

# V for ~~Victim~~ Victory

Despite being victims of a cruel theft, cancer patients and their supporters at V for Victory prove there is more good than bad in the world as the Jacksonville community and beyond rally behind them to replace hundreds of stolen LEGO sets destined for the recovering cancer patients.

READ MORE ON PAGE 46



COMMUNITY NEWS

# Resident

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Sutter  
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Excellence



Bridget Sutter

Bishop Kenny senior Bridget Sutter was honored with the Gator Bowl Charities Award of Excellence Scholarship. She was selected based on her scholastic record, community service, sports participation, leadership, extracurricular activities and written essay. Sutter is a BK Student Ambassador, a member of multiple school organizations, runs cross country and track and maintains a 4.48 grade point average.

The award includes a one-time gift of \$2,500, which Sutter hopes to use at University of Florida or Notre Dame University as she majors in economics.



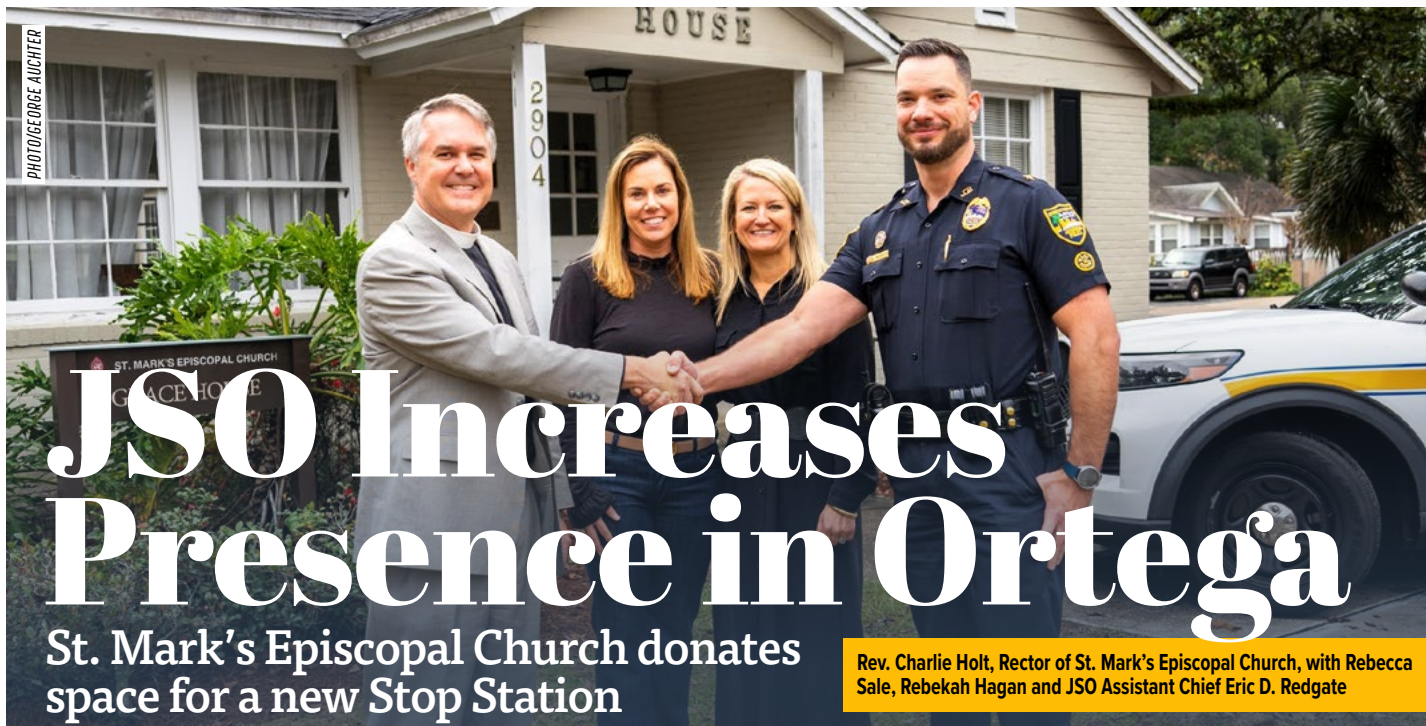
Sally Barnett with Patrick Emmet, DeDe Petri and Susan Smathers

## Centennial Gala Raises funds for Memorial Park Association

The area's most prolific advocates for the preservation, maintenance and restoration of Memorial Park were on hand to celebrate the last 100 years of recognizing 'The Florida Fallen.'

Sally Barnett joined Memorial Park Association Board President Patrick Emmet, DeDe Petri and Susan Smathers as they enjoyed a celebratory gala, a first of its kind for the Memorial Park Association. The event took place at the Timuquana Country Club, Jan. 20.

READ MORE ON PAGE 24



## JSO Increases Presence in Ortega

St. Mark's Episcopal Church donates space for a new Stop Station

Rev. Charlie Holt, Rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, with Rebecca Sale, Rebekah Hagan and JSO Assistant Chief Eric D. Redgate

St. Mark's Episcopal Church of Jacksonville has partnered with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) to assist law enforcement in Ortega and surrounding communities of Avondale and Westside.

The church donated space in its Grace House resource center for JSO to use as a field office called a "Stop Station" located adjacent to both the church and the St. Mark's campus of the Episcopal School of Jacksonville.

"Sheriff [T.K.] Waters and I are very appreciative of St. Mark's providing space in this facility for our officers," said Eric Redgate, JSO Assistant Chief, Patrol Division, District 4. "The Stop Station gives our officers a quiet, comfortable office space to take a break in the field so they can return phone calls, write their reports and do other paperwork requirements without having to go back to the substation on Blanding Boulevard."

Rev. Charlie Holt, Rector of St. Mark's, said, "It's a win-win for everyone. Helping the people of this community is a big part of our mission, and we're glad to do it."

Local families, especially parents with children enrolled in the school, initiated the Stop Station idea to get a more visible police presence in the community and near the school for the safety of the children and the community.

"We are so pleased to have a JSO Stop Station on the St. Mark's campus," Rebecca Sale said. "As a parent and a neighbor, it gives us tremendous peace of mind."

Fellow parent and neighbor Rebekah Hagan said, "The day in and day out sacrifice of these brave men and women in our community does not go unnoticed."

## Financing Woes

A project 10 years in the making, the resurrection of the Laura Street Trio will have to wait a little longer; the project's financing remains in limbo as parties go back to the table for a redevelopment agreement.

READ MORE ON PAGE 6



Soluna Yoga + Spa hosted three local Girl Scouts troops – Troops 2076, 62040 and 2149 – for a one-hour yoga class on Jan. 21 taught by owner Dori Thomsen, vice president of the 5 Points Merchants Association (FPMA), in gratitude for their sisterhood and service. The yoga class was followed by a group trash clean-up around the 5 Points area. The activities intended to focus on the Girl Scouts' January theme of happiness, which participants sought to create through yoga, fitness, self-care and service to the community.

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# You Asked for It

## Why was a gate added at Murray Hill Park and will it be removed?

BY JENNIFER JENSEN

Shortly after the city made \$250,000 worth of upgrades to the playground at Murray Hill Park, a fence and gate were installed and the park was locked during school hours. Many residents wondered why a public park was now no longer public.

However, the city is not the one that erected the fence. The park is right across the street from Ruth Upson Elementary School, which entered into agreement with the city in 2013 to jointly use the park for recess and gym class during school hours from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. According to the agreement, the school is allowed to put up a fence around the playground for safety reasons, but there is nothing in the agreement about locking the gate during school hours.

