth, character and responsibility are fostered through weekly Mass at the on-campus Parish. "We want to share our school's legacy with others," said Traci Walker, a parent and alumnus of the school, "SJCS is a well-kept secret and more families need to know that an affordable private education is available to them."

The school works closely with the Step-Up for Students Scholarship program making it possible for low income, Florida students to qualify for a private education.



San Jose students have award-winning success at Regional Science Fair with 22 place awards and 18 specialty awards.

San Jose students survive brutal tie breakers to win school Spelling Bee, the winner moves on to Duval County Spelling Bee.

For the past 15 years– over 30 live performances and more than $42,000 have been raised and donated to Guardian Catholic Schools.

The many accomplishments this year:

- Placed top three (five years running) in the Bishop Kenny Brain Brawl
- Diocesan Science Fair (won 11 of 16 awards) including First Place in grades 6, 7, and 8
- Forty awards won at the NE Florida Regional Science & Engineering Fair
- State History Bee, 4 qualifiers, 2 students selected for Nationals
- First Place in Research & Presentation at Lego Robotics
- First Place Regional Art & Writing winners, National Silver Medalist (Writing), Scholastic Art & Writing Awards
- First Place in "Florida Letters - About Literature", National Library of Congress Writing Contest
- State recognition, Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP) qualifiers
- Nationally recognized as one of twelve schools selected for the "Innovations in Catholic Education" award, Today's Catholic Teacher Magazine

For information about the school, visit their web site at
www.sanjosecatholicschool.com
or visit them at 3619 Toledo Road, Jacksonville, FL 32217
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Two years abroad gives high school senior bigger world view

By Lara Patangan
Resident Community News

By Alex Morrell's own account, as a middle school student he was more interested in the surf report than reading The Old Man in the Sea. But after living abroad for two years, the Wolfson High School senior is set to graduate with a 4.7 grade point average, riding the wave to an academic success he credits to a more global view of the world.

Morrell was 14 years old when he moved to Venezuela with his father and older brother, and while it set the San Jose resident back a year in school, the life lessons he learned from his exposure to other countries were more enlightening than any textbook.

"Before Latin America, I knew little of global issues and the impoverished circumstances in which many must live," explained Morrell. "A year in Venezuela and a year in Mexico witnessing social inequity not only made me aware of these cruel realities, but also made me want to change them."

Morrell hopes to do that by studying economics and law, and has been accepted to both Dartmouth and Swarthmore colleges for undergraduate studies.

Wherever he goes, he has a greater appreciation for the opportunities in the United States – in large part because of the places he's already been.

"It was very hard to shift between the countries," said Morrell. "Being in economically less-developed countries is very eye opening. The true parts of the country are very different than what the tourists see."

When he returned to the United States at age 16, he set very high standards for himself not only academically, but also by volunteering more than 200 hours at AngelAID, an organization that helps children with life-threatening diseases.

An avid skateboarder, Morrell also volunteered at a local summer camp where he gave away some of his prized skate awards trying to carve a positive impression into the daily grind of middle school campers.

He can't help but think how different life is for young people in other countries though, and said it's "surreal" knowing that people he met in Venezuela are involved in the protests against their government.

"It gave me a big world view," said Morrell. "It made me realize that there is something more than our leisurely bubble. I learned the value of hard work."

Students knit one, purl two for One Spark

Pine Forest School, the only dedicated Elementary School of the Arts in Jacksonville, collaborated with Yarn Bomb Jax last month in preparation for One Spark, according to Principal Tamara Williams. Shannon Palmer of Yarn Bomb Jax taught a special fiber arts class where students learned how to arm knit an infinity scarf. They also made braided fabric coiled plates, to be displayed in Yarn Bomb Jax's One Spark project "Rabbit Holes," themed around the book "Alice in Wonderland."

Bolles Squared Art benefits Cummer program

An art reception in Gooding Gallery at The Bolles School took on added dimension with the debut of 9x9 square art pieces from more than 50 Bolles student artists. The pieces will benefit the Cummer Connection Club's fundraiser, Young Artists Squared.

The club is a student-run campus group raising money to send underprivileged Jacksonville students to The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens' summer art camps, where they will be given the opportunity to further their artistic skills.

The students' work is for sale for $50 per piece and the works are displayed at Biscottis in Avondale, along with work by local artists.

Squared art organizer Jennifer Howson, a senior at Bolles, said the Cummer Connection Club aspires to "showcase Bolles artists while also benefitting the less fortunate children of Jacksonville with an opportunity to flourish artistically over the summer at the Cummer."

