



ANIMAL HOUSE
SEE PAGE 26



LOCAL FOLKS
SEE PAGE 38



THE WAY WE WERE
SEE PAGE 28



Brooks and Michael Biagini with their girls, Rachel and Zoey

WOMEN'S AUXILIARY PIVOTS, KICKS OFF CHRISTMAS IN JULY

Over 150 walkers, runners and volunteers also celebrated Christmas in July during the 2nd annual Kettle Krush 5K downtown.

[READ MORE ON PAGE 24](#)



Ward Lariscy and Jon Singleton

HISTORY CELEBRATED

A car parade recreated the original crossing of the Acosta Bridge from the Southbank to celebrate the 100th Anniversary. The procession wound its way to San Marco Square for festivities and presentations.

[READ MORE ON PAGE 20](#)

HOMEOWNERS HAVE INCENTIVES TO SELL

In June, the region's residential market continued its frenzied pace, with low interest rates and a limited inventory fueling record high sales prices.

[READ MORE ON PAGE 6](#)

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This rendering illustrates the creative use of spaces abutting other structures, opening up the church grounds to the public. The courtyard dubbed "Presbyterian Plaza" is shown to be able to accommodate large groups and passive activity. The perforated lines on the drawing, front left, illustrate a spot where the dimensions of a wedding or event tent could be assembled, adding scale references for viewers of the presentation.

A new anchor for San Marco to the South, creative ideas emerge

South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church opens arms to community, embraces the future

Many years ago, leadership of South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church had challenges ahead, something had to change. With a shrinking membership, a struggle to keep expenses under wraps and some hard financial decisions to be made, they proceeded with a controversial plan to sell portions of the church property and reallocate assets.

Ultimately, the sale of the property and anxiety over redevelopment created a rift in the local community, which lingered until the gavel dropped in February of 2020, ending the battle over building height,

size and scope as well as some aesthetic requests made by opposition groups. Those concerns are now water under the bridge, as demolition begins Aug. 1.

Today, cooler heads have prevailed and new church leadership has made an extraordinary effort to be inclusive and intentional about the plans for the future of the parcel. And, after careful consideration of community stakeholder opinions, a very careful process to reinvigorate the new life for the church ensued.

[READ MORE ON PAGE 4](#)



Annual Character Ball delivers a storybook ending

Gate Hospitality team members go all out for the entertainment of children, as Disney characters, Marvel and other amazing costumes were rolled out for the annual affair.

[READ MORE ON PAGE 36](#)

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INCENTIVES INCREASE CHANCE OF SAVING HISTORIC STRUCTURES

BY SUSANNAH PARMENTER
Resident Community News

Downtown Jacksonville is looking to the past to help shape and revitalize its future via the Downtown Preservation and Revitalization Program (DPRP). Due to some ambitious plans for growth and revitalization, those programs are being put to the test and should spell progress for Downtown in the months ahead.

Launched by the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA), the program's mission is to facilitate adaptive reuse projects within downtown Jacksonville through increased funding.

According to the DIA's program guideline, the new program will apply to historic preservation projects seeking more than \$100,000 in city funding. It also removes the \$1 million maximum in city funding that had previously applied to historic preservation projects.

SouthEast Development Group, LLC plans to use incentives approved through the program to renovate the Laura Street Trio. Built between 1902 and 1912, the Trio buildings are The Florida Life Insurance,



HISTORIC PHOTOS COURTESY OF WAYNE WOOD

The Laura Street Trio in a historical photo illustrating the activity that once bustled from the downtown buildings.



RENDERING COURTESY OF SOUTHEAST DEVELOPMENT GROUP, LLC

Renderings of the current plans for the Laura Street Trio include the addition of a Marriott Autograph Collection branded hotel, which is slated for the corner of Adams and North Laura Streets.

Bisbee and Marble Bank buildings at Forsyth and Laura streets. The nearly \$25 million incentives package plans to convert the structures into a 145-room Marriott Autograph Hotel with a restaurant, lounge, boutique grocery store and a ground floor retail space.

The package is headed to the City Council for final approval and SouthEast Development Group, LLC Managing Director, Steve Atkins, says it will likely receive approval in August. The project is slated to close on financing in September and have construction underway by October, Atkins aims to debut the renovations in mid-2023.

Atkins is experienced in renovating and preserving historical buildings. He successfully completed the restoration of the Barnett National Bank Building, which was originally built in 1926. It is now home to the University of North Florida Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation, commercial offices, 107 apartment units, Vagabond Coffee, and a Chase Bank branch location. He also has a proposal to revamp the Riverfront with residential units, hotels and retail, including a two-story dining and entertainment destination.

Having grown up in San Marco, Atkins is excited to see the changes coming to the downtown area. "When I was a kid, downtown was still thriving and was the city center and everything was happening there. I remember it from that perspective. Construction, design, and preservation have been some things that I've been interested in most of my career. I really thrive on the challenge that these things present. Anybody can build a box, but I like to be challenged."

JWB Real Estate Capital President Alex Sifakis also welcomes the difficult and painstaking renovations that these structures require. "That's one of the main reasons we do the work on historic buildings. It's

interesting and it's a challenge. We feel that that it's a place where we can contribute."

JWB Real Estate Capital received an incentive package of \$8,706,356 through the DPRP for the Florida Baptist Convention Building and the Federal Reserve Bank building. JWB Real Estate Capital was the first to receive incentives through the DPRP. JWB, led by Sifakis, plans to turn the Baptist Convention property into a mixed-use space with the lower floors dedicated to restaurant and mercantile use and the upper floors offering 24 studio and one-bedroom apartments. The Federal Reserve building will consist of restaurant and event space. Sifakis says the company has the permits and will start renovations early next month.

Sifakis is also seeking incentives for the Thomas V. Porter House

on Julia Street and plans to turn the mansion into office space and develop a restaurant in the basement.

AXIS Hotels LLC is also utilizing an incentive package to start the renovation of the Ambassador Hotel, built in 1923, into a TRYP by Wyndham.

Due to the high costs of renovating older buildings, Sifakis says that before the DPRP, the city struggled to attract developers. "Incentives are critical because developers need to be able to make at least some money or they're not going to do a deal. That's why all these properties have sat vacant, blighted and unused for years because the numbers don't work."

The costs of renovating historical structures can be extreme and, in many cases, it would be cheaper to demolish them. But for some, the preservation of history is more important than repair costs. DIA CEO Lori Boyer explains, "There is a value, a cultural value in preserving the history and the character of various building styles. It certainly adds to the character and the uniqueness of downtown."

Boyer also feels that while there is a significant cost associated with renovating these buildings, in the end it will economically benefit the area.

"The vacant and abandoned structures that are just sitting on the landscape and being allowed to deteriorate, drag down the economic value and potential of all the surrounding property. It has a negative impact on adjacent property values and a negative impact on the vitality of downtown."

Money aside, community members in the area do support this new program and the changes it will bring. Dr. Wayne Wood, a resident of Riverside and widely-known historian of Jacksonville, sees it as vital for the downtown area. "These funds are specifically designated for this. They have been derived, just for saving old buildings. The downtown of every city in America is

“These funds are specifically designated for this. They have been derived, just for saving old buildings. The **DOWNTOWN OF EVERY CITY IN AMERICA IS THE HEART OF THE CITY.** And as former mayor Jake Godbold once said, **'DOWNTOWN IS THE HEART OF JACKSONVILLE.** And if we don't have a healthy heart, all of the city suffers.”

— Dr. Wayne Wood

the heart of the city. And as former mayor Jake Godbold once said, 'Downtown is the heart of Jacksonville. And if we don't have a healthy heart, all of the city suffers.'

Alan Bliss, CEO of the Jacksonville Historical Society, loves the rich history of the city and believes that many of these historical structures deserve preservation not only for current residents and tourists but also for future generations. "When you visit a city and you go to its downtown and you see the old buildings that have stood there for decades, or in some cases centuries, you become present in the inherited sort of legacies of the people who came before everyone there. That is what gives people a sense that they are in the authentic Jacksonville. People do not travel to Jacksonville because they want to see what shopping center developers have been doing at St. Johns Town Center or the Orange Park Mall, they look to the evidence of the past to really get a sense of what Jacksonville is authentically."

Atkins also recognizes the uniqueness of these places and says they won't stand the test of time unless we as a city work to maintain them. "Buildings have lifespans just like everything else. But for the most important historic buildings, I personally think it's very important for us to do what we can to preserve and keep those in service. They add a certain fabric to the downtown community that is irreplaceable. Once they're gone, they're gone for good, and you can't recreate that."



RENDERING COURTESY OF SOUTHEAST DEVELOPMENT GROUP, LLC

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



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This rendering illustrates the overhead view and layout of the property, providing a view of the entry and exit points from the church.

BY KEVIN J. MEERSCHAERT
Resident Community News

South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church has a plan to renovate its location and turn it into a meeting place for the residents of San Marco.

When the church sold off part of its land for the upcoming four-story, 49.5 foot tall Park Place San Marco apartment complex, officials determined changes needed to be made to their campus.

In front of about two dozen residents Pastor Adam Anderson and architect Bill Jaycox shared their plans to renovate the church lot to make it more inviting to the San Marco community.

The church itself will remain with a few renovations, while the building next door will be demolished and replaced. The face of the church will be open to a view down San Marco Blvd.

Jaycox called the current site a mishmash that needs to be modernized to serve parishioners and the community. He said too many churches in Jacksonville are closed most of the week to the public and that needs to change to meet the changing needs of the community.

The design calls for a new three-story, 14,000 square foot building and an open grassy courtyard facing Hendricks Ave. that can be used for various community events. A tent could be pitched for weddings, concerts or other festivities.

The church and any event planners would be able to access part of the parking garage that is to be built with the apartment complex.

Anderson says he's hoping the construction will coincide with the building of the apartment complex to keep distraction to a minimum. It's expected to begin in August.

He says services will be moved to Preservation Hall for nine weeks beginning in August while renovations to the church building are made.

While there has been a tremendous amount of controversy regarding the construction of the apartment complex,

the church's plans are getting strong support among its neighbors.

San Marco Preservation Society President Desiree Bailey said it was one of the most exciting things she's seen in a long time and is looking forward to what it will bring to San Marco.

"The forethought and the planning they have put into this and the effect it's going to have not only on their church and their own congregation but on the community as a whole...it's a once in a lifetime opportunity," she said.

Local residents who attended the town hall meeting on July 20 reacted positively to the plans that were presented. They also added how the new building could be used by the community for a senior center or a hurricane shelter.

Next door neighbor Jon Livingston, who organized "Right Size San Marco," the group that had failed in their attempt to stop the apartment building construction, said he was pleased with the church's plans.

"I think the church (made) an excellent hire in Bill Jaycox," he said.

"That out of the gate was an excellent move because of the type of work he does and how he cares for this area and his care for San Marco."

Anderson said funding for the project has already been earmarked and approved by church leaders. Construction is expected to take about 17 months.

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Long-overdue demolition of Berkman II begins

BY SUSANNAH PARMENTER
Resident Community News

After sitting unfinished and vacant for more than a decade, the Berkman Plaza II tower demolition commenced on July 15.

The first piece of the building finally came down after the demolition process was delayed due to mechanical issues with the machinery. The demolition contractor, Pece of Mind Environmental Inc., said that it is using a high-reach excavator to bring down the structure. The specialized piece of equipment can reach to the top of the building and cut it apart in pieces.

During a press conference, Jacksonville Mayor Lenny Curry shared his excitement about the demolition. “We are now taking the big step of removing that eyesore. A step that I hesitated to take for years.”

As Curry indicated, this is a much-anticipated event for the city – the building at 500 Bay Street has remained untouched and unfinished for 13 years. Situated on the Downtown Northbank of the St. Johns River, the 18-story building originally was conceived as a residential tower. The Berkman Plaza II suffered a series of setbacks starting in 2007 with the collapse of a parking garage during construction. The collapse killed a construction worker and left 21 others injured.