The gate was installed shortly before the summer and many residents became frustrated because although school was out, the gate remained locked during the week for summer school. Murray Hill is also one of the few parks that has a splash pad and resident were unable to enjoy that perk on hot summer days.

When City Council Member Jimmy Peluso took office in June, he promised to get the fence taken down and work with the school district to find a better solution. In August, Peluso issued a memo saying the fence would be brought down by the end of December and Duval County Public Schools agreed to construct a new playground on school property.

“They have every right to use it,” Peluso said. “But it was always a public park and we needed to make sure it

wasn’t inaccessible at any time during the day.”

The gate and fence were removed during the winter break. Parts of the fence will be used and repurposed, Peluso added.

Since the gates have been removed, recess and resource activities moved back to the school, according to Ruth Upson Elementary School Principal Faith Roberts-Graham. The school is currently working on a new onsite playground. While the school has a few small playgrounds, it did not have one for the older students.

Peluso said the school’s playground equipment was supposed to be installed in tandem with the fence being removed, but there were some delays.

“Work on our playground continues,” said Roberts-Graham. “Playground equipment has been ordered and is expected to be installed prior to the end of the school year.”

The agreement allows for the children to have a safe space to play and not have to cross the road, while also allowing the public to have full access to the park as intended.

# Special Exceptions for Beverages on Riverwalk

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

In November, *The Resident News* reported on a regulation approved by the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) to establish the Jacksonville Riverwalk Specialty Center – a designated area along the North- and Southbank where pedestrians would be permitted to carry and enjoy alcoholic beverages in designated containers purchased from participating licensed vendors.

This designated area would run from the Fuller Warren Bridge to EverBank Stadium on the Northbank, roughly a two-mile stretch, and just over a mile to RiversEdge on the Southbank. Bridges are not currently included.

Earlier last month, the JAX Chamber issued a press release expressing its board of directors’ support of the program.

“The Chamber believes creating this Jacksonville Riverwalk Specialty Center will improve Jacksonville’s waterfront experience,” it stated.

“We need to continue to look at ways to activate the

riverfront downtown, and this is a simple addition that can give people one more way to enjoy downtown,” said JAX Chamber President and CEO Daniel Davis.

Ordinance 2023-0863, the proposed bill that would amend Ordinance Code Chapter 154 – Alcoholic Beverages to allow the creation of the specialty center, is now moving through the legislative process in City Council.

The topic of cups dominated the conversation at a Jan. 16 Rules Committee meeting, including what type of materials would be used to create the cups and how costs would impact participating business owners..

City Councilmember Terrence Freeman introduced an alternate amendment to one already introduced by the Neighborhoods, Community Services, Public Health and Safety (NCSPHS) Committee that struck the word “plastic” and replaced it with “environmentally conscious/friendly material” to ensure the production of sustainable cups given the center’s proximity to the river. Freeman’s amendment followed Boyer’s recommendation at that NCSPHS meeting to simply strike the word “plastic”

without inserting new language pertaining to the container’s qualities or materials.

“What I had indicated previously in committee was that if you simply struck the word ‘plastic,’ that gave the city the right to approve an acceptable container which – my thought was that we would not approve something that wasn’t environmentally friendly adjacent to the Riverwalk or to be used on the Riverwalk,” Boyer explained at the Rules Committee meeting.

Gordon explained this program is modeled after an existing one at the Tampa Riverwalk. Initially, he said, DVI plans to provide the cups to the participating businesses to ensure the program’s success, “but then eventually cover those costs.”

The program, Gordon added, is optional for businesses within the established program boundaries – of which there are currently “six or seven” – and no one is obligated to participate.

The Rules Committee unanimously approved 2023-0863 as amended. It will now move on to the city council.

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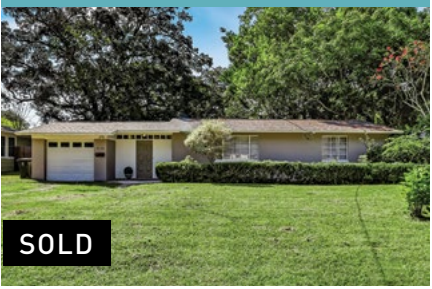
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The Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) approved a one-year lease on this two-acre parcel to JEA, which will in turn provide funding for the Park Street Road Diet project.

# Bay Street Staging Area Tees Up Park Street Road Diet

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) Board gave its unanimous approval at a Jan. 17 board meeting to temporarily lease an estimated two-acre parcel of land on Bay Street for JEA to use as a construction easement for one year.

The parcel would be used as a staging area for the installation of chilled water lines on Bay Street. These lines would serve the Museum of Science and History (MOSH), the Four Seasons and other nearby developments.

An appraisal of the property placed its rental value at just over \$235,000. As payment, JEA has offered in-kind services at

a minimum of \$300,000 for the Park Street Road Diet project – a City project several years in the making that would bring much-needed upgrades to the Park Street corridor in Brooklyn.

The week prior, at the DIA Retail Enhancement and Property Disposition Committee meeting, CEO Lori Boyer said, “The Park Street CIP is a project that will facilitate development of adjacent parcels in that vicinity. There is a developer who has already acquired the land, who’s been waiting for that road project to begin. Their engineers have identified water and sewage upgrades that need to be made to serve that development so this is providing some of that work under the pavement that would

ensure future development can happen in that area.”

The developer she referenced is the Trevato Development Group, which received conceptual approval from the Downtown Development Review Board (DDRB) last year for Block Nine, its proposed mixed-use Brooklyn development.

At the committee meeting, Boyer fielded questions regarding the \$300,000 in-kind services for the Park Street project and its funding within the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). She clarified that these funds are not reducing the CIP budget.

“The CIP budget is for the street – so for pavement and curbs and trees and things like that,” she said. “This is for utility work that has been unfunded, and the question has been whether the developer was seeking incentives to cover the utility work and the developer was going to pay for the utility work, or whether JEA was going to pay for the utility work. There have been negotiations going on around that. So, this is a commitment for them to pay for at least a part of the work.”

She added that “the initial biggest concern” pertains to an iron pipe beneath Park Street that would require the street to get dug up in order to replace or repair it.

“I think the initial thought was, let’s either line or replace that iron pipe first. The other feeder lines can be additional phases from JEA or negotiated with the developer,” she said.

The resolution for the JEA property disposition includes an option to extend the lease for an additional 180 days after one year, but with the inclusion of additional consideration from JEA. At the conclusion of the lease, the parcel would revert back to the City.

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# Laura Street Trio Awaits Next Steps

## Historic properties require unique financing

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The future of the Laura Street Trio remains in limbo as parties return to the drawing board to settle on a redevelopment agreement to help fund its adaptive reuse and restoration.

### New year, new deal

At a Committee of the Whole meeting on Jan. 4, representatives from the development team and the City discussed the merits and concerns about legislation introduced as an emergency proposing the appropriation of \$22 million to fund a participation loan for the restoration and renovation of the historic trio. According to the bill summary, the bill waived several ordinance code provisions and policy guidelines.

At-Large Group 4 City Councilmember Matt Carlucci explained he introduced the bill as an emergency because of a deadline the developer had on locked-in interest rates with a lender. The developer would have needed the bill to pass quickly to secure those rates.

“Unlike any other deal in Jacksonville in recent times, you have a developer who is seeking to do the almost impossible: to rehabilitate not one, not two but three historically significant, post-Great Fire, legendary structures at the very epicenter of Jacksonville,” said attorney Jason Gabriel in his presentation to the council on behalf of the development team. “This is a true public-private partnership in the best sense of the phrase.”

Gabriel emphasized the need for haste in reaching an agreement on the project’s financing.

“The more time that passes in the financial planning phase, the more likely it is that market conditions will shift, making the initial financial plan obsolete before it can even be implemented,” he said.