Mikkel Jordahn, Jennifer Howson, Charlie Cellar

Local girls win Optimist Club essay contest

Marie Fazio, Laura Saffy from the Optimist Club of Arlington, and Olivia Mayer

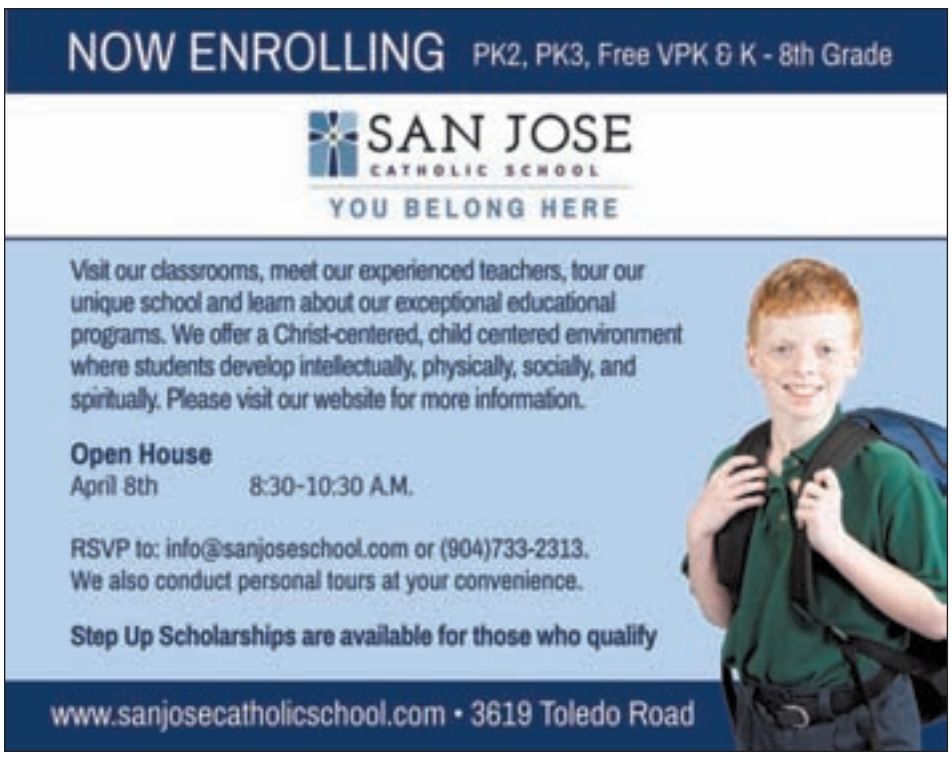
The glasses were half-full at a luncheon celebrating the winners of the Optimist Club of Arlington's essay contest last month.

San Marco resident and Bishop Kenny High School Junior Marie Fazio won first place for her essay on the topic "How do dreams leads to success?" Second place winner was St. Nicholas resident and Assumption Catholic School 8th grader Olivia Mayer and the third place winner was Bishop Snyder High School student Dominique Dubon.

The girls were each awarded $100 gift cards and Fazio's essay will go on to the district level where she will be eligible to win a $2,500 college scholarship.

Fazio's winning essay was about her dream to be on a school team and the trials she overcame to make the varsity cross-country team her freshman year after unsuccessfully trying other sports.

That's certainly worth toasting to – with her half-full glass.



Essay contest winner sparks creative ideas for Downtown

Last month ***The Resident*** responded to one parent's lament that "schools don't teach creative writing" and sponsored an essay contest.

The rules were simple – complete this thought in 500 words or less:

"Mom, take me Downtown because..."

While city leaders, movers and shakers are contemplating solutions to revitalize Downtown and bring more visitors to the city, area middle school students have some pretty creative ideas of their own.

Eighty-three fifth and sixth grade students from four area schools sent in a wide range of ideas from the easy (activity parks) to the outrageous (floating resorts in the St. John's River), but the single most recommended strategy should have AquaJax leaders sitting up and taking notice: Mom, take me Downtown because I want to go to the aquarium!

AquaJax does have initial plans that call for a 150,000-square-foot aquarium that would feature both freshwater and saltwater species, as well as reptiles that thrive in the surrounding region. AquaJax leaders will be presenting at One Spark, Apr. 9-13, at the Downtown Jacksonville Library. Here's the chance for those students to realize their dreams for an aquarium in Jacksonville, by voting for AquaJax. Visit Aquajax.net or www.facebook.com/jaxaqua for more information.