New owner Jacksonville Riverfront Revitalization LLC purchased the property for \$5.6 million. During an April 28 news conference, development group co-manager Park Beeler and city officials presented plans for a 320,000-square-foot mixed-use residential project with a grocery store anchor. Beeler said the plan will cost around \$135 million.

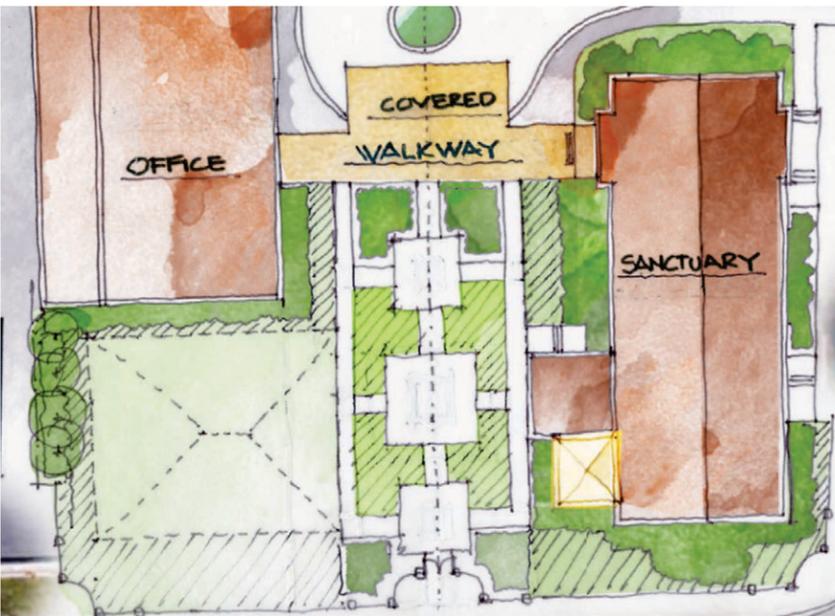
The developer said that it has met with the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) to discuss the design and is working to submit design documents to the Downtown Development Review Board.

The demolition contractor expects the process to take three to four months. While this is a longer method of demolition, District 7 City Council member Reggie Gaffney said it is the safest method. At a press conference at the site he said, “One of the things the administration and myself wanted to make sure didn’t happen was that no more accidents happen here. This is why the process is taking so long and going so slow.”

The new plans for the Berkman II come at a time of change and renewal for the Riverfront. In 2019 the former Jacksonville Landing marketplace was demolished after being open for 32 years. Recently, Perkins & Will won the Riverfront Plaza design competition with its plans to redevelop the plaza with a beer garden, a hotel, a play area and a 151-foot stainless steel “Jax” sculpture designed by artist, Jefrè.



This rendering shows the pickup and dropoff point for Presbyterian Plaza.



A watercolor rendering makes clear the grass and surrounding landscapes that border the new, proposed structures around the Plaza.



DRAWINGS COURTESY OF JAYCOX ARCHITECTS AND STUDIOVINES INC. • YVES RATHLE BA NCARB

This aerial illustrates the anchor points of the San Marco Square, which now has a Southern landmark if plans continue on track as proposed, finishing at what is being dubbed - Presbyterian Plaza.



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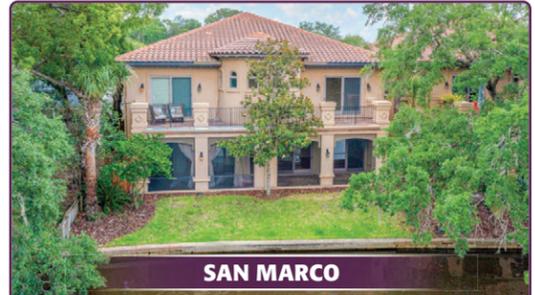


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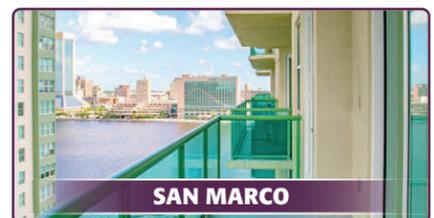


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Real Estate market continues to sizzle

DESPERATELY SEEKING HOMES TO SELL IN NORTHEAST FLORIDA PEARL STREET ADDRESS

Northeast Florida's housing market desperately needs more homes.

In June, the region's residential market continued its frenzied pace, with low interest rates and a limited inventory fueling record high sales prices.

With an available months' supply of inventory declining 58.1% to a mere 1.3-months of inventory compared to the same time last year when it boasted 3.1-months, June's housing market numbers showed another record increase in average and median sale prices. Also, worth noting was a 55% decline in the number of days homes stayed on the market – 71 days in June 2020 to 32 days in June of this year.

Specifically, June's median sales price of \$301,000 leapt 18% from \$255,000 in June 2020. Meanwhile the average sale price of a home on the First Coast was \$373,378, a dramatic 20.7% increase from the year before when the average price was \$309,269.

"Many buyers have gone to the sidelines and are continuing to rent or double up with others, as the affordability of homes compared to incomes becomes a bigger issue," said Missi Howell, president of the Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS®.

“The summer demand and supply will be interesting to watch, as peoples’ EYES TURN FROM LISTING AND SELLING TO FOCUS ON TRAVEL AND VACATIONS. But they generally turn back to listing and selling as the summer wanes. At present, THERE IS LITTLE TO NO RELIEF IN SIGHT FOR THE LACK OF HOMES NEEDED in our market”

— Missi Howell
President, Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS

"Sellers continue to reap the benefits, as long as they have somewhere to go that can fit within their budget. Many sellers continue to choose not to sell, because they have nowhere to go, lending to the undersupply of existing homes for sale."

If they do have a home to move to, sellers have a lot of incentive to put their residences on the market. In June, sellers received 100.5% of their original list price. This number is derived from dividing a property's sales price by its original list price and taking the average for all properties that were sold in a given month, while not accounting for seller concessions. This also represents a 4.6% increase over the percentage of 96.1 in June 2020. Also in June, 43.3% of closed sales sold for more than the most recent list price, a 220.7% increase over June 2020 when that was 13.5%.

Home builders are trying to meet the increased market demand with new construction. Housing starts were up 3.6% in May from April, according to the U.S. Commerce Department. "Builders are building, but labor and material shortages have elongated their timelines," said Howell.

"Several builders have slowed production due to uncontrollable and unforeseen but anticipated price increases that may have them building beyond what the market value appraisal could bring. First-time home buyers have been the hardest hit with their budgets blown due to rapidly increasing prices coupled with a lower supply of money in the state's housing trust funds to help with down payment and closing-cost assistance. The institutional investors, which include iBuyers, institutional investors, and local real estate investors, continue to be strong players in our Northeast Florida market, buying up homes to turn around and rent," she continued, referring to iBuyer companies that use technology to make offers on homes instantly.

"The summer demand and supply will be interesting to watch, as peoples' eyes turn from listing and selling to focus on travel and vacations. But they generally turn back to listing and selling as the summer wanes. At present, there is little to no relief in sight for the lack of homes needed in our market," Howell said.

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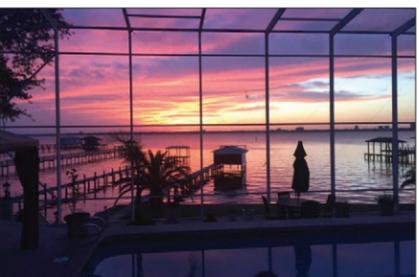
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MAYOR CURRY ROLLS OUT BUDGET, ANNOUNCES PRIORITIES

Gas tax, COVID relief funds and rise in property values help fund long-forgotten projects



BY KEVIN J. MEERSCHAERT
Resident Community News

Saying the past year was one with many challenges for the people of Jacksonville, Mayor Lenny Curry has presented a \$1.4 billion budget for the upcoming fiscal year to the City Council.

The spending plan includes pay raises and bonuses of about \$2500 for city employees. “I want to personally thank the city employees when in the midst of a global pandemic and so much uncertainty didn’t even blink an eye,” Curry said. “Instead they showed up for the citizens of Jacksonville day after day.”

The \$495 million Capital Improvement Plan for next year has an ambitious plan to address many longtime infrastructure needs. It includes \$24 million for road resurfacing, double the previous annual commitment. A \$50 million dollar investment in parks, pools, libraries and other enhancements with another \$50 budgeted for next year. The CIP also

includes a \$54 million commitment for drainage and resilience projects. That’s a five fold increase from last year.

Curry says there is also \$50 million earmarked to phase out septic tanks in neighborhoods that had been promised the improvements for decades. “It’s time the city lives up to its promises and to begin rebuilding trust in our community and this is a first step toward that goal,” he said.

Phasing out the septic tanks is a priority for City Council President Sam Newby. He said he was very pleased to hear Mayor Curry will be investing greatly in neighborhood improvements. “The city is definitely going to move forward in the right direction,” Newby said.

After several difficult years things should be a lot easier for the Council Finance Committee when it begins its budget hearings August 12.

Along with increased revenue from a hike in property values, the city will see additional funding from the federal government in COVID relief money and the Jobs for Jax legislation that doubled the local gas tax.

Group 2 At-large City Councilman Ron Salem said it’s a good year to be the Finance Chair. He said there will be no

consideration of a millage hike or increase in city fees in the budget.

“I don’t see a need for that. I think that we have hit our citizens between the pension tax, the school sales tax over the last five or six years. I think the citizens have stepped up and I don’t see a need to do any more than that,” he said.

Curry spent a large part of his June 20 address to the Council to urge local residents to remain vigilant in the fight against COVID-19 and it’s recent variant. There has been a surge of recent cases in Duval County hospitals that have strained emergency services. Curry urged all residents to get vaccinated.

The Mayor’s office has also submitted legislation for the proposed \$120 million athletic complex for the Jaguars. The city would fund \$60 million with any cost overruns picked up by the team.

The project, which is being called the first phase of a major stadium renovation, would include an indoor playing field and 127,087 square foot building for team offices, training and meeting rooms.

The City Council must approve the budget by October 1st.

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KHAN, JAGUARS PLAN FOR RIVERFRONT GETS GREEN LIGHT FROM DIA

City Council could take up vote as early as September



BY KEVIN J. MEERSCHAERT
Resident Community News

Jacksonville Downtown Investment Authority gave unanimous approval July 7 to a \$114 million incentive package with Jaguar owner Shad Khan for his plan to revitalize the former Kids Kampus parcel on the St. Johns River.

Khan's development company, Iguana Investments is looking to build a \$321 million development across from TIAA Bank Field. The proposal includes a Four Seasons hotel and an office building with space set aside for a renovated marina and an expanded

Riverwalk. The historic Fire Museum would be moved to a location on Catherine Street.

DIA Board members said they were impressed with the plans being put forth by the development team. Board member Craig Gibbs said the plan was impressive and should alleviate any public concerns regarding greenspace and public access to the river.

"I think this deal does a good job of threading the needle in as much as you can. I know that the duPont study is a great thing," he said. "I think the unfortunate reality is if we were to wait for everybody's sighting and everybody's meeting, and everybody's public comment, and every private developers

proposal, we would end up in a place where we would probably not get anything developed."

Part of the deal stipulates that the DIA works with the Jessie Ball duPont Fund to build a replacement park for Kids Kampus within ten acres of its original location.

The DIA and Jacksonville City Council donated \$60,000 to the Fund to create a Downtown Riverfront master plan to preserve public access downtown to the St. Johns River.

Knowing they will be spearheading the design of the new park was enough to get several local environmental groups to support the plan.

Greenscape of Jacksonville Interim Executive Director Lisa Grubba said her group is excited with what Jesse Ball DuPont has envisioned.

"The preliminary plan described in the Jessie Ball duPont Fund report... advances several objectives important to Greenscape," she said.

Grubba said she's pleased the plan described as The Esplanade, preserves a significant portion of open space which can act as a resilient buffer to the St. Johns River. She also said she's happy to see plans to link the riverwalk to Metropolitan Park.

The park proposal must be approved by the state in regard to some grant restrictions, but DIA CEO Lori Boyer says it shouldn't be a problem. She said they'll present their proposal to state officials after the duPont plan is finalized in the coming weeks.