In his presentation, Gabriel detailed the four parts of the deal, “three of [which] have remained the same all along, one of which is new in concept but has always been a part of the necessary ‘gap financing’ that’s necessary for this sort of rehabilitation project.”

The three previously discussed facets of the deal are the REV (Recapture Enhanced Value) Grant, the DPRP (Downtown Preservation and Revitalization Program) loan and the forgivable loan. The fourth was the aforementioned participation loan at the center of discussion.

Property owner and SouthEast Development Group principal and managing director Steve Atkins responded to questions regarding why the development team was pursuing this agreement versus one more traditionally structured.

“We have a stack of about \$24 million in private equity in this project. Equity is expensive; equity has to have a return. We have to either pursue other equity opportunities or we have to pursue a public-private partnership with the City of Jacksonville,” he said. “But the Capital One product that we had an opportunity to pursue is probably the best-case scenario in the market that we’re faced with right now.”

### A constitutional concern

During their respective presentations, Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) CEO Lori Boyer, City Chief Financial Officer Anna Brosche, Council Auditor Kim Taylor, and Special Counsel to the Mayor Mike Weinstein all expressed concerns regarding the deal before the council. Among those concerns were those regarding the constitutionality of the proposed deal.

“The General Counsel has advised, and I think has spoken to many of you, that more likely than not, the participation loan and replenishment guarantee violate the Florida Constitution,” Boyer said. “The constitution prohibits the lending of credit for private activities unless there’s a paramount public purpose such as major job creation, public sports or entertainment venues, etc. and they consulted outside general counsel who came to the same conclusion. This is a concern not only because citizens can sue, it’s a concern for those of us who have to execute the documents and warrant that they are legal binding obligations of the city.”



Renderings of the SouthEast Development Group proposed adaptive reuse and restoration of the Laura Street Trio.

General Counsel Michael Fackler said his office’s analysis, in conjunction with an analysis review by an outside firm, concluded that “this project doesn’t meet that heightened standard of a paramount public purpose.”

### Moving forward

After a lengthy discussion, Carlucci withdrew the emergency and the council opted to pass the baton back to the DIA Board to find a redevelopment agreement to which all parties can agree, though Boyer later said she believes the board’s charge is “much broader than that.”

“I think what was passed back to us is, figure out a way to get the historic buildings renovated,” she said. “The council president has said ‘work with urgency but don’t rush it, come up with something that works.’ We took that as it was important for staff to have two or three alternatives to offer the developer that we think would work and to have those ready by last week. So we do.”



City Councilmember Matt Carlucci calls the Laura Street Trio Jacksonville’s “three most historically significant buildings” in the downtown area.

Atkins purchased the Laura Street Trio and the Barnett Bank Building in 2013 and completed restorations on the latter in 2019. It is now a mixed-used development that serves as the North Florida flagship office for JP Morgan Chase and the home office for the Jacksonville Business Journal. It also offers residential space.

Atkins’ plans for the Trio include an Autograph Collection Hotel by Marriott offering 143 guest rooms, multiple restaurants and bars, ground-level retail space and 169 multifamily units, of which roughly 30% will be in the workforce category. The additional vacant acreage within the Trio’s footprint has allowed for the new construction add-ons, which will bring the total square footage to approximately 300,000.

Atkins said the Trio “really signifies and represents the most catalytic opportunity for change and revitalization in downtown Jacksonville.”

When asked about a backup plan for the Trio if a finance agreement could not be reached, he said, “Is there another program we could use? I don’t think there’s another use that we could come up with over a multifamily and/or hotel that would produce enough revenue to make it any different. We are committed to trying to make this program work. We think it’s not just the right program for those buildings, but we think it’s the right program for downtown and the needs of downtown.”

The Trio has sat vacant for more than 30 years, and Carlucci said their successful renovation would “be a 365-day-a-year economic development driver. It will develop jobs.”

“I just think we’re at a point now where everybody’s rallied behind it, just want to get it over the goal line, push it over the goal line,” he said. “The Laura Street Trio is kind of like our running back at the seven-yard line, and the whole city, and the DIA, and everybody is trying to push it across. That’s what I want to see happen.”

The three buildings – the Florida Life Building, the Bisbee Building and the Old Florida National Bank, or the Marble Bank – were built in the years following the Great Fire of 1901. Two of them – the Bisbee Building and the Florida Life Building – were designed by renowned Jacksonville architect Henry Klutho.

“Those three buildings took a chance on Jacksonville, and they helped rebuild Jacksonville’s present and pointed us towards a new future,” Carlucci said. “Ironically, all these many years later, those three buildings have the opportunity to help rebuild our present and rebuild our future again.”

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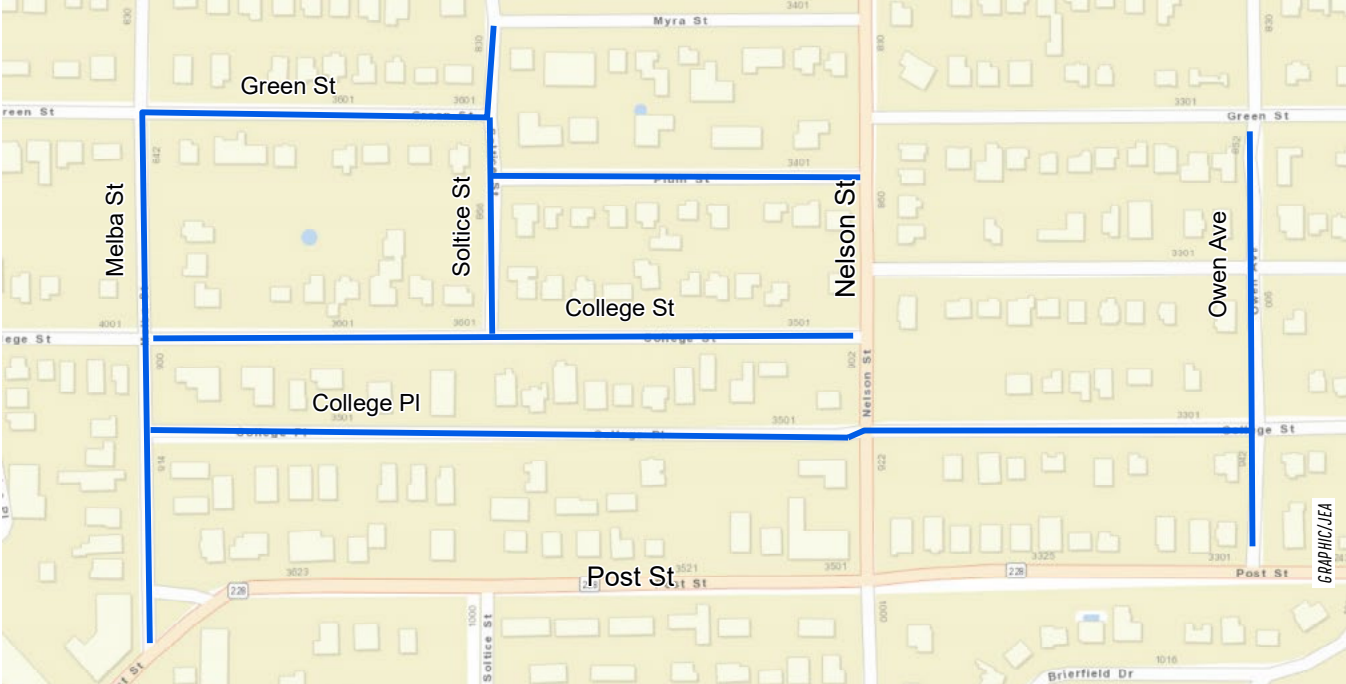
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A project area map of the JEA Melba Street Water Improvement Project, slated to wrap on or before Aug. 30.