In the meantime, enjoy the winning essay by Assumption Catholic School student Reedy Monahan, who won gift cards to Pizza Palace. Runners-up Nina Saldajeno (amusement park), Elizabeth Mayer (Navy Pier) and Clark Fannin (expanded Skyway) will receive passes to the Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens.

• Jacksonville Aquarium •

by Reedy Monahan

Mom and Dad, take me downtown because they have built an aquarium just like Savannah, Tampa, Miami, and Charleston! I think an aquarium would want to make me go downtown. I have no reason to go downtown besides the occasional picnic to Memorial Park. An aquarium would make a great addition to downtown because we live near the ocean and are interested in marine life.

Most people don't get a chance to see all the amazing creatures in our rivers and oceans. This would give them a chance to. Many other cities in the southeast have aquariums. I personally have been to these aquariums and never get bored of them and know the majority of the adults and children in Jacksonville wouldn't either. An aquarium would make downtown a place for me to go frequently with my friends.

I think Jacksonville could maintain an aquarium with all the knowledge we have on the First Coast of marine life. An aquarium can also be open in any kind of weather and all year long.

An aquarium could also benefit Jacksonville's economy. It would create many jobs. While you're at the aquarium, you probably will have to eat somewhere unless you go late at night or early in the morning. Jacksonville's restaurants would benefit from having an aquarium. Mary people before or after their visit to the aquarium would eat at one of Jacksonville's down town restaurants.

My definition of an aquarium would be something like this: a large, naturally drawn to, building downtown. You should be able to make out that it is an aquarium before you step inside (posters on the walls, statues, and mural). Then when you walk inside there would be a gift store with interesting items. Then you would buy your ticket. While you are inside, you are amazed with the detail in the exhibits and are wowed by the exotic, scary, amazing, and local creatures. There would also be interactive activities such as touching stingrays and sharks.

I think an aquarium would be a great addition to Jacksonville and would make me want to go downtown more.

Photograph by Ingrid Damiani.

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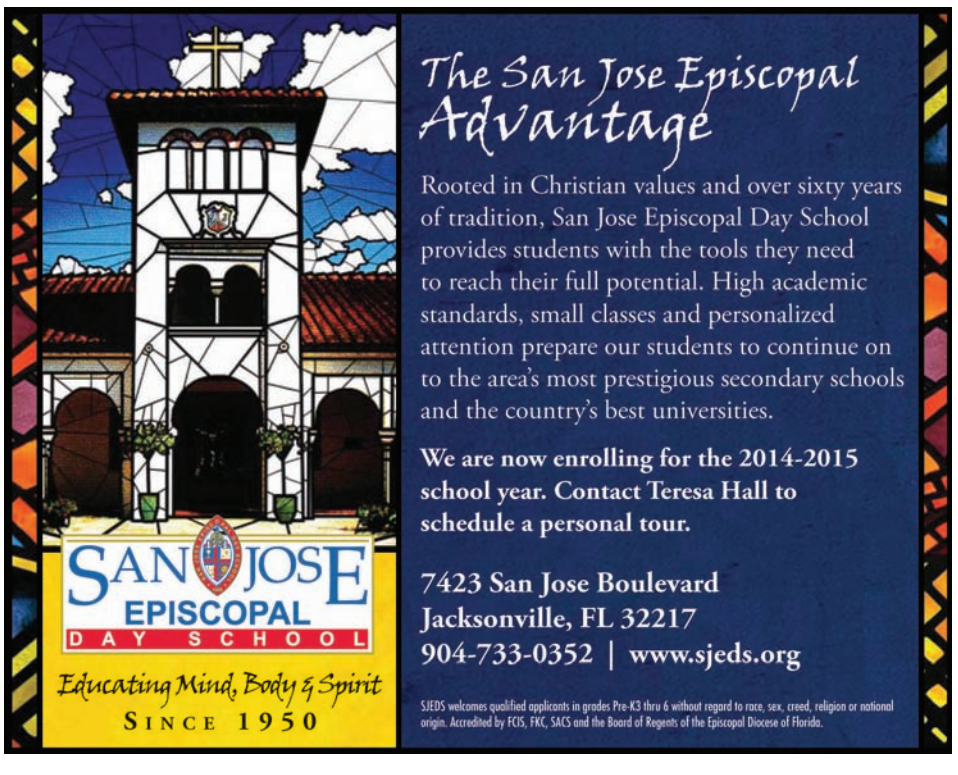

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