JAX Chamber has been strongly in support of the plan presented by the Jaguars.

JAX Chamber President and CEO Daniel Davis said it's a huge deal for the city and he's very excited over the prospect of the development.

The area known as the Shipyards has seen more than its share of proposed developments fall to the wayside for various economic reasons. Davis said he believes this time it will be different and the Jaguars' plans will become a reality.

"We've got a lot of momentum right now," Davis said. "You're seeing that downtown. You're seeing that with other projects. So, we think this is a great first step and I am looking forward to [a vote by] the City Council."

One additional legal hurdle needs to be cleared before the plan can be sent to the Council for its approval. Boyer said other private developers have until early August to submit their own plans for the space. If no one does, and she says there has been no indication that any other company is planning to do so, the Jaguars proposal would be introduced to the Council in August with a vote possible by the end of September.

While everything appears to be heading in the right direction Jaguars President Mark Lamping said they won't be taking anything for granted. He said there could be some minor changes to the plan but if all goes well with the City Council, Lamping said he has no doubt there will be a Four Seasons Hotel coming to Jacksonville's riverfront.

According to the deal, Iguana must break ground on the project by next June.

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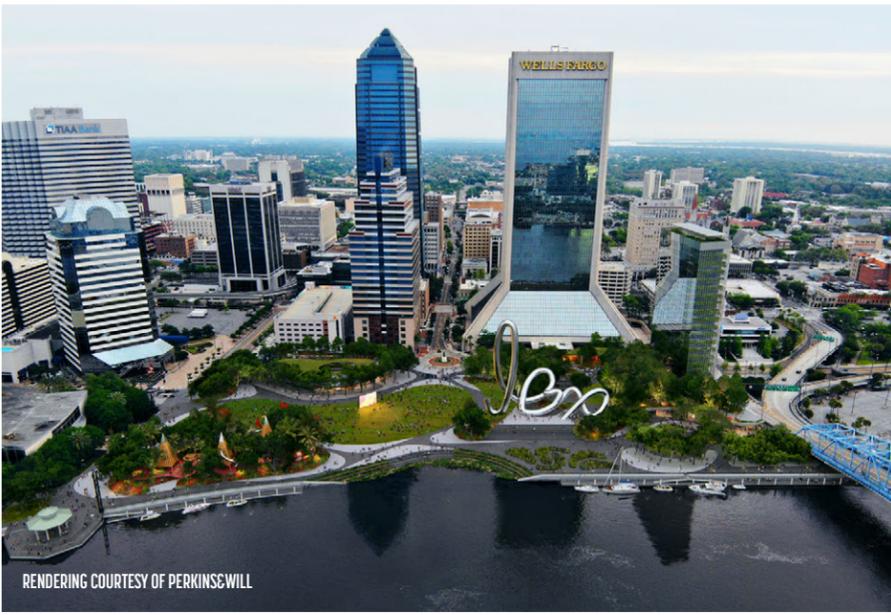
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RIVERFRONT PLAZA DESIGN UNVEILED, WINNER CHOSEN FOR FORMER LANDING SITE

Park to connect the community to St. Johns River, spark conversations

The Jacksonville Professional Services Evaluation Committee (PSEC) has selected Perkins&Will as the winner of the design competition for Riverfront Plaza, the former home of The Jacksonville Landing.

In June, Perkins&Will was one of three groups who presented their plans to the PSEC. Their plan narrowly outscored the proposals by Agency Landscape+Planning and Olin Limited.

The winning proposal includes a 151-foot high art sculpture of a gleaming “Jax” written in stainless steel tubes.

It also calls for a children’s play area, a sky garden terrace, a large central lawn, a beer garden, and walking and biking ramps to the Main Street Bridge. The current ramps to the bridge are being removed.

There will also be space set aside on both ends of the parcel off Independent Drive

for a hotel and park pavilion building. It will leave an open corridor at Laura Street so the view of the St. Johns River isn’t blocked.

Downtown Investment Authority CEO Lori Boyer sits on the committee and along with Jacksonville Parks Director Darryl Smith, scored the three presentations made to the PSEC in June.

Boyer said all the proposals had intriguing ideas but it was the art structure that put Perkins&Will over the top. “I kept asking myself ‘Could you take this piece of art and plo p it down in some other city in Florida or elsewhere and have it work?’”

She said the other proposals were nice but neither would be considered uniquely “Jacksonville.”

The sculpture has gotten a great deal of attention in the community. Boyer said public comment before the vote was running about five to one regarding the Perkins&Will design. There appears to be some strong feelings on the sculpture and it’s curving tube that spells out “Jax” with a heart in the middle. While opinions vary, Boyer said that is one of it’s attributes since it gets people talking about downtown Jacksonville and could become a place for people to visit.

“The fact that people are talking about it is exactly what we’re looking for,” she said.

“Love it or hate it, the public art piece has received a tremendous amount of public comment. Which I think really indicates it’s iconic nature.”

Boyer said if you have something like it downtown, it’ll draw people to the downtown area and be what The Landing once was when it was first opened and was anchored by major retail stores.

In his scoring, Joseph had ranked Agency Landscape+Planning slightly ahead of Perkins&Will but still has no problem with the final outcome.

“This is an exciting project that will change the Downtown experience for years to come,” he said.

“Parks connect people to each other, and Riverfront Plaza will connect the community to the St. John’s River in a meaningful, heartfelt way.”

For their part, Perkins&Will say they are delighted to be the winning design. Landscape Architect Design Principal Christopher Counts said the transformative potential of the project cannot be overstated.

“This new world-class park will be reflective of the culture, diversity, and vitality of the City of Jacksonville,” he said in a written statement provided by DIA. “It will become part of the public consciousness of the City and a source of civic pride for the citizens of Jacksonville.”

There will now be a specific plan worked out between the city and Perkins&Will. Boyer said most of what’s being proposed will likely stay intact but some elements of the other proposals may also be added to the final design.

The estimated total cost presented in June by the designers was \$12 million for the park and between \$11.5 to \$18 million for the art sculpture depending on the materials used.

The total price tag of \$23.5 to \$30 million was the highest estimate presented by the three final candidates.

Boyer said they hope to have completed negotiations on the contract and sent it to the Mayor’s office by the end of September.

Construction could begin as early as next summer.

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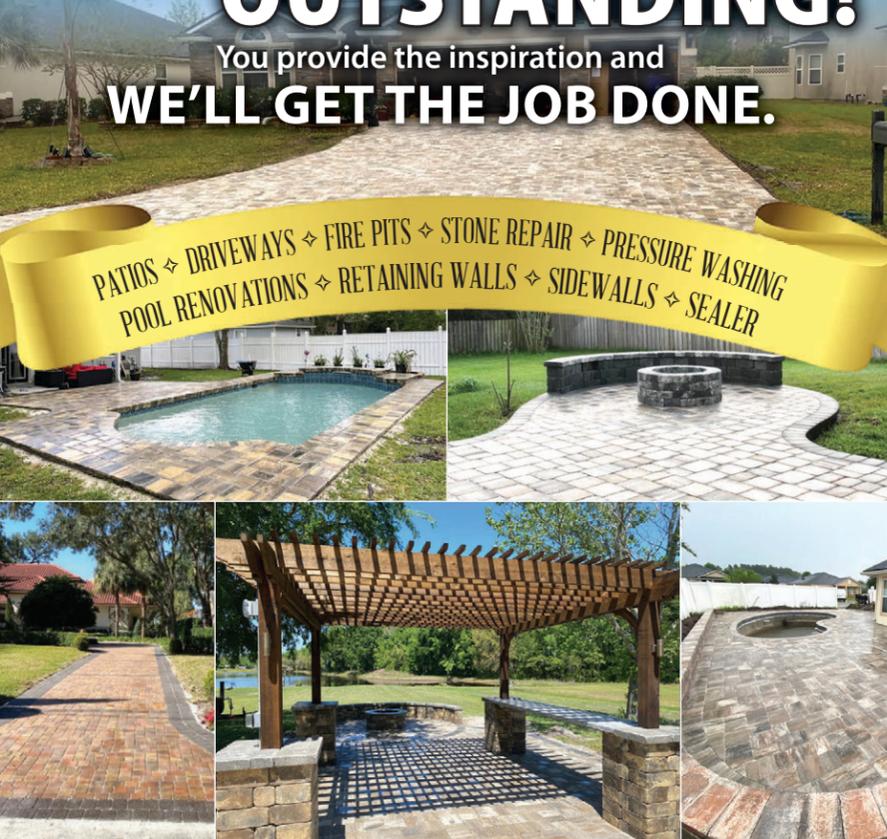
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Downtown Ecumenical Services Council is having a party, a party with a purpose on Aug. 23 at WJCT Studios. The organization has been helping on the front lines during the most severe impacts of COVID-19 on the job market and the ravaging impacts on public health. They need more superheroes, more locals to step up in the fight to beat back poverty and the circumstances that keep people from thriving during tough times.

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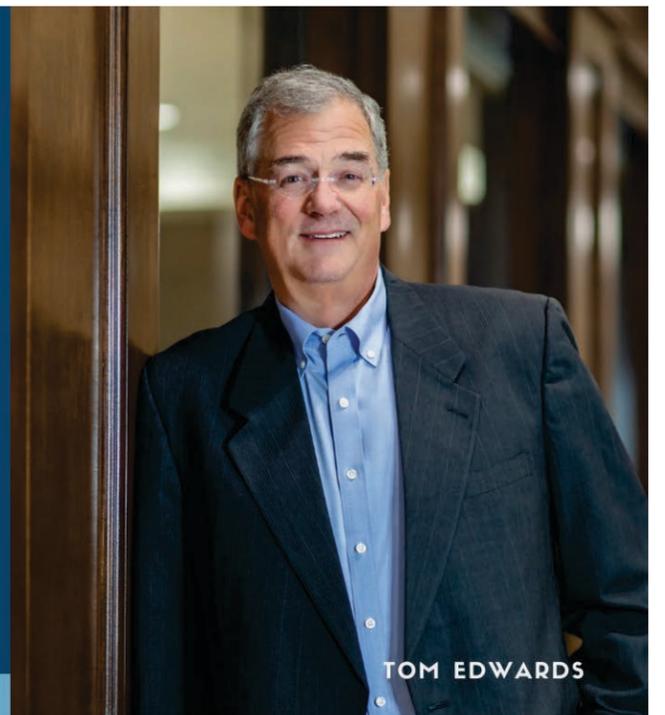
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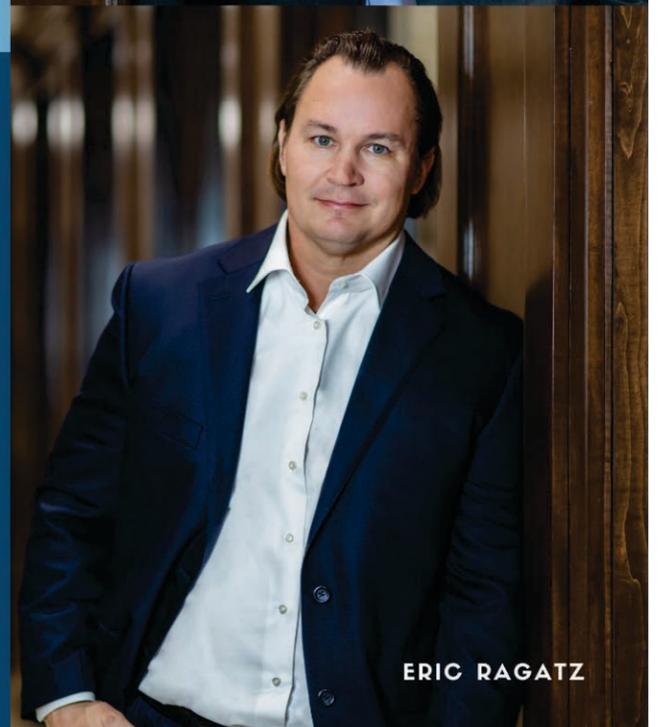
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Wolfson Children's ER and Porter Family Trauma Center earn Emergency Nurses Association Award



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To recognize the world-class, life-saving care provided at Wolfson Children's Hospital of Jacksonville, the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) selected the Wolfson Children's Emergency and Porter Family Trauma Center as one of only 33 emergency departments (EDs) nationwide to receive the prestigious Lantern Award. Just seven children's hospitals in the country received this prestigious emergency nursing honor.