# Water Improvement Projects Underway in Murray Hill, Riverside

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Murray Hill residents can expect to see more construction on some of its residential streets as JEA continues work for the Melba Street Water Improvement Project.

The project, which launched late last summer, is estimated to cost \$4 million and has an anticipated completion date of Aug. 31 of this year.

The project’s objective is to upgrade and replace portions of the existing water lines on Melba Street, College Place, College Street, Green Street, Nelson Street, Owen Avenue, Plum Street and Solstice Street.

According to JEA Community Involvement and Project Outreach Manager Greg Corcoran, the only remaining work on Melba Street is road resurfacing, which is currently expected to occur in April or May. The overall project is more than halfway complete, and Corcoran added JEA anticipates wrapping the project before the Aug. 30, 2024, contract completion date.

The Melba Street Water Improvement Project is part of the larger Galvanized Pipe Replacement Program, which JEA developed and launched “to modernize more than 200 miles of [its] existing potable water distribution system to reduce service failures and meet current potable flow standards.”

According to the Galvanized Pipe Replacement Program webpage on JEA’s website, the program was launched in 2018, and more than 15 miles of outdated galvanized pipe is estimated to have been replaced countywide by the end of last year.

Corcoran explained that many of the projects within this program are in “older” communities such as Riverside and Murray Hill.

“This work includes installing larger pipes for improved water pressure and new fire hydrants to upgrade area fire protection,” he said.

The program’s webpage lists water improvement projects currently underway. It lists the following projects as under construction in the Riverside community:

- Center Street, Cherokee Circle, Locust Street and Gilmore Street (“Center Street from Rosselle Street to the dead end, Cherokee Circle from Rosselle Street to Locust Street, Locust Street from Rosselle Street to

Cherokee Circle South and Gilmore Street between Cherokee Street and Locust Street”) – Anticipated End Date: Feb. 1

- McDuff Avenue (“McDuff Avenue near Old Roosevelt Boulevard”) – Anticipated End Date: Feb. 29
- Osceola Street (with work areas on “Osceola Street, Dellwood Avenue and Myra Street”) – Substantially completed on Jan. 9; area restoration work remains.

An additional project in Murray Hill – the Antisdale Street Water Improvement Project – is currently underway “Antisdale Street from Ingleside Avenue to just west of Edgewood Avenue, Ingleside Avenue from Post Street to Antisdale Street, and Talbot Avenue from Post Street to Mayflower Street.” The anticipated end date for this project is May 31.

Petticoat-Schmitt Civil Contractors is the contractor for the Melba Street, McDuff Avenue and Stockton Street projects. JEA crews are working on the Center Street, Cherokee Circle, Locust Street and Gilmore Street, Lancaster Street and Antisdale Street projects.

Additional projects are underway in other areas of Jacksonville within JEA’s service territory.

For the Melba Street project, Corcoran added there are no additional road closures on Melba Street expected except for during the road resurfacing.

“Road closures are typically only for a day at a time and are related to specific project activities like paving,” he said. “For the safety of our crews and the general public, there will be times when roads will be temporarily closed to through-traffic, and street parking will be limited while crews are installing the new water lines.”

He continued: “Residents will have access to their homes and businesses and will be permitted to drive, with caution, within the project area. There may be times when driveways are temporarily blocked while crews are working directly in front of homes or businesses.”

More information regarding the Melba Street and other projects within the Galvanized Pipe Replacement Program, including future proposed projects, can be found at [jea.com/gprp](http://jea.com/gprp).

# Jacksonville Launches Roof Rehab Program

The City of Jacksonville Neighborhoods Department, Housing and Community Development Division launched a new Home Roof Rehabilitation Program last month. The new initiative is funded from the City of Jacksonville General Fund and was passed by the City Council in December.

“The home roof rehabilitation program will help keep a roof over people’s heads, and it’s a crucial next step towards preserving generational wealth in Jacksonville’s underserved neighborhoods,” said Mayor Donna Deegan.

The program helps homeowners fund replacement of their home’s roof in compliance with homeowners’ insurance and mortgage requirements, provided in the form of a deferred payment loan, at 0% interest, for up to five years. Applicants must be the owner and occupant of the property, be current on their mortgage and property taxes, meet maximum household income requirements, and provide a proof of insurance letter or insurance company roof exclusion notice demanding roof replacement or repairs.

“The home roof rehabilitation program will help keep a roof over people’s heads, and it’s a crucial next step towards preserving generational wealth in Jacksonville’s underserved neighborhoods.”  
– Donna Deegan, Mayor

“The City of Jacksonville is acting on the twin crises of affordable housing and property insurance,” said Affordable Housing Director Joshua Hicks. “This is just the start of efforts to provide immediate relief to our citizens while we work to implement long-term solutions that keep people in their homes and grow the attainable housing inventory.”

The program opened applications for residents of Duval County at 9 a.m. on Jan. 16, and it filled up less than 90 minutes after opening, with 270 applications submitted before the city closed the waiting list.

Councilmember Matt Carlucci filed an emergency bill in response, asking city council to increase the budget from the approved \$500,000 back to the originally requested amount of \$946,000. The current amount will only cover up to 35 applicants and Carlucci said the increase could serve over 90 people.

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# Suspect Charged in River Road Shooting



Luis Rocés was arrested and charged with second degree murder in connection with a fatal shooting on River Road in San Marco last month.

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office (JSO) has a suspect in custody following a fatal shooting on San Marco’s River Road on Sunday, Jan. 21.

According to the police report, officers were dispatched to a River Road residence at 1:32 a.m. in response to a shooting. When they arrived, they found 30-year-old Austin Fitzgerald suffering from a gunshot wound on the ground near the residence. The report indicated Fitzgerald was pronounced dead after being transported to a hospital.

The suspect, 36-year-old Luis Rocés, has been charged with second degree murder. A witness recognized him and told police he “occasionally resided” at the River Road residence, though the police report lists a Neptune Beach home address.

According to the police report, a witness stated the suspect located her at the Dart Bar on King Street, where she’d been with the victim and another friend. She said she’d received and ignored several calls and texts from the suspect prior to that and later realized he’d been searching for her in the Riverside area.

The witness statement in the police report continued that, en route, the witness texted Fitzgerald, asking him to come pick her up at Rocés’s house, stating that she was afraid of him, and, once there, remained in a bathroom near the front door to wait for Fitzgerald to arrive; Rocés remained in the bathroom with her. Once Fitzgerald arrived, the witness said Rocés left the bathroom and began arguing with him at the front door, and the witness fled from the house.

The statement went on to say that the verbal altercation between the men continued as she and Fitzgerald attempted to get in Fitzgerald’s car – parked two doors down – to leave. Fitzgerald and Rocés approached one another, still arguing.

Several portions of the report have been redacted, including the events immediately leading up to the moment Fitzgerald was shot and Rocés’s statements. A silver .38 caliber revolver was recovered at the scene.

Rocés was arrested later that Sunday afternoon and charged in connection with the shooting.



Dozens of volunteers cleaned up the streets of North Riverside on Saturday, Jan. 13, in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

# Multiple Service Projects Honor MLK Day

Hundreds of volunteers gathered last month for the largest Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. service event in Northeast Florida’s history. United Way of Northeast Florida, the City of Jacksonville, AmeriCorps and over 30 community partners collaborated to bring forth the MLK Week of Service, Jan. 12-20, to Duval, Clay and Nassau counties in order to affect tangible, positive change in their communities, including several projects in North Riverside.