Anthony Pohlgeers, MD, chief of Pediatric Emergency Medicine for Wolfson Children's Hospital

of Jacksonville, said, "The nurses in the Emergency and Trauma Center provide both medical and emotional support for not only the patients, but the parents, as well. This national recognition is confirmation of what I have always known: this team is special, and we are lucky to have them here in Jacksonville."

"The Wolfson Children's Emergency and Porter Family Trauma Center team is specially trained to treat the most critically ill and injured children in the region," said Michael D. Aubin, FACHE, president of Wolfson Children's Hospital. "We hope parents will rest assured knowing that this expert pediatric team is ready and waiting, should their child ever need them."

JEWISH FEDERATION ANNOUNCES NEW CEO

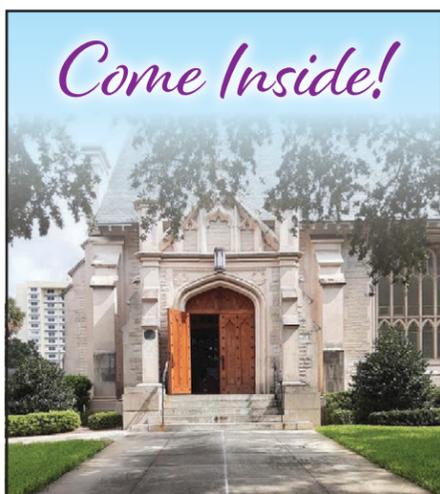


MARIAM SHPEEN FEIST

The Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida has hired Mariam Shpeen Feist as the new chief executive officer for the nonprofit organization. Feist is the former executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas and has spent more than 25 years in Jewish community service.

Feist will begin work for the Federation on November 1, and the current Executive Director Alan Margolies will retire at year's end after more than 30 years with the organization.

"We cannot let this moment pass without acknowledging the immeasurable impact that Alan has had on our Northeast Florida Jewish community as well as our Jewish community in Israel and around the world. We are grateful for his leadership and for the strong connections and foundation he has created during his tenure and look forward to continued growth and fulfillment of our mission under Mariam's leadership. We are excited to welcome her to our Jewish community and look forward to many years of success working together," said Jewish Federation & Foundation President Jennifer Plotkin at a June board of directors meeting.

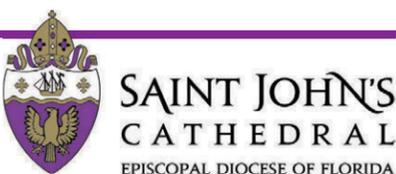


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Local bank donates \$10,000 to RAP

IBERIABANK First Horizon recently donated \$10,000 to Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) to assist with its efforts toward the beautification and maintenance of the Five Points area.

This investment complemented the City of Jacksonville's major infrastructure project on Lomax Street. It helped fund power washing and some landscaping that has already been done from Post Street to Park Street. Installation of new trans cans, signage, and light fixtures is planned for the fall.

The check was presented by Abel Harding, President of the North Florida Market

IBERIABANK First Horizon to RAP's Executive Director, Shannon Blankinship, Councilwoman Randy DeFoor was present.

"As part of our mission to improve the well-being of our neighbors and support organizations creating a more sustainable future for our communities, we are thrilled to support the efforts of Riverside Avondale Preservation in the beautification of our neighborhood," said Harding. "Living in Five Points, this project is close to home. I appreciate the hard work our city has put into improving infrastructure and accessibility for both its residents and local businesses."

'The Butterfly Bruises' author reflects on time in Jacksonville

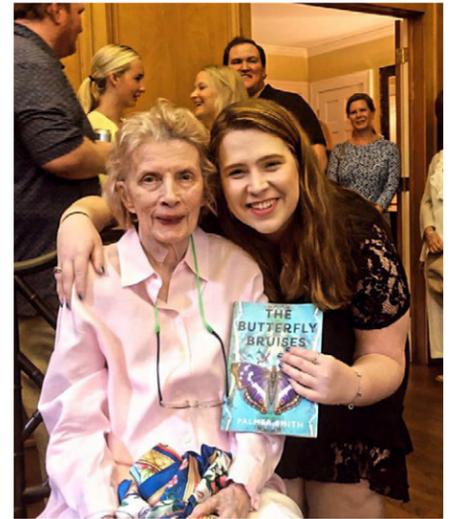
In the case of Palmer Smith, North meets South and the result is Smith's first published collection of work, *The Butterfly Bruises*. Born in New York City to a southern mother, Smith's mother packed up their car every summer and drove Smith and her brother down the east coast to North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida to visit their many relatives.

"I have spent every summer of my life in the Ortega and Avondale neighborhoods of Jacksonville, as my family, the Cassidys, all live there," Smith said.

During the week of June 21, she did several readings and signings in the Jacksonville area at Chamblin's Bookmine, San Marco Books and More, Story and Song, and The BookMark.

Her yearly travels gave her the opportunity to study and reflect on Northeastern versus Southern American cultures, family, nature versus technology, animals, the ocean and the imagination. *The Butterfly Bruises* is her compilation of 80 poems and several short stories in which a manatee befriends a widow, a ghost haunts an old Charleston home and New York City becomes its own character. Some of the texts are full of magic, others full of mystery. The collection is organized into six themed poetry sections and one final section of short stories.

"From sonnets to somnambulance, from algae to oxytocin, from manatees to Manhattan, Smith rides the riptides of memory's fictions and frictions in this prolific debut," said



Author Palmer Smith with her debut collection, *The Butterfly Bruises*, and her grandmother at a recent private reading

Professor Robert Dewhurst, poetry critic and scholar.

Passionate about writing and poetry, Palmer is a current pursuing her master's degree in English. She attended Convent of the Sacred Heart as a child and Sarah Lawrence for her bachelor's degree in creative writing, French literature and pre-law. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in a host of magazines and journals. The CFO of *Garden and Gun Magazine* recently praised her poetry.

To find Palmer Smith's tour dates, or purchase a copy of "The Butterfly Bruises," go to thebutterflybruisesbook.com.

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Lisa Grubba named Greenscape's Interim Executive Director

Lisa Grubba, a board member of Greenscape of Jacksonville, has been named the company's Interim Executive Director, following the retirement of Anna Dooley, who served for nearly 25 years.

"We're thankful to Anna Dooley for her many years of service to Greenscape, and we look forward to Lisa Grubba's leadership during this transition," said Board President Kim Bongiovanni.

Grubba is an award-winning journalist and Florida Master Naturalist who has been covering environmental matters in Northeast Florida for more than a decade. She founded the digital magazine Florida Field Notes, and she hosts a radio segment entitled "Wild Florida" on WJCT 89.9 FM. She will work with Becky Henson, Greenscape's Assistant Director, as the organization emerges from the pandemic and continues its efforts to plant, protect, and promote trees.

"I am thrilled to help lead an organization with such deep roots in our community, especially now. As appreciation for the role of trees has grown from beautification and property value enhancement to include storm water management, heat reduction, and wildlife habitat preservation, Greenscape is poised to lend its decades of experience to Jacksonville as it addresses resiliency issues," Grubba said.

Grubba began her career in finance with Barnett Bank, later managing the statewide operations of a regional company. She holds a Bachelor's in Finance from the University of Central Florida, a Master's in Journalism from Harvard, and a Master Naturalist certification from the University of Florida.



Lisa Grubba, Interim Executive Director of Greenscape

Online auction benefits children coping with hearing loss and impairment

AFICIANADOS SIP, SAVOR THE HOOSH TO RAISE FUNDS FOR HEARING AND SPEECH

The Jacksonville Bourbon & Whiskey Society held an online auction to benefit Clarke Schools for Hearing and Speech in June at Grey Matter Distillery. The auction raised \$8,365 in auction sales and donations by JBWS members, as well as Jacksonville and St. Augustine businesses.

Proceeds from the auction will help fund services and programs at Clarke Jacksonville, which exists to teach children who are deaf or hard of hearing to listen and speak through its early intervention and school-based programs.

Jacksonville Bourbon & Whiskey Society partners with local charities to help promote and support their causes, in addition to offering its members the opportunity to share the experience of drinking great bourbon and whiskey.



Todd Paschall presents a check for the auction's proceeds to Clarke Jacksonville's director, Alisa Demico



Grey Matter Distillery staff Chris Bickett, Drew Flavell, Todd Paschall and Paul Grey, owner of the distillery

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Leadership Jacksonville announces 2021-2022 Board of Directors

Leadership Jacksonville has announced its 2021-22 officer and new members. The board of directors is led by President Kathy Miller, senior vice president of financial services and tax for Regency Centers Corporation.

“With this outstanding group of leaders, we are ready to begin another year, preparing adult and youth leaders to make a difference in our community,” said Leadership Jacksonville’s CEO, Jill Langford Dame.

The organization was established in 1976 as a vehicle to stimulate growth of leadership in northeast Florida. It has four major programs: Leadership Jacksonville, New Leadership Summit, Youth Leadership Jacksonville and Leadership Jacksonville Next Generation.



President Kathy Miller, senior vice president, financial services and tax, Regency Centers Corporation



President-Elect Michael Howland, president and CEO, Jacksonville Speech and Hearing Center



Secretary/Treasurer Ron Pellum, president, Ennis, Pellum & Associates, CPAs



Immediate Past President Bruce Fafard, CEO, Museum of Science and History



Vicky Basra, president/CEO, Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center



Cynthia Griffin, director, pharmacy government programs, Florida Blue



Thanh Hogan, vice president-clinical operations, UF Health Jacksonville



Michael Huskey, director of workplace development, Haskell



Mincy Pollock, owner/founder, Florida Care Assurance Group



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Nina Waters, CEO of The Community Foundation, receives award from Jennifer Ryan, CEO of Volunteers in Medicine, 2020

Volunteers in Medicine to honor eight women

“These women have demonstrated exceptional commitment to the health of the community through their professional and personal engagement and accomplishments,” Ann Carey, VIM Board Chair said of the honorees.

“These women are community leaders, advocates, and key influencers,” said Jennifer Ryan, VIM CEO.

VIM is currently accepting sponsors for the luncheon to help ensure that those who do not earn enough money to meet their basic needs will have access to healthcare. By supporting VIM through the Women with Heart Luncheon, the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) population is given a medical home, keeping them healthy, employed, and out of hospital emergency rooms.

The luncheon kicks off a year-long awareness and fundraising campaign. Featured will be a drawing for the 2022 “Heart of Jacksonville” necklace, donated by Allen’s Jewelers and valued at \$13,000. Only 150 tickets will be sold at \$100 each.

For more information about sponsorship opportunities, luncheon details, and event tickets, please contact Karen Smith, VIM’s development manager, at (904) 399-2766 extension 102# or KSmith@vim-jax.org.

Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) plans to honor eight women at the Sixth Annual Women with Heart Luncheon to take place on Wednesday, February 2, 2022 at the Florida Blue Conference Center.

The 2022 honorees are:

- Terrie Andrews, PhD, Baptist Health
- Debbie Buckland, TRUIST Bank
- Paula Chamberlain, MSN, MA, Ascension St. Vincent’s
- Jessica Cummings, Brooks Rehabilitation
- Sejal Kuthiala, MD, Memorial Hospital, Cancer Specialists of North Florida
- Susan Monahan, OD, Ponte Vedra Eye Associates
- Patricia Gillum Sams, JEA and The Sistah Covenant
- Kelli Wells, MD, Florida Blue

Each honoree has committed to a month of advocacy and service to VIM’s free healthcare clinic.

JIM WHITTAKER TO RETIRE FROM ARC



JIM WHITTAKER

Jim Whittaker, President/CEO of The Arc Jacksonville will retire in December after 21 years with the organization and 46 years in the industry.

Whittaker has dedicated his professional life to serving individuals with intellectual and developmental differences (IDD), a population he began working with when he was a teenager. Upon earning his Bachelor’s in Education from the University of Florida, he led the newly formed Arc of Putnam. He then grew The Arc Jacksonville.

“I have seen firsthand how Jim’s ability to effectively bring ideas and opportunities to reality enabled The Arc Jacksonville to become an exceptional organization. His understanding and commitment to innovation, inclusion, service quality, and financial accountability have been cornerstones in the development and management of programs and services,” said John Cooksey, Chairman of Board at The Arc Jacksonville.

The Board is working with a search firm to find the most qualified candidate for the next President/CEO and will share more news this fall.



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THE BRIDGE THAT FOREVER CHANGED THE RIVER CITY

Antique cars, relics and memories shared during a celebration of the Acosta Bridge



Sara Andrews



Matt Carlucci and Tom Ranney.

BY KAREN RIELEY
Resident Community News

When the Acosta Bridge opened on July 1, 1921, it changed the “geography of [Jacksonville’s] mind to greater possibilities and opportunities,” as Alan Bliss, Jacksonville Historical Society executive director, noted in his remarks at the 100th anniversary celebration of the opening of the Acosta Bridge on June 24 hosted by the San Marco Preservation Society.

Over 100 guests attended Wood’s presentation on the Acosta Bridge, including St. Elmo Acosta’s oldest living granddaughter, Adrienne Hollis; his youngest living granddaughter, Andrea “Andy” Acosta Newman; and his grandson, George Acosta. Each granddaughter was presented with a rose at the gathering to commemorate the fact that Acosta traditionally wore a rose in his lapel.

The granddaughter of South Jacksonville’s mayor, Nancy Belote Felton, was also in attendance. South Jacksonville was the forerunner of the community now called Southside.

On June 26, a car parade recreated the original crossing of the Acosta Bridge from the Southbank. The procession wound its way to the San Marco Square in San Marco to participate in more festivities and presentations.

Andy Newman noted that her grandfather would be proud of today’s Acosta Bridge because it represents progress for the city of Jacksonville. The opening of the bridge sparked rapid growth in South Jacksonville and led to the community’s annexation by the City of Jacksonville in 1932. It was also instrumental in growth of the beaches area, as well as residential development in Mandarin. The bridge also made the other neighborhoods south of the river more attractive for residential development, and even affected the rest of the state by opening up travel along Florida’s east coast.



Adrienne Hollis, St. Elmo Acosta’s oldest living granddaughter, brought the shovel that Acosta used in the groundbreaking for the bridge. Also shown are Andy Acosta Newman, Acosta’s youngest living granddaughter, to the left of Adrienne Hollis, and Curt and Debbie Hollis with Doug and Linda Hollis.

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LOCAL COUPLE SHARES A PASSION FOR THE ARTS, MARRIAGE

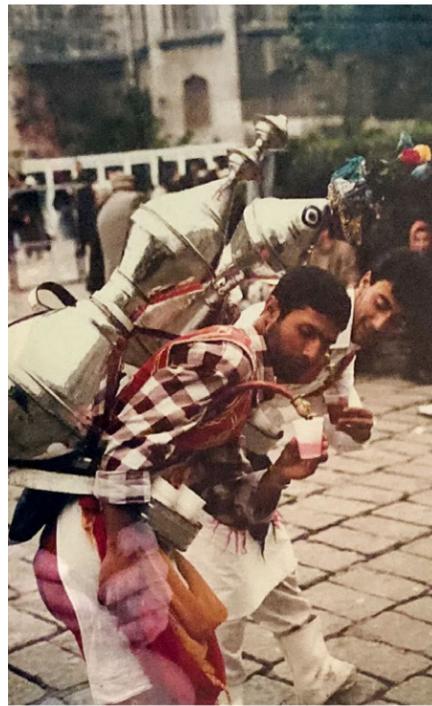
Exhibit on display through mid-September



Dan and Alice by Alice Hadwin, charcoal on paper



Fr. Nadopol, charcoal on paper by Alice Hadwin



Untitled, photograph by Dan Hadwin



"Roadside in Croatia," Dan Hadwin, photograph



"Palmetto," Dan Hadwin, photograph

BY MARY WANSE
Resident Community News

Now through September 19, see displayed the artwork of Alice and Dan Hadwin in Taliaferro Hall at St. John's Cathedral on East Church Street.

The exhibition is entitled ALICE AND DAN: A Marriage of True Minds, harkening back to Shakespeare's Sonnet 116. It features the talents of the late Alice Hadwin and her widower, Dan Hadwin, long-time congregants of St. John's and residents of San Jose area.

Alice's realistic paintings and charcoal portraits explore relationships between colors and reveal significant attention to detail. The artist's presence seems embodied in her work.

Dan's color and black and white photographs expose viewers to the intimate details of nature and impart a sensitivity toward architecture.

Together, the Hadwins' works disclose a joint appreciation for places and spaces that Alice and Dan had shared.

The exhibition will be open to the public during church hours. Pieces will be available for purchase through the Cathedral Bookstore & Gift Shop. A portion of the proceeds will benefit The Cathedral Art Guild to help fund future exhibits, purchase art inventory, offer art classes, and partake in related activities.

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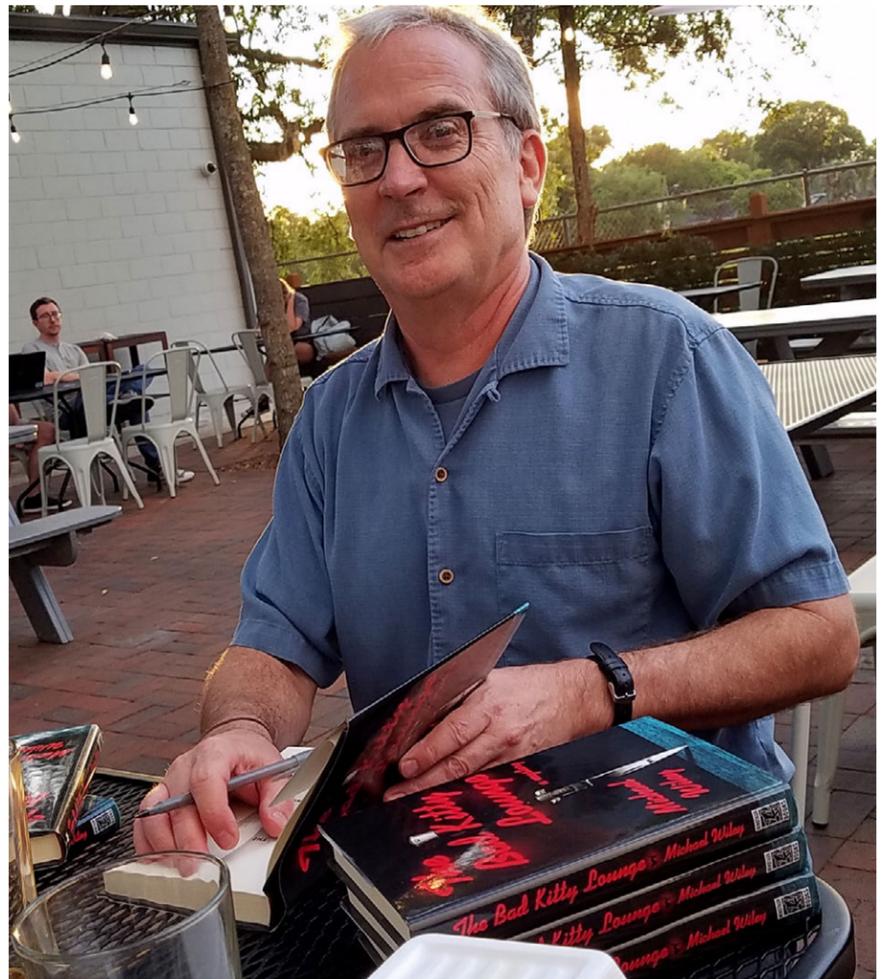


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Brookwood Book Club closes chapter



Suzanne Schellenberg, Sue Savayano, Emily Cofer, Michael Wiley, Nilda Laurint, Dale Bolton, Heather Gollnick, Carol Hamilton, and Lisa Alexander



Michael Wiley, local author

BY MARY WANSEER
Resident Community News

On May 18, the Brookwood Book Club closed its final chapter with one last gathering at Southern Grounds on Atlantic Boulevard. The event was attended by several club members and guest writer Michael Wiley, a Jacksonville author of crime mysteries.

The Brookwood Book Club was founded in 2001 by Ellen Bertoni. Long after her passing in 2005, monthly meetings continued to be held throughout the San Marco neighborhood to discuss books and socialize.

A brick in San Marco Square will ensure that the long-running group will always be remembered.

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Salvation Army celebrates successful return to fundraising

5k and Inaugural Event benefit various programs



Sgt. Ronnie Gainey with Sgt. Dana Gainey



Liz Ehlers with Margie Owen, Teena Foy and Cindy Johnson



Belinda Gallogly and Melina Buncome

The Women's Auxiliary 2021 Celebrity Chefs Tasting Luncheon was postponed due to COVID-19. The 35th Annual event was replaced with the new inaugural Christmas in July silent auction and vendor expo.

The Second Annual Kettle Krush 5K was also successful, as the event brought the community together and increased awareness of the Salvation Army of Northeast Florida services. Over 150 walkers, runners and volunteers celebrated Christmas in July and helped raise funds to help local families in need.

"We are thankful for the community turn out at our first in-person Kettle Krush 5K in downtown Jacksonville and look forward to increasing the involvement at the next race," said Major Keath Biggers, Area Commander.

All funds raised will continue to aid The Salvation Army philanthropic wishes with a focus on The Angel Tree program which served over 4000 children and hundreds of families in 2020.



Connie Craven with Kim Hepler



Ella, Anders and Erica Sahlgren



Leslie and Daryl Hetrick



Bert Tanner as Santa pictured with Major Keath Biggers



Bert Tanner as Santa

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Jim and Charlene Martin of the Carouel Yacht Club in Clearwater Beach

Florida's top yacht clubs descend on Ortega

It was a long weekend full of festivities and good times for leaders of yacht clubs throughout the state of Florida as a group of reciprocal members and their spouses arrived in mid-June. Leadership at the Florida Yacht Club (FYC) welcomed guests to Jacksonville to be entertained, all while celebrating the customs of traditional yachtmanship.

"It is always a great turnout when the clubs visit, it's also a great time for everyone involved," said Bert Ralston, who helped to bring the outing back to the Florida Yacht Club for the third such occasion. Ralston, who is a past commodore of the club is currently the Commodore of The Florida Council of Yacht Clubs (FCYC), which has Flag Officers disbursed throughout the state, other roles are Vice Commodore, Rear Commodore, Secretary and Treasurer.

The Council exists to encourage the sport of yachting, promote seamanship and navigation, and to promote entertainment of members of member clubs, sound club governance and best practices in club operations. Over 36,000 voters count on the FCYC to represent them in legislative matters that pertain to the boating public. They employ a legislative representative in Tallahassee to speak on behalf of the member clubs and have done so since 1960.

Ralston heaped praise on the staff of the Florida Yacht Club, from the staff to the club's Board of Governors to members that entertained out of town guests. He also said that it wouldn't have been possible without the leadership and contributions of William Allen, IV, the current Commodore of the club.

"It's the first time in history that a club has hosted the group [FCYC] for three such occasions in its history," shared Allen, while discussing the turnout for traditions at the club.

The Florida Yacht Club is also the oldest continuous running yacht club in the entire state of Florida, dating back to 1876.