King Solomon United Baptist Church and Feeding Northeast Florida hosted a food and hygiene distribution drive, where a team of volunteers organized the drive and packed items into recipients’ cars.

Three teams were sent to Broward, Smith and Crystal Streets to clean up trash from the sidewalks, mow lawns for residents and clear out muck from the street gutters.

Lastly, at the Daily Manna Community Garden, volunteers and community members – in partnership with Groundwork Jacksonville, North Riverside CDC and the Daily Manna Serving Center — installed a gazebo, cleared weeds and prepared raised beds for the next season’s planting.

Additional group, individual and virtual volunteer projects are available through United Way’s Volunteer Hub at [unitedwanefl.org/volunteer](https://unitedwanefl.org/volunteer).



Volunteers helped distribute food and hygiene products at King Solomon United Baptist Church during United Way’s MLK Week of Service.

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## Sulzbacher hosts its annual Give Kids a Smile® event Feb. 24

Sulzbacher will host its annual Give Kids a Smile® event Saturday, Feb. 24 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Sulzbacher Pediatric Clinic at 5455 Springfield Blvd. Through a generous donation of supplies from the American Dental Association (ADA) the Sulzbacher Pediatric clinic dental team will be on hand to give free, comprehensive dental care and support to children under 18. Services will include routine exams, cleanings, sealants, extractions and simple fillings.

No registration is required, but patients are encouraged to arrive early as services will be rendered on a first-come, first-served basis. The last patient will be admitted no later than 1:30 p.m. For further information, call (904) 535-0327 or email [SulzbacherDental@sulzbacherjax.org](mailto:SulzbacherDental@sulzbacherjax.org).

# More Questions in Quest for New DCPS Admin Building

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The Duval County Public Schools Board (DCPS) is inching toward making a final selection between the two administrative building proposals recommended by its negotiation team last August.

One proposal is from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, Inc., the other, from Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) and Preston Hollow Community Capital.

According to a presentation given to the DCPS Board last August, the Blue Cross Blue Shield option would involve leasing space in the existing Riverside building and the offer includes “up to 130,000 [square feet] available in two different floor plan scenarios,” available immediately. The JTA proposal would be “build-to-suit” and includes a 40-year lease with an option for DCPS to purchase the building after six years.

Questions were raised at that August workshop regarding what the projected costs would be to remain at the current location for the next 20 years. To that end, an independent third party was brought in to complete a facility condition assessment for three buildings from which DCPS staff would consolidate in the new location. Those three buildings are the Prudential Drive administrative building, the DCPS Teams Center on Beach Boulevard and the Technical High School in Riverside.

The assessment analyzed both short-term deferred maintenance and estimated long-time capital improvement requirements projected for 20 years. For each facility, it put forth lists of immediate, short- and long-term maintenance repairs and upgrades. The assessment projected the “total capital plus operating cost through 20 years” at \$56,641,846 for the existing facilities at an a 20-year average annual cost of nearly \$3 million.

This assessment was presented to the board at a Jan. 10 workshop, though it raised several questions and concerns by board members regarding the accuracy of the numbers reflected in it.

DCPS Executive Director of Maintenance Tarek Ghandour shared his thoughts on the “discrepancies”

he saw in the report pertaining to estimated repair and maintenance costs.

“Some items, yes, you are right in the ballpark, I believe, and some items you are not, based on my belief that we have relationships with our contractors who can do the job a lot more efficiently and we have a lot of in-house capability to get the job done,” he said.

Later, in a telephone interview, DCPS Director of Purchasing Services Terrence Wright elaborated, “This facility condition assessment was completed, however it did not allow the school district staff to be able to take a look and make sure that all the information was correct and accurate. So, after that meeting was held, it was determined that [DCPS real estate consultant] CBRE, along with the consultant who prepared the facility condition assessment, will meet with the DCPS staff to go over it and make sure that all the numbers are accurate and everything is accurate. Once that’s done, the final version will then be presented in some manner to the school board again.”

Wright clarified the option of staying in the current location on Prudential Drive was not an option recommended by the negotiation team, and this assessment is “extra due diligence.”

“This is a huge decision, and it just seems like they’re trying to make sure that they perform all the due diligence and get all the information that they need before they make the decision,” he said.

According to Wright, once DCPS staff has an opportunity to go over that assessment report in detail, at that point – barring any new questions or additional requests for information – the board will move forward with a final decision to accept one of the offers, a decision he hopes will take place sometime this year.

“No one has given a timeline for anything, but that would be my hope,” he said. “I do think that the new chairman wants to take some action on this. I haven’t heard him give a timeframe, but I do think that it will be something that’s going to be in consideration all the time until the decision is made.”



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# MOVERS & SHAKERS



Alistair D.M. Dove

## Dove Named MOSH CEO

The Museum of Science & History (MOSH)'s board of trustees announced the unanimous selection of Alistair D.M. Dove as the Museum's new CEO, effective Feb. 5. He was selected from more than 50 highly qualified applicants from around the world to replace the previous CEO, Bruce Fafard.

"Al is a renowned scientist, an experienced educator, a masterful storyteller and a proven leader from a world-class institution. He's the right fit at the right time and we can't wait for him to get to work," said William Magevney, board chair of MOSH.

Dove comes to MOSH with more than 17 years' experience at the Georgia Aquarium, where he has served as Vice President of Science & Education since 2020. His previous roles spanned multiple departments, including research, conservation, nutrition and development, while his academic work includes more than 75 peer-reviewed scientific publications and one book, along with research and professor positions at Cornell University and Stony Brook University.

"I am both eager and delighted to take on this incredible opportunity. MOSH is a cherished cultural institution and I look forward to leading this preeminent science and history museum through its current programming and into an exciting future through the MOSH Genesis project," said Dove. "Public institutions like science centers and museums are trusted community voices and I take the responsibility of keeping them a vibrant and relevant part of the social fabric very seriously."

MOSH is currently preparing for its future location at the Jacksonville Shipyards.



Elizabeth Andersen

## Anderson Tapped as OneJax CEO

Elizabeth Andersen has been named the new CEO of OneJax, Inc., effective Feb. 5, 2024. The announcement was made by Dr. Mobeen Rathore, OneJax board chair.

"After an extensive national search for the right person to lead OneJax into the future, we found her in our own backyard," said Rathore. "Actually, we found her in our own board room, as Elizabeth joined the OneJax board in July. When the position became available this past fall, she decided to throw her hat in the ring, and we're delighted that she did."

Andersen is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and former chair of the Duval County School Board. More recently, she served as the Chair of the Mental Health Subcommittee for Mayor Donna Deegan and the City of Jacksonville.

"We see Elizabeth as a catalyst for positive change, championing initiatives focused on social equity, resource accessibility and the common good. She is dedicated and comes to this position with a great sense of purpose. Her multi-dimensional involvement with community initiatives speaks to her values and her vision," Rathore said.

## All Smiles for Dr. Hanania

Dr. David Alex Hanania has joined Dr. James Schumacher and the team at First Coast Smiles, located at 4201 Roosevelt Blvd. Dr. Hanania earned his dental degree from Nova Southeastern University College of Dental Medicine and his bachelor's in biochemistry from the University of Florida. He is a member of the American Dental Association and the Florida Dental Association.

In a statement on the company's website, Dr. Hanania said, "My mission in dentistry is to provide high quality and personalized care catered to each patient with integrity and honesty. My goal is to educate patients on the importance of their oral health and build trusted relationships with them and our community."