Fred and Jessica Jenkins with Wilson and Penny Studstill



Florida Yacht Club members Marisol Harrell and Ann Mancuso



Chip and Betty Hardy of the Tampa Yacht and Country Club with Joey and Pam Sowell of Eau Gallie Yacht Club in Melbourne along with fellow Eau Gallie Yacht Club members Jon and Edy Williams



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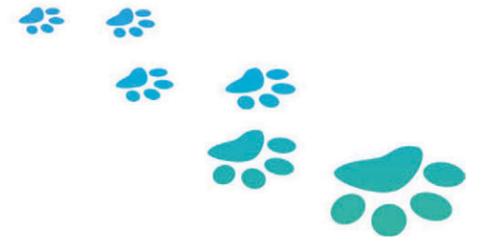
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ANIMAL HOUSE



ANIMAL TEACHERS

BY JULIE KERNS GARMENDIA
Resident Community News



When schools open in August, students will be welcomed back by more than just teachers, administrators and staff. In some school classrooms, a variety of friendly classroom pets and animal reading companions will enrich and expand traditional learning, according to longtime educators Ana Andenmatten and Laurie Wilbur.

Both women are teachers and mothers with decades of childhood learning experience. They promote the value of animals in the classroom to motivate and excite children about learning, especially children with no pets at home. They say that interaction with classroom pets, or reading to an animal provides powerful incentive for students to focus on assignments and put forth their best efforts while practicing skills and building confidence.

Ana Andenmatten, a first grade teacher at Mandarin Oaks Elementary and founder of Ana's Angels Animal Rescue, provides classroom

pets and foster animals to interact with her students. Laurie Wilbur and her chocolate Labrador Retriever, Rosie, spearheaded a Read With Me initiative in schools that has grown to ten reading teams since 2018.

Mrs. Andenmatten's fifteenth year of teaching begins in August. She said that classroom pets can teach children valuable life lessons equally as important as grade-level curriculum. As an experienced elementary teacher, including special-needs students and those whose first language is not English, Andenmatten said that all young learners uniquely respond to animal interaction.

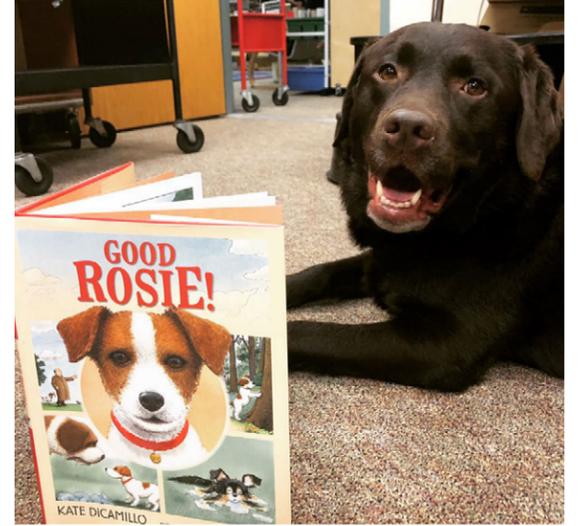
"As we care for classroom pets or rescued animals, these activities teach the importance of daily routine and responsibility. During the year, students learn empathy and compassion, because our animals were homeless, have obvious disabilities, or are healing from temporary or permanent injuries. Each time they clean up after, feed, water, play with or

walk an animal, they learn to think of the needs of others. Students also learn how to calmly approach or properly handle an animal, including safety and cleanliness. Students are introduced to animal rescue, rehabilitation, socialization, training and fostering-to-adoption, including how to say goodbye when a foster goes to its new home," she said. "When a foster is adopted we post photos for the entire school to celebrate that adoption together."

While foster animals rotate in and out of the classroom as they are adopted, Andenmatten's permanent classroom residents include a rescue hedgehog named Hedgie and a chinchilla named Chinnie Chin Chin. Andenmatten said every child has a daily job to compete for the animals. After school work is finished, the reward is time to pet or play with the animals.

Animal activities complement science curriculum studies and projects, including hatching baby chicks from eggs in an incubator. Ecology and environmental lessons come alive with an outside garden perfect for hedgehogs. Reading to Hedgie is considered a class privilege; the children truly believe he listens attentively to them. They don't seem to mind at all that the nocturnal hedgehog who enjoys many hours of daytime sleep, often snoozes straight through storytime.

Andenmatten does not accept animals from the public, but pulls them from shelter euthanasia lists or from situations where necessary veterinarian, surgical care or longterm rehabilitation is unavailable. Her safety net also includes rescue of animals with the least probability of adoption: senior or disabled pets, those with obvious deformities, and animals with solid black fur. She is always astonished at how first-graders do not hesitate to accept physical differences that cause most potential adopters to reject animals.



"I talk to my students about possible foster pets and discuss if they are comfortable with having a particular animal in the classroom. Green Bean, a kitten born without paws who could not walk normally is a perfect example. I choked up when eighteen little faces nodded yes to Green Bean without hesitation. Spending time with Green Bean is going to help them accept and better understand others with differences, throughout their lives," she said. "It is so endearing to see them carefully spread their jackets under their desks, inviting Green Bean, because he is more comfortable lying on cloth than tile."

Andenmatten's outside-the-box creativity, and her animal teachers, have proven so successful and popular, there is a waiting list for her classes. Waiting list requests and other parental options are only available at some public schools. Students must be allergy-free and parental permission is required for students to interact with classroom animals. Ana's Angels Animal Rescue is a nonprofit, with all tax-deductible donations entirely used for animal rescue, food, supplies and veterinary care.

Laurie Wilbur and her chocolate lab Rosie volunteered to spearhead the Read With Me

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program in 2018, a special initiative of Pet Partners of Northeast Florida. The program trains, tests and registers a human/animal team for school visits. There are two types of program activities: younger children practice their literacy skills and gain confidence by reading aloud to the animal, or for teens, the teams offer companionship, emotional support, positive interaction and personal connection, or stress relief.

Wilbur visits school principals to explain the program and its broad benefits for students and teachers. The first school visit was to Seabreeze Elementary in 2018. Then she and Rosie began to visit Mandarin Oaks Elementary and Paxson High School. There are now ten Read With Me teams that include dogs, a cat and a rabbit, that are all available to visit schools, Wilbur said. She actively recruits new teams and welcomes principals to contact her about the program.

“When I heard that Pet Partners of Northeast Florida needed a volunteer to coordinate a local Read With Me program, I knew that Rosie and I were the perfect fit,” Wilbur said. “Sometimes it’s children reading to Rosie or teenage students who sign up for lunch visits. All kinds of students want to connect and relax with an affectionate animal, or talk to a caring adult with no agenda but a sympathetic ear. This program offers benefits for all ages. The animals especially help children who are learning English, the disabled, autistic or those with other physical, emotional or

learning challenges. Teams also teach children how to safely and properly greet, approach and interact with animals.”

Wilbur said that visits are closely coordinated with the schools and parental consent is required for participation. The Read With Me teams have attended 2021 summer camps and are ready to resume a normal school visitation schedule for the 2021-2022 academic year. Adult handlers and their animals must complete obedience training, testing and registration requirements as a pet therapy team through Pet Partners of Northeast Florida in order to participate.

Children reading to animals has also been a success at the Jacksonville Humane Society. Their highly successful Pawsitive Reading Program, sponsored by The Jim Moran Foundation, has attracted approximately 1100 families since 2018 and several hundred regular weekly or monthly readers. Participants visit the shelter to read to the animals, which allows them to practice reading skills and build reading confidence in a safe, fun environment. The reading sessions also provide valuable enrichment for shelter pets who miss human interaction and contact, according to Savanna New, M. Ed., Jacksonville Humane Society’s Development & Education Manager.

“Attendance at one, free forty-five minute information session by the child and parent/guardian, with advance registration, is required. Pawsitive Reader information sessions resume in August and quickly fill. Check the JHS website for information,” New said. “We welcome all ages, including pre-readers whose parents or guardians can read to them while our shelter pets listen. While promoting literacy skills for children, this program provides socialization, companionship and stress relief for shelter pets, helping better prepare them for adoption.”

Pawsitive Readers may come to the shelter anytime during Adoption Center hours, weekdays 12 p.m. – 7 p.m. or weekends 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., to read to shelter pets. A parent or guardian must stay with their child throughout the reading session. Suggested reading time for maximum benefit to the animals and readers, is at least thirty minutes per visit. Readers choose to read to adoptable cats or dogs from their own books or books may be borrowed from the Pawsitive Reading

Library. All participants receive a free book, courtesy of The Jim Moran Foundation, while supplies are available. Teen Pawsitive Readers complete community service volunteer hours required by schools, while helping animals in need.

The required Pawsitive Reading Information Sessions will be held in August: Saturday, August 7, 10:30 a.m.; Thursday, August 12, 5:00 p.m.; Wednesday, August 18, 5:00 p.m.; Tuesday, August 24, 5:00 p.m. Advance registration is required and can be completed online. Sessions are held at the Jacksonville Humane Society, 8464 Beach Boulevard, in the conference room above the adoption center.



Resources

Ana’s Angels Animal Rescue/ Ana Andenmatten:
Facebook.com/ anasangelsanimalrescue
Donation address:
4525 Hood Road, Jacksonville, FL 32257
Paypal online donation:
anapeel5@hotmail.com

Read With Me/Laurie Wilbur:
Larz91@bellsouth.net.

Pet Partners of North Florida:
petpartnersnf.org
Facebook.com/petpartnersofnef

Jacksonville Humane Society Pawsitive Reading program:
www.jaxhumane.org/how-to-help/read
education@jaxhumane.org



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THE WAY WE WERE

LARRY AND MARY JANE MCKNIGHT

BY MARY WANSEER
Resident Community News

The story of Larry and Mary Jane McKnight began in the first grade at Hendricks Avenue Elementary School, and it continues today, seven decades later.

Both of them were born and raised in the San Marco area of Jacksonville—Larry on River Oaks Road with one younger sister and Mary Jane on a street just off of there as the fourth in line with four brothers. Their mothers played bridge together. Both of their fathers were exceptionally well known in the community.

Larry's parents were Arthur and Emily, nee Fruit, from Texas. Arthur McKnight worked for the Army Corps of Engineers as a Chief of Operations and became a world expert on dredging. He oversaw many projects on the St. Johns River. Arthur McKnight was also a leader at All Saints Episcopal Church.

Mary Jane's parents were Margaret, nee Hughes, a Jacksonville native, and O.E. Harrell, who was originally from Georgia. Her dad was a popular obstetrician in Jacksonville who

delivered over 4,000 babies during his career, many of them at St. Luke's, St. Vincent's, and Baptist Hospitals. He charged \$150 per delivery. One of Mary Jane's brothers and one of her daughters entered the same career field.

Mary Jane's family might have been known by her doctor father's popularity, but what most people didn't know about the Harrells was that they had built their own 16-foot boat from a kit, sanded it down themselves, strapped on a 25 horsepower Evinrude outboard motor, and headed south to Miami. All seven of them. "We didn't move very fast," Mary Jane said. Each family member had a responsibility in getting ready for the trip; Mary Jane's was to pack drinks. At eight years old, she didn't know better than to pack prune juice, her favorite fruit drink at that time. "My brothers have never let me forget it," she said.

Mary Jane's maternal grandparents, Leo and Bea Hughes, were known around town as well. They were here at the turn of the century. Leo was in the lumber business. They were instrumental in the building of St. Paul Catholic Church on Park Street and St. Vincent's Hospital. They also built their house on Montgomery Place in Avondale. In the window shutters, they carved a capital H for Hughes. They lost that house during the Great Depression, but the letters are still visible today.

Larry and Mary Jane attended grammar school together through sixth grade, and then their families moved—the McKnights to San Jose Boulevard behind the elementary school and the Harrells near the corner of



McKnights' 50th anniversary family photo taken in Maine, 2017
LEFT TO RIGHT-Back row standing: Alex Naaman, Nancy McKnight, Tim Lum, Cathy McKnight Naaman, Patrick Naaman, Jon Reuter, Robin McKnight, Emma Naaman; LEFT TO RIGHT-Front row seated: Hilary Reuter, Mary Jane McKnight, Julia Lum, Michael Lum, Larry McKnight, Abigail Reuter

Arbor Lane and Laurel Road. Larry and Mary Jane went on to Landon Junior-Senior High School. As friends, they socialized in the same groups. They enjoyed the Gator Bowl, basketball games, the Texas Drive-In, and The Krystal.

Larry was on the swim team, lettered. Mary Jane still regrets not having been a Lionette. "I was the most un-athletic person in my class. I was asked to be a timer for the swim team," she said. "As long as she could push the button on a stopwatch, she could do her job," Larry said as they both laughed at the memory of it.

The number one teacher whom Larry and Mary Jane remember fondly is Ms. Hunter Perkins, their 12th grade English teacher. They still recall her "double double toil and trouble" memorization exercises and the fact that they sat near each other in the back of her classroom because students were arranged by spelling scores. "In the back of the room were all the boys and Mary Jane," Larry told. "Because I couldn't spell either," she admitted.

They graduated with the class of 1960 before going off to separate colleges. Mary Jane went to Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina as a home economics major while Larry went to the University of Virginia as an engineering major on a Navy scholarship. "Halfway through school, I discovered that was not my calling, and I transferred to the business school and got a degree in accounting. It took me five years to get out of college," he said.

By September 1964, Mary Jane had returned to Jacksonville and was teaching at Landon, their alma mater, something she swore she would never do. "But I did it," she conceded with a giggle. For three years, she taught home economics in classrooms down the hall from her former teachers. One of them even reprimanded her for wearing high-heeled shoes during her first week on the job. But from the opposite side of the desk, Mary Jane developed a new appreciation for faculty members. As an adult and a teacher herself, she actually found her former instructors fun and funny.

Larry returned to Jacksonville from Virginia in 1965, assigned by the Navy to



May 6, 1967 at St. John's Cathedral



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The Harrell family
Center: O.E. and Margaret; LEFT TO RIGHT: William,
John, James, Martin, Mary Jane

Mayport. He and Mary Jane had not officially dated before this time. They were friends, and their families were as well. They spent time together, including holidays, and, occasionally, they escorted each other to functions if they couldn't find dates of their own. But they were not considered a couple. Then it happened, following a party down at the beach. "We finally decided we were meant for each other," Larry said. They were 23 years old.

Once they were engaged, Larry's naval ship was sent to the Mediterranean for six months. They left the wedding plans up to their mothers while Larry was at sea. Upon his return, they were walking down the aisle at St. John's Cathedral. "There weren't any secrets when Larry and I got married," Mary Jane said. It was May 6, 1967, and they had already been friends for nearly two decades.



Larry McKnight in Vung Tau, Vietnam, 1969

Almost immediately following the wedding, the McKnights moved to Charleston, South Carolina for two years; Larry was assigned there as a rear admiral's aide. A unique aspect of the job was that, even though Larry was fully qualified, Mary Jane had to be interviewed and approved by the admiral and his wife before Larry could take the job, as it involved the handling of a social calendar. She passed their inspection.

From there, Larry served in Vung Tau, Vietnam from 1969 to 1970. He was there when their first daughter, Cathy, was born and didn't meet her until she was nine months old when he returned to Jacksonville where Mary Jane had gone to be with her parents while Larry served overseas.

For the next 18 months, 1970-1971, the young family of three lived in Philadelphia so that Larry could earn a Wharton MBA at the University of Pennsylvania. From there, they were off to Rochester, New York when Larry was hired by Xerox Corporation. Their second daughter, Robin, was born up there before the company moved the family south to Stamford, Connecticut for three years and then back again to Rochester where their third daughter, Nancy, was born. There were additional transfers, which included moves to Dallas, Texas and Saratoga, California. "Xerox spent an enormous amount of money moving me around the country, which I never quite understood," Larry said of his time with the company before his 2000 retirement. Mary Jane thinks it was because "he was a problem solver."

After Larry's retirement from Xerox, he worked remotely doing part-time accounting work for Coastal Construction Products, a Jacksonville company owned by Mary Jane's younger brother, William Harrell, and William's good friend, Skip Allcorn,

Larry and Mary Jane were gone from Jacksonville for a total of 47 years. By the time they returned six years ago, their three girls were already married and on their own. Through all those decades, they never lost connections here though. Mary Jane maintained her leadership role in running Landon reunions. And they visited Jacksonville often when their parents were still alive.

Today, the McKnights have six grandchildren, two per each daughter who live in Texas, Massachusetts, and New York; they rarely visit Florida, as it's less complicated for Larry and Mary Jane to fly to them instead. When they are not cruising at sea, that is. The coronavirus pandemic caused a long gap in their travels though: 20 months. Only recently did they begin again.

As a hobby that morphed into paid work, Mary Jane does genealogy research.

Her curiosity began with a desire to find out who her maternal great grandmother's parents were. Her investigating led to the sad revelation of a tragic accident involving a wood-burning stove in 1916. It prompted in Mary Jane a passion for getting to the truth of family histories.

Larry and Mary Jane are active in two churches, St. John's Cathedral and All Saints Episcopal. They also are active in the exercise room. They both enjoy working out and staying fit.

When asked the secret to the longevity of their love, Larry said, "It's nice to marry the girl next door, the one you grew up with. But I didn't know that when I grew up with her." Mary Jane commented on all they have



Ginny McKnight Jones and Larry McKnight, siblings

in common and the importance of being mutually supportive in relationship.



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IN MEMORIAM

JOE SMITH

MARCH 31, 1948 – FEBRUARY 15, 2020



Retired firefighter Lt. Joe Smith answered his “Last Alarm” and took his last ride to Union Hall on Engine 18 as he was remembered by his fellow firefighters on his birthday March 31. In keeping with the motto “remembering our brothers who have answered their last alarm,” Joe was honored in the first outdoor memorial service conducted by the Jacksonville Retired Firefighters Association. The service, officiated by Mick Tyson, was held at Stockton Park in Ortega, a place where the amateur photographer liked to visit and take photos. In addition to family members, friends, his wife Andra (Leonard) and daughter Joy Smith, there were over 50 retired firefighters in full uniform in attendance, a bagpipe salute, a bugler playing taps, a color guard and presentation of the American flag to his wife of 50 years whom he met in junior high school at John Gorrie and married at Murray Hill Methodist Church in 1971, the same year he joined the Jacksonville Fire Department.

Dr. Percy Golden, Chaplain of the Fire and Rescue Department conducted the service and remarked on Joe’s thirty- two years of service to the community. He said that Joe was well thought of by the people he worked with and went into dangerous neighborhoods and situations. Andra, a retired nurse from St. Vincent’s

said that he never talked about anything regarding his work until he retired 20 years ago although fellow firefighters remarked that “his most memorable fires were like so many other members- the Triangle Fire and the Stewart Petroleum Fires.”

Andra mentioned that Joe was generous to a fault. He helped a young fireman build a house, helped a lot of people out financially, even taking in an elderly man who had lived with his parents and then lived with Andra and Joe for over 20 years.

In addition to his service as a firefighter the hard- working Smith was in the National Guard 146th Signal Battalion in Jacksonville, owned a cabinet shop, B and J Contractors, and at one time owned the Waycross Speedway and a Dairy Queen on Roosevelt Boulevard. He delivered drinks for RC Cola while a student at Robert E. Lee High School (class of 1966) where he was an athlete who played football, basketball and ran track setting a state record in low hurdles and taking two gold medals in his 10th and 11th grade year. Unfortunately, a broken foot his senior year ended his athletic competitions.

After his retirement from the Fire Department Joe stayed busy with his remodeling business and hobbies – hunting, fishing, photography and with Andra, taking care of their numerous dogs, cats,

raccoons and possums on their two plus acres in Murray Hill.

After his last ride from Stockton Park to Union Hall on a fire engine, friends and family gathered to share stories about his life and contributions to the Fire Department. It was noted that he was active in the union and worked to secure life jackets for firemen who had to respond in boats as well assisting with re- doing the rules and regulations of the widow’s fund.

Joe’s “Last Alarm” has been answered and noted with respect by his friends family and peers.

“ Joe was **GENEROUS** to a fault. He helped a young fireman build a house, **HELPED A LOT OF PEOPLE** out financially, even **TAKING IN AN ELDERLY MAN...who lived with [us] for over 20 years.**”

— Andra (Leonard) Smith



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DAR recognizes Cochran's 50 years of volunteer service



Carol Cochran was recently recognized by the Jacksonville Chapter for her 50 years of volunteer service to the National Association of Daughters of the American Revolution.

50-year commitment to volunteering is unusual, and the Jacksonville Chapter of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution recently took the opportunity to recognize Avondale resident Carol Cochran's half-century of service. Since 1971, when Cochran became a member of Shawnee Mission Chapter, Shawnee Mission, Kansas, to today, she has been an active volunteer in the DAR.

Cochran first became interested in the 130-year-old organization because of her mother-in-law, who was a member. She traced her lineage to a Pyles family member on the paternal side

who contributed to securing American independence during the Revolutionary War. After becoming an official member on April 17, 1971, she soon went to work volunteering on multiple committee offices and leadership offices in the Shawnee Mission Chapter, including serving as a Regent.

From there she held offices as Kansas State Organizing Secretary and then State Historian. Twice she was awarded the State Volunteer Genealogist. At the national level, she served as Vice Chairman of Chapter Development.

In 2018, her husband and she decided to leave Kansas winters behind and move to Jacksonville where their son and his family live in Avondale. She founded the Jacksonville Chapter of the NSDAR and has been inducted as Registrar for 2021-2023. She continued to serve at the Florida State Level and National Level.

"We are honored to have a member like Carol Cochran now call the Jacksonville Chapter her home," C. Maria Miller, current Jacksonville Chapter Regent, said. "I personally congratulate Mrs. Cochran on her outstanding 50 years of service."

Hyde Park grandmother takes on jet skiing



With the help of grandson Lee Walker, Perry Jones Russell, 82, jet skis for the first time on the Ortega River. Lee is Kathy Walker's son and Terry Roberts' nephew.

“She had a big smile on her face...She's **FUN AND FULL OF ADVENTURE** and ready to go.”

— Terry Russel Roberts

“My mother raised a total of six kids – his, hers and ours – with five under one roof at the same time. There are 20 years between my baby sister and me,” said Roberts. “She’s also an artist, mostly in pastels, and even sewed a leisure suit for my dad at one point.”

Percy Russell was known for her cooking as well. “My father would see a recipe in Bon Appetit and want her to make it. Despite the seemingly never-ending list of ingredients, Russell would take it on and produce a delicious dish.

Dr. Thomas Russell, 89, passed away on September 27, 2020. He had a dentistry clinic at San Juan and Hugh Edwards Drive for more than 35 years. Percy and he were married for 52 years.

Roberts owns Terry's Kitchen and, with her late husband, Gary, the In River or Ocean nonprofit. Gary, who grew up on Jacksonville's Westside, also owned South Bank Pharmacy on Atlantic Boulevard.

Terry and her family moved from High Point, N.C., to apartments in the Normandy area, when Terry was in the third grade. They eventually moved to Hyde Grove Acres.

What's Percy Russell's next birthday adventure? “Well, Kathy took on ziplining when she turned 60, so she may encourage mother to take that on when she turns 83,” said Terry.

As Percy Jones Russell approached her eighty-second birthday, COVID-19 and her husband's health had kept her confined for the past couple of years, and the family felt it was time for her to get out and enjoy herself.

“My sister, Kathy, encouraged our mother to do something totally different for her birthday,” said Terry Russell Roberts. Kathy Russell Walker, Terry's younger sister, lives in Eatonton, Georgia.

What that may be having yet to be determined, Percy was visiting with Terry, in her Ortega Forest home on the Ortega River. When she saw someone jet ski by, she knew that was it. She was going to jet ski for the first time in her life. They found a place to rent the jet ski and an instructor to help her learn.

“It went great. She had a big smile on her face as they took off,” Terry said. “She's fun and full of adventure and ready to go.”



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BY MARY WANSEER
Resident Community News

San Marco members of Boy Scout Troop 906 chartered out of St. John's Cathedral recently returned from a trip to the Northern Tier. Along with their leader, Mark Eckels, the scouts participated in a five-day canoe trek out of the Charles Sommers National High Adventure Base in Ely, Minnesota.