David Alex Hanania

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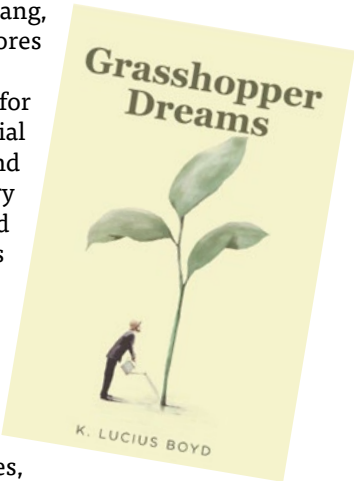
Ken Boyd

# Local Author Boyd Publishes Book of Poetry

Author Ken Boyd has published “Grasshopper Dreams,” a collection of poems that reflects the author’s nearly 400 years of familial history in the American South. Through 39 entries replete with Southern slang, colloquialisms and universal wisdom, Boyd explores joy and suffering across different stages of life.

“‘Grasshopper Dreams’ is a collection of poetry for our times – times of change, uncertainty and social confusion,” said Boyd, who grew up in Avondale and is also a jazz musician and member of the Poetry Society of America. “It explores what confronts and eludes us. It takes on the unchanging uniqueness of the Deep South, family dramas, social tides and our wandering spirituality. It is composed of equal parts contentment, humor and confounding confusion.”

“Grasshopper Dreams” is published through Fulton Books under K. Lucius Boyd. It is available at bookstores, or online at iTunes, Amazon, Google Play and Barnes and Noble.



Tammy Daniel

# Daniel Recognized for Nursing Leadership

Tammy Daniel, senior vice president and chief nursing officer (CNO) of Baptist Health, has been included on *Becker’s Hospital Review’s* list of Hospital and Health System Nursing Leaders to Know. The list acknowledges nursing leaders who leverage their clinical and leadership experience to provide exceptional patient care and create “professional pathways for the next generation of nurses,” according to *Becker’s*.

Daniel has spent nearly half of her 35-year career at Baptist Health. She joined the health system in 2007 and held several leadership positions within the organization before assuming the top nursing leadership role in 2018.

In congratulating Daniel, Matthew A. Zuino, executive vice president and COO of Baptist Health, called her an “innovator and advocate for advancing the role of nursing.”



Billy Dale Tyson, Jorge Morales, Michael Cascone, Betty Demetree, Elizabeth B. Cascone, Jay Demetree and Erik Kasper performed the ceremonial groundbreaking.



A rendering of the Betty & Jack Demetree Family Athletic Training Center

# Bishop Kenny Breaks Ground on New Athletic Training Center

## High school facility named in honor of the Betty and Jack Demetree Family

Bishop Kenny High School, Jacksonville’s first and oldest Catholic high school, broke ground on a \$10.1 million building on Jan. 3 with The Most Rev. Erik T. Pohlmeier, Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine, presiding over the event. The new Betty & Jack Demetree Family Athletic Training Center will house facilities and resources for the school’s student athletes. More than half of the student body participates in one or more of Bishop Kenny’s 23 athletic teams.

“Today is a historic day. We have long provided a strong, rigorous academic environment for our students. It is now time to level-set our athletic facilities to that same standard,” said Principal Todd Orlando.

The Athletic Training Center is the first of two building projects envisioned and made possible through the school’s *Legacy of Faith* Capital Campaign. The second, a practice gymnasium, will house lockers, weights and classrooms for use by the entire student body. Construction on the practice gymnasium will start after the opening of the training center.

“To be able to move this building forward while honoring our parents, Betty and Jack Demetree, is a special opportunity,” said Jay Demetree. “Our father would have been thrilled to join us here today as we break ground on this exciting project.”

In addition to the construction of these buildings, Bishop Kenny is also prioritizing the expansion of its endowment. Formally begun in December 2021, the endowment has raised more than \$2 million toward creating a restricted long-term fund to ensure the school’s financial sustainability.

The Betty & Jack Demetree Family Athletic Training Center will open during the 2024-25 academic year. kasper architects + associates and Auld & White Constructors are the design and construction partners on this project.



# Billion-dollar Boom

The Chairman’s Cup-winning Avondale/San Marco Metropolitan office of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty recently celebrated their award, along with the company’s impressive \$1.4 billion sales volume in 2023, at the company’s “Agents are Forever” 2023 Annual Awards celebration. San Marco Metropolitan office Realtor Anita Vining led as the Top Producer with \$56.8 million in closed volume. Ann King, president of the company, praised the agents’ “unparalleled commitment” and indicated plans in 2024 to make “dreams come true for our clients, colleagues and the community.”



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# Griggs Appointed Director of Community Initiatives



Charles Griggs

Mayor Donna Deegan appointed Charles Griggs to serve as Director of Community Initiatives in the Mayor's Office, effective Jan. 8. In his new role, Griggs will be responsible for promoting community initiatives that focus on public safety through crime prevention and intervention. This will include reimagining the Jacksonville Journey while

providing oversight to the City's current programs in that area. He replaces Lakesha Burton, who resigned in 2023 to care for her husband.

"Relaunching this vital program is a top priority of our administration," said Deegan about the Jacksonville Journey. "It will be in good hands with Charles at the helm."

Griggs was the president of Eighth & Whitner Group LLC, a media, marketing, and government relations agency focused on policy engagement and program issues that improve community outcomes. Prior to that, he worked for the Florida Department of Health in Duval County, serving as the Director of Communications and Community Engagement, then later as Director of External Affairs.

He is a longtime member of 100 Black Men of Jacksonville, Inc. and serves on the board of directors of the 100 Black Men of America, Inc. Griggs has also served on the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission, Arts in Public Places Commission, and the Jacksonville Journey Oversight Committee. In 2015, he received the Mayor's Lifetime Journey Award for his eight years of service on the Jacksonville Journey Oversight Committee.



Thomas B. Waters

# Waters Responsible for Jacksonville Neighborhoods

Thomas B. Waters was appointed by Mayor Donna Deegan to serve as Director of Neighborhoods for the City of Jacksonville, starting Jan. 22. Waters will be responsible for neighborhood and housing services, as well as regulatory compliance for the City, including the Neighborhood Services Office, Housing and Community Development, Municipal Code Compliance, Environmental Quality, Mosquito Control, Animal Care and Protective Services, and the Office of City Link/630-City.

Waters has a long history with the City, having previously served as a Grants Administrator for the Department of Intra-Governmental Affairs, Project Administrator for the Department of Public Works, and a Planner/Coordinator for the Neighborhoods Department. He is also a City Council-appointed Commissioner for the Jacksonville Housing and Community Development Commission.

# \$95K Granted to Revitalize Cathedral District

The Jessie Ball duPont Fund has jointly awarded a \$95,000 grant to St. John's Episcopal Cathedral and Cathedral District-Jax (CDJ) to help revitalize the 36-block Cathedral District in northeast downtown Jacksonville. The grant will provide general operating support for CDJ's work to repopulate the formerly thriving neighborhood through the prioritization of affordable mixed-income housing. The grant is the largest received by CDJ to date.

Ginny Myrick, president and CEO of CDJ, said that while affordable housing projects typically take two to three years to complete, CDJ is working to shorten that time for developers. She called the housing a "critical component" of a healthy neighborhood.

"CDJ's goal is to help facilitate 2,500 new residential units as soon as possible in the 36 blocks of the Cathedral District on Cathedral Hill, working for a recognizable sense of place in the neighborhood," said Myrick.

Since its inception, CDJ has worked with current landowners and potential sellers to gain control of properties and make them developable for private builders and developers. The affordable housing units are earmarked for residents earning 30%-80% of the area median income.

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# New Trustees for The Community Foundation

The board of trustees for The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida is welcoming new leadership, as Michael DuBow begins a two-year term as chair, and John Hirabayashi, John Peyton and Amy Wacaster begin three-year terms as new trustees. DuBow succeeds the Honorable Brian J. Davis, who completed his two-year term as chairman on Dec. 31, 2023, and will continue his service to the board as the chair of the governance committee.

Michael DuBow is the president of the DuBow Family Foundation, overseeing all grantmaking initiatives. He has served on the board of The Community Foundation since 2014. He was a previous president of the Jacksonville Jewish Center and board chair of the Wolfson Children's Hospital.

John Hirabayashi is retiring this year as the president and CEO of Community First Credit Union after leading it since 1996. He has served on the boards of the Jacksonville Public Education Fund, Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Florida State College at Jacksonville, JAX Chamber, the Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida, Jacksonville Community Council Inc., and WJCT Public Broadcasting.

John Peyton was named president of GATE Petroleum Company in January 2012 after serving two consecutive terms as Jacksonville's mayor. He has served as chairman of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, Jacksonville Symphony Association, Greenscape of Jacksonville and the JAX Chamber.

Amy Wacaster is a retired equity trader who chaired the board of trustees at Beaches Episcopal School prior to its merger with Episcopal School of Jacksonville (ESJ), and now serves on the executive committee of the board. She is the current co-chair of the Boldly ESJ capital campaign and serves on Wolfson Children's Hospital's boards of directors and Davidson College's board of visitors.



Ron Elliott



Emily Lloyd

Hamilton Lloyd

# 20 Graduate Leadership Academy

Ron Elliott, Emily Lloyd and Hamilton Lloyd were among the Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS (NEFAR) Leadership Academy graduates celebrated during its 2024 Awards and Installation Gala.. Leadership Academy is a yearlong program designed to train emerging leaders in how to grow their businesses, expand their leadership skills, develop a sense of camaraderie with their peers and make a difference within the extended real estate community. For a full list of NEFAR's Leadership Academy class, please visit [residentnews.net](https://residentnews.net).



Daniel Burkhardt

# Burkhardt Named NAI Hallmark Partner

NAI Hallmark, a commercial real estate services and advisory firm, announced the appointment of Daniel Burkhardt as its newest partner, effective Jan. 1, 2024. Burkhardt will assume a larger role surrounding the growth of the brokerage division and provide strategic guidance to the NAI Hallmark team.

Burkhardt joined NAI Hallmark in 2012 after graduating from the University of Florida. Throughout his career, he has represented clients in more than 200 transactions totaling over \$500 million in value, and said he was "honored" to take on this new role.

Christian Harden, Co-CEO at NAI Hallmark said, "His dedication to the community and commitment to excellence in his daily work have set the high-water mark and we are proud of the growth he's made in our team."

"Daniel's core values have always been in line with those of our company and witnessing Daniel's professional growth over the past decade has been truly inspiring," said Harden's Co-CEO counterpart, Keith Goldfaden.



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MEET THE AGENT



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Realtor

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**Is a hot dog a sandwich?**  
I'll go with an expert like Gordon Ramsey, yes a hot dog is a sandwich!!



Nina Chankelee and Clark Coombs

# SENYAI Thai Brings Authenticity to Cuisine in 5 Points

For restaurateurs Clark Coombs and Nina Chankelee, food has always been at the forefront of their lives. For Chankelee, it was growing up in Thailand and being raised on the roots of the traditional dishes that ignited a passion for sharing generational Thai recipes with guests. For Coombs, it was a lifelong pursuit of travel and expansion of his palate while traveling to 28 different countries over the last few decades.

The pair has combined their passions to rebirth a local Thai concept, complete with a new name, new recipes and fresh ingredients. They have now unveiled their plans for an outstanding experience in 5 Points. Chankelee and Coombs took over operations of Aroi Thai at 820 Lomax St., renaming the concept SENYAI – Thai Street Food and Noodle Bar. The previous owners had survived the pandemic, but challenges remained that led to a change in ownership and ultimately, a better outcome for the neighborhood.

“I just love this neighborhood. From its youngsters and hipsters to the elders, everyone really lives together here in harmony; it’s a great area in which to build a business,” said Chankelee, while discussing their newly minted venture.

Coombs has lived the bulk of his life in Jacksonville and was born at Riverside Hospital, but he’s finally settled down after years of globetrotting. He’s a self-professed “foodie” who “will eat just about anything,” and loves to share his appreciation for unique eats, seasonings and flavors from around the world.

The pair is excited to share their cuisine and excellent service with a smile, coupled with high-quality ingredients that will please the most discerning palate. SENYAI is located along the one-way streetscape in 5 Points, just off the landmark flashing yellow beacon that defines the area. The restaurant can be reached by calling (904) 256-4979.



Pete O. Dalton

Clark LaBlond

Wanda McReynolds

# Realtors Dalton, LaBlond and McReynolds Honored

The Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS® (NEFAR) presented 16 awards to local realtors at its 2024 Awards and Installation Gala, Jan. 4 at the Hyatt Regency Riverfront Hotel. The honorees included three from *The Resident News* readership area: Clark LaBlond, Pete O. Dalton and Wanda McReynolds.

The Legends of Real Estate’s Clark LaBlond took home two awards, The Circle of Honor Award and The Diversity Award. The Circle of Honor Award recognized LaBlond’s many years of exceptional service and contributions to the community, state and the real estate profession. The Diversity Award recognized his efforts to raise the consciousness of inclusiveness within the organization, industry and workplace.

LaBlond is an active member of NEFAR’s board of directors, Budget and Finance Committee, Global Business Council, Education Task Force, and was chairman of the DEI Committee and co-chairman of the 2023 NEFAR Leadership Academy. He has also served on the Fair Housing Policy Committee and Diversity Committee for the National Association of REALTORS®.

Pete O. Dalton, broker/owner of Coldwell Banker Vanguard Realty, took home the NEFAR Lifetime Legacy Award, which honors a long-time REALTOR® member, living or deceased, who has made a significant mark on the Northeast Florida real estate industry. Under Dalton’s leadership, Vanguard Realty grew from an independent one-office brokerage into the largest Coldwell Banker franchise in Florida with 10 offices and two service centers. He has served as president of the Clay County Association of REALTORS® and as NEFAR’s secretary and on its board.

Slate Real Estate’s Wanda McReynolds was honored with the night’s Silent Angel Award. The Silent Angel Award honors a NEFAR REALTOR® member who has demonstrated continued personal involvement and support to NEFAR and to the real estate profession for the past three years, and McReynolds was known for her giving spirit toward others and the association. She has been involved with many different area councils and the Global Business Council.

For the full list of honorees, please visit [residentnews.net](https://residentnews.net).



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# McLendon Named Multiple Sclerosis Society Partner

Dr. Loren McLendon, a pediatric neurologist at Nemours Children’s Health, Jacksonville, has been named a Partner in MS Care physician by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) for her knowledge and experience in treating multiple sclerosis (MS). McLendon is the only pediatric MS provider in the state of Florida. As part of the Partner in MS Care distinction, McLendon has at least 20% of her patients diagnosed with MS and/or other chronic neurologic illnesses.

“This collaboration is a positive move forward in continuing to provide prestigious pediatric care for MS.”

– Dr. Loren McLendon

“This collaboration is a positive move forward in continuing to provide prestigious pediatric care for MS,” said McLendon.

Multiple sclerosis is a disease of the central nervous system with symptoms ranging from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. There is currently no cure.

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# New Owner Brings Welcomed Change to Happy Medium Books Café



Dana Shutters

There is a unique place in the neighborhood to relax, unwind, read a great book and enjoy an old-school, independent bookstore. In fact, that very shop has been abuzz with locals who are discovering its allure, and they are spreading the word. Happy Medium Books Café has been operating at 2723 Park St. in the Whiteway Corner building since August 2023, but the face behind the business has changed in recent weeks.