They ventured for five days and four nights into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness where they paddled over 55 miles, portaged over four-and-a-half miles, and carried all their gear and food. The scouts were disconnected from Wi-Fi and cell service while immersing themselves in the nature and wildlife surrounding them. Along the way, each scout earned three awards: 50-Miler, Historic Trails, and Duty to God.

The same crew attended a high adventure trek at Sea Base in the Florida Keys last summer and is slated to complete a trek at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico next summer. These trips are part of a quest to earn the coveted High Adventure Triple Crown Award, which is given to those who complete treks at three of four high adventure bases.

Northern Tier Crew
LEFT TO RIGHT, First row: Ion Jablonski (Field guide from Buffalo, NY), Mark Eckels (Troop Leader), Liam Leonard, Mike Leonard (Assistant Troop Leader); LEFT TO RIGHT, Second row: Andrew Snyder, Max Moorehead (Senior Patrol Leader), Kamm Eckels, Emiliano Makros, Kaden Newman

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Tanase Popa (2002) a University of North Carolina School of the Arts graduate is a producer on iconic television series and films including "Glee",

"American Horror Story", "Pose", "Halston" and many others with Ryan Murphy Productions. He has been nominated for five Emmys and is the recipient of an AFI Award and a Peabody Award.



James Boyd (2006) completed his BFA at SUNY Purchase College in 2010 and traveled the world performing with music icons Elton John, Lady Gaga, Mary

J. Blige, and Bruce Springsteen. Today, James is an international faculty member of the Manhattan Dance Project, and a full-time faculty member of the Troy University Theatre and Dance Department.

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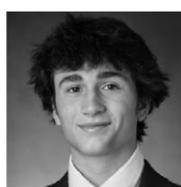
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Festival celebrates the power of performing arts for teens

The Performers Academy, located in the St. Nicholas area, kicked off its tenth year of Camp Just Like Me on June 1 with TPA Fest 2021, the nonprofit's first-ever mural festival. More than 12 local and visiting artists participated, with some murals created collaboratively and some done independently. The artists completed their murals over the course of the week on the exterior walls of The Performers Academy's outdoor campus.



Ebony Payne-English, TPA's new executive director, and Kathryn D. McAvoy, board chair, who founded The Performers Academy

In addition to inspiring the community, motivating TPA students and providing opportunities for local artists, the festival raised funds for the nonprofit's creative enrichment programs that support enrolled youth. The event included music, MC Olympics and a murder mystery brunch, while the muralists were painting. Keynote speaker was Allison Galloway-Gonzalez, the executive director of Any Given Child. Special guest Damien Lamar performed.

"TPA students are taught to use art as a vehicle for behavioral intervention and academic enrichment," said Ebony Payne-English, who was recently named TPA's executive director. "We are committed to making arts as coping mechanism accessible to communities that suffer from limited access, and in particular, historically underserved teens."

TPA programs include #SquadGoals Teen Studio to interrupt cycles of trauma through performance arts, Produce Of My Environment (POME) for teens to create autobiographical poetry, Just Like Me three-week summer camp and Truth & Proof: Youth Open Mic as a free, monthly art and poetry event for teens. The organization works



with instructors and artists from all geographic, ethnic and economic backgrounds within seven arts and cultural disciplines including lyricism, theater, visual arts, music, dance, songwriting and recording arts.



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READ USA DELIVERS PROGRAMS FOR LITERACY, JOBS

An electric atmosphere of excitement and energy abounded at the Jessie Ball duPont Center in mid-June as 60 teens received training for a unique and meaningful summer job. For the READ USA Summer Reading Program 2021, teens received a week of intensive professional development training, using high-quality literacy curriculum, on how to teach and assess phonics and reading comprehension with elementary school children in a one-to-one setting.

The READ USA Summer Reading Program of peer-to-peer tutoring pairs the 60 teens from the Mayor's Youth at Work Program with 165 elementary students at three Title 1 Duval County schools - Cedar Hill, Hyde Park and Sadie T. Tillis Elementary.

As of Monday, June 21, through Community in Schools, Team Up and the I'm a Star Foundation, elementary students at the three schools who are experiencing difficulty with reading will be matched with teen tutors five days a week for five weeks.

READ USA staff, led by Dr. Robert Kelly, provided 25 hours of training to the teens, with curriculum that incorporated high-interest books and multisensory word study materials. Each teen tutor was assessed

on two measures of literacy exposure and one measure of reading proficiency. At the beginning and end of the program, the tutors will assess all elementary students using pre and post measures of reading accuracy, phonics skills, and reading proficiency.

Job coaches from Goodwill, the organization managing the Mayor's Youth, will support the tutors with professional skills, scheduling transportation, and supervising time clock and payroll details. Based on data from prior programming provided by READ USA, it is expected that substantial reading gains will be achieved by both the elementary students and their tutors.

"This model of peer-to-peer tutoring, pairing high schoolers and elementary children from low-income communities, is unique in two ways: the number of hours of tutor training and the quality of literacy curriculum. These two components are key to the success of this model," said Dr. Kelly, noting that "READ USA has combined these powerful practices with high-quality books and multisensory materials to boost the literacy progress of both elementary children and their tutors. That's the beauty of this program."



Bryan Gamble, Mr. Kellie Landen, Nahume Mosby, Haley Holloway and Dr. Rob Kelly



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Pretty as a princess... or a Marvel hero

GATE Hospitality goes all out for annual Character Ball

Members and their guests were treated to the annual Character Ball at the River Club, one of GATE hospitality's favorite outings among the staff and membership alike.

Familiar faces were transformed from staff to elaborate characters from across the spectrum from Disney to Marvel, and others in between.

The event spreads joy for the children, as the immense pride in character outfits and motifs, as well as decor in breakout rooms make for a faniciful outing for all to enjoy.

The group welcomed over 260-plus guests to the downtown club, high above the skyline of Jacksonville on the top two floors of the Wells Fargo Center, Saturday July 17.

The annual gathering was such a hit that the team is already planning for next year's big event.



Kimberly Younkin as Snow White with Kacie Cobb who played Cinderella for the day.



Rachel Cliff as Princess Jasmine entertains a little club member alongside Amy Walter, who played Aurora from Frozen 2.



Sarah Small, VP of Membership for Gate Hospitality, entertained guests as Belle, she's pictured with Beast during the festivities.



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Cyber Patriot Camp Bringing Schools Together



Bishop Kenny High School's NJROTC was selected to participate in the 2021 season of the Air Force Association's (AFA) CyberCamp Program, as a host for both Standard CyberCamp and the Advanced CyberCamp. The BKNJROTC is a distinguished unit which allows it to be selected from organizations across the United States

More than 30 students attended Bishop Kenny's AFA CyberCamps during the last two weeks of July, and included NJROTC cadets from Oakleaf High School, and Valdosta High School (GA). Because of their past successes, the courses were taught by the unit's Cyber Patriot Team Commander Cadet Sapp and Unit's Executive Officer Cadet August Gould. Overseeing the camp and evaluation were BKNJROTC's Naval Science Instructors: CDR Morrill and MCPO Harris, as well as Valdosta's NSI: SCPO Willis, and Mr. Larry Rodriguez and Mr. Jim Baas (Bishop Kenny's IT Team) were instrumental in facilitating the smooth running of all computer systems.



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LOCAL SPELLING BEE WINNER TIES FOR 12TH IN NATIONAL SPELLING BEE



Local three-time First Coast Spelling Bee winner, Erik Williams, a rising ninth grader at St. Johns Country Day School, has competed for the last two years in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. After dominating the preliminaries and quarter finals in June, Williams was knocked out after incorrectly spelling "orismology," the science of defining technical terms.

"It's been an incredible ride for this very talented teen and coming in twelfth out of 209 spellers in the final this year is definitely an accomplishment to be proud of," Regan Minners, SJEDS director of communications, said.

"I practice a lot," said Williams. "You have to study languages and the roots of words.

Paying attention to language patterns help, too. And then you have to just memorize random words, like trademarks."

Erik competes in more than spelling bees, however.

"Competition naturally appeals to me," he said. "I play baseball and basketball, but, of course, spelling is a little different because you're competing against the dictionary, and you can't control what others do."

Even though he's competing, Erik still feels badly when others miss a word.

"I always feel bad when someone gets out because I know it could be me. I know how that feels, and I don't want to happen to someone else."

"The anticipation about getting a word you might not be able to spell is the hardest part of competing," Erik said. "about what word you're going to get. 'Orismology is an example of a word that doesn't follow a pattern. Being Greek work, it should be 'orismology,' but it doesn't follow the pattern."

"This finish definitely exceeded our expectations," said Williams' mom, Annica Williams. "It's been one incredible journey and it's, for sure, bittersweet that it has come to an end." Erik credits his mother for being a great study partner and coach.

"It's been a great opportunity," Erik said. "You learn all these good lessons like determination and persistence."



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LOCAL FOLKS

TYLER HODGES

BY MARY WANSEER
Resident Community News

Many know Tyler Hodges as President and Head of The Bolles School. Many don't know him as a family man—a husband and a father.

Hodges lives in a household among five females: his wife, Tristan; his daughters, Madalene (15) and Hannah (12); and his dogs, a 5-year-old goldendoodle named Murphie and an under-a-year-old Maltese shih tzu mix named Florence, whom they call Flo. "I've learned to acclimate after growing up with only brothers," Hodges said.

According to Hodges, Madalene is introverted, like her mom. It takes her a little longer to make friends, but when she does, they're strong and rich bonds. Hannah is more like her dad, extroverted. "We jump in a little bit faster, and the other two tend to observe a little bit more. I think it's a fun balance," Hodges said.



The Hodges Family

Six years ago, the family moved to Jacksonville from Santa Barbara, California where Tyler had been working for a private school. "We didn't know what to expect, but it's been amazing! We love Florida because of the large number of sunny days per year," he said. They are outdoorsy folks. "We love being outside, first and foremost."



The Hodges Family: Tristan, Hannah, Tyler, and Madalene

They came here so that Hodges could fill the position of Associate Head of School under Dave Farace, whom he had known only through mutual acquaintances. The two men became not only work associates but also best friends, and Hodges took over as Head of School when Farace left for Maryland three years ago.

In their free time, the Hodges family enjoys riding mountain bikes. Their favorite spot is in Colorado during summer, each carrying nothing more than a sack lunch and a bottle of water in a backpack. They like to explore the river areas there, as fly fishing is another joy of Tyler Hodges.

Locally, they like to head east for one of the beaches, anywhere from Atlantic on down. "We are really big beach people," Hodges said of his family, and he added that it's necessary for their relaxation and for their mental health.

"I think everybody needs to have their spot to go and decompress, to step away from the hecticness of life. The beach has always been an area for us as a family, regardless of where we've lived, California or here. It's never too cold for the beach," he said. The only time they will stay away is in thunder and lightning. Rain doesn't stop them. "There's not bad weather. There's just bad clothing choices," has always been his saying.

"I love to surf! I love the warm water here. It's such a nice change," Hodges said. He grew up in western NC, so knew nothing about surfing until he moved to California. Now, he estimates he's put in hundreds of hours atop a surfboard. "I enjoy it even if I'm not catching huge waves," he said. While he surfs, his daughters boogieboard and his wife relaxes on the sand and reads, sometimes with the dogs.

In fact, the entire family loves to read. Some days, they can be found tucked throughout different areas of the house cozied up with their own books, drinking hot tea. At times, they'll collectively read

the books that the girls have been assigned to read for school. "It's always fun to come back a re-read some of the classics that you had read as a kid when you were in school yourself," Hodges said. They used to try sharing the same copy, but, inevitably, someone would get upset over a missing bookmark and a lost place. So, now, they make sure there are four separate copies on hand.

"We're just thankful. We're so blessed to be in Jacksonville. This has been such an amazing community for us, professionally for me, and it's been an amazing educational opportunity for my girls," said Hodges.



Murphie and Tyler Hodges



Tyler Hodges and his family

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