As a volunteer at the store, Dana Shutters was helping the prior owner, Annie Pagett, stock shelves, serve patrons and lend a hand. In a twist of fate, a call to help the family out in Utah meant that Pagett would have to depart Jacksonville...and fast. The pair devised a plan to keep the lights on and let Shutters take over the business. As a former librarian and educator, Shutters knew it was time to enjoy the next phase in her own journey. She took the reins and began putting her personal touch on things, which included more new books, versus the 80-20 split of used to new.

"I would say we're about 50-50 when it comes to the balance and inventory of new [books] and used at this point," she said.

Shutters is working to ensure fresh ideas are explored. The place is quickly evolving to take on a life of its own, from the selection of reading materials to the aesthetics, décor and cash-and-carry items like greeting cards and for-purchase local art adorning the walls.

Shutters is welcoming book clubs, mothers and their children, and anyone that finds solace in the peace that bookstores have to offer. Not only can one find a delightful book, but the "Café" aspect of the namesake also means fresh pastries, scones and other tasty snacks alongside matcha teas, espresso drinks and cold beverages.

Visit [happymediumbookscfe.com](http://happymediumbookscfe.com) for more details or call (904) 683-8447 to check on a title today.



Megan DeGance

# DeGance Joins Five Star Veterans Center

Megan DeGance has joined Five Star Veterans Center as its marketing director after spending four years as the Center Operations & Programs Manager at USO in Jacksonville.

DeGance has an extensive background in center operations, programs management and marketing, having also held positions in operations and publishing throughout her career.

The Five Star Veterans Center is dedicated to assisting veterans with the housing and support services they need to transition to civilian living.

# Renovation Marks New Chapter for Carithers Pediatric Group



The Carithers Pediatric Group recently celebrated its grand re-opening at 2121 Park St. with a ceremonial ribbon cutting. Originally erected in 1987, the group's office has long been a cornerstone of the community, providing pediatric medicine since its founding in 1941 by Drs. Hugh and Connie Carithers.

Over the decades, the Carithers Pediatric Group has grown and evolved, adapting

to the changing needs of the community while staying true to its core values of compassion, integrity, and innovation. The new office features updates and amenities designed to enhance the patient experience.

"We are thrilled to unveil our newly renovated office space," said Wendy Sapolsky. "This renovation not only enhances our ability to provide the highest quality care to our patients but also reaffirms our commitment to serving the children and families of Northeast Florida for generations to come."



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Margaret Barrett and former Lee High school player and Green Bay Packer LeRoy Butler with Leon Barrett in 2022, around the time Butler was inducted into the Football Hall of Fame.



Leon next to a television gifted to him by four appreciative former Generals: Greg Carter, Phil Miller, Joe Joe Browder and Steve Hyers



A rendering of the new signage for Coach Leon Barrett Stadium.

# Championing a Legacy

## How one man’s impact inspired a timeless tribute

BY LINDSEY GAST PESSIA

Leon Barrett studied, played football and graduated from then-named Robert E. Lee High School in 1961. Just five years later, upon graduating from University of Georgia – with a little help from his former Lee football coach – he, his wife and one-month-old baby returned to his alma mater to teach and coach...and he never left. Now, a group of individuals have worked to ensure that his 60-year legacy never will.

On Saturday, March 9, at 10 a.m., the stadium at Riverside High School will officially be renamed the Coach Leon Barrett Stadium during a special dedication ceremony at the field.

“I always knew Lee High School was home to me,” said Barrett. “To me, God had a purpose in my life to come back here and do what I’ve done with it.”

What he’s done with that life is leave in indelible mark on generations of students, strengthen and inspire those around him for decades, and even become family to those who needed it most.

“He’s really a builder of men. He’s just such a Christian. There are so many people that are indebted to him for his continued friendship, and the way he handled himself in high school as a mentor to other students and the ball players, whether it was girls or boys,” said Norman Abraham, who went to school with Barrett and served on the committee to have the field renamed. “He’s the perfect guy to look up to.”

Abraham, along with Greg Carter, Pat Geer, Doug Milne, John Wannamaker and Gary Warner, formed a committee to petition the Duval County School Board to name the field – which Barrett had previously dubbed “The Backyard” – Coach Leon Barrett Stadium.

Barrett spent 38 years teaching and coaching at what is now called Riverside High School. Though he claims he was better at being an assistant, Barrett was the head coach of seven different sports at different times, and only had one losing season as a head coach, oddly enough in football. He started the school’s first athletic booster club, served as the school’s Athletic Director from 1977-1992, was instrumental in having the press box, lights and bleachers installed, and even used maintained the field back when it was grass.

He and his wife, Margaret, have owned a home adjacent to the school for 52 years.

“You can’t sit in my den or my dining room, or walk out my door, or drive up my driveway without looking at Lee High School,” he said.

But Barrett said his greatest accomplishments aren’t necessarily the victories won on the field.

“I came off the street, and when I had the opportunity to go to college, it seemed like everything just pointed me back here. I wanted to come back here and see if I could help some kids. That’s been the whole purpose of my life,” he said. “If I can help one kid move on and be as lucky as I was...that’s been the whole thing.”

Stories abound about the positive impact Barrett has had on individuals that have passed through the school halls: The kid he “led to Jesus” in 1972 who now has a church in Portland, Oregon. The Green Bay Packers’ defensive safety LeRoy Butler, who for years told Barrett that if he ever got in to the Football Hall of Fame – which he did in 2022 – that “you and mama [Margaret] are coming.” And the everyday players who found inspiration in his words.

“The thing about Coach Barrett is that he could encourage or motivate you to do things you didn’t think you could do,” said committee member Carter, who graduated Lee High in 1975 and played for Coach Barrett. “For instance, 1973, the first game of the season. We played Fletcher High School. Fletcher was ranked No. 1 in the state preseason. We had not had a winning record in nine years, so were picked last in Jacksonville; but, we went out there and beat them 15-14. We only had a few boys over 200 pounds, but Coach Barrett would motivate you and get you so fired up, you thought you were the New England Patriots.”

The committee that petitioned the school board also raised the funds to cover the costs and signage for the naming of the stadium. In the future, Abraham said the committee would also like to start a scholarship at Riverside High School in honor of Barrett and his longtime friend, playing and coaching partner, Corky Rogers. They have also requested that all athletes who have played for coach Barrett in the past be in attendance at the dedication ceremony on March 9.

“I’m blessed. I’m still shocked a little bit. I never thought anything like this would ever happen,” said Barrett.

Barrett will be 82 in February and still substitute teaches at Riverside High to this day. When asked about former players coming to the dedication, Barrett’s humble nature showed through again as his only concern was for the feelings of the potentially hundreds of people that might come out in support of it.

“I don’t know what to say to everybody. I won’t recognize everybody’s name anymore. At 82, you forget a lot of names.”

While he may not remember all their names, he is sure to feel their presence. There’s no doubt they’ve all felt his.

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## \$300K Awarded for Refugee Housing

The Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund at the Community Foundation for Northeast Florida recently awarded Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida (LSS) a \$300,000 grant spanning the next three years to support housing initiatives within the agency’s refugee resettlement program.

The funding will go toward refugee families arriving in Northeast Florida, with first priority given to Afghan refugees. In 2023, 2,542 refugees and nearly 45,000 individuals received assistance through LSS.

“We are immensely grateful for this funding partnership from the Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund,” said Bill Brim, president and CEO of LSS. “This gift will move LSS forward in welcoming refugee families seeking a brighter tomorrow in our city.”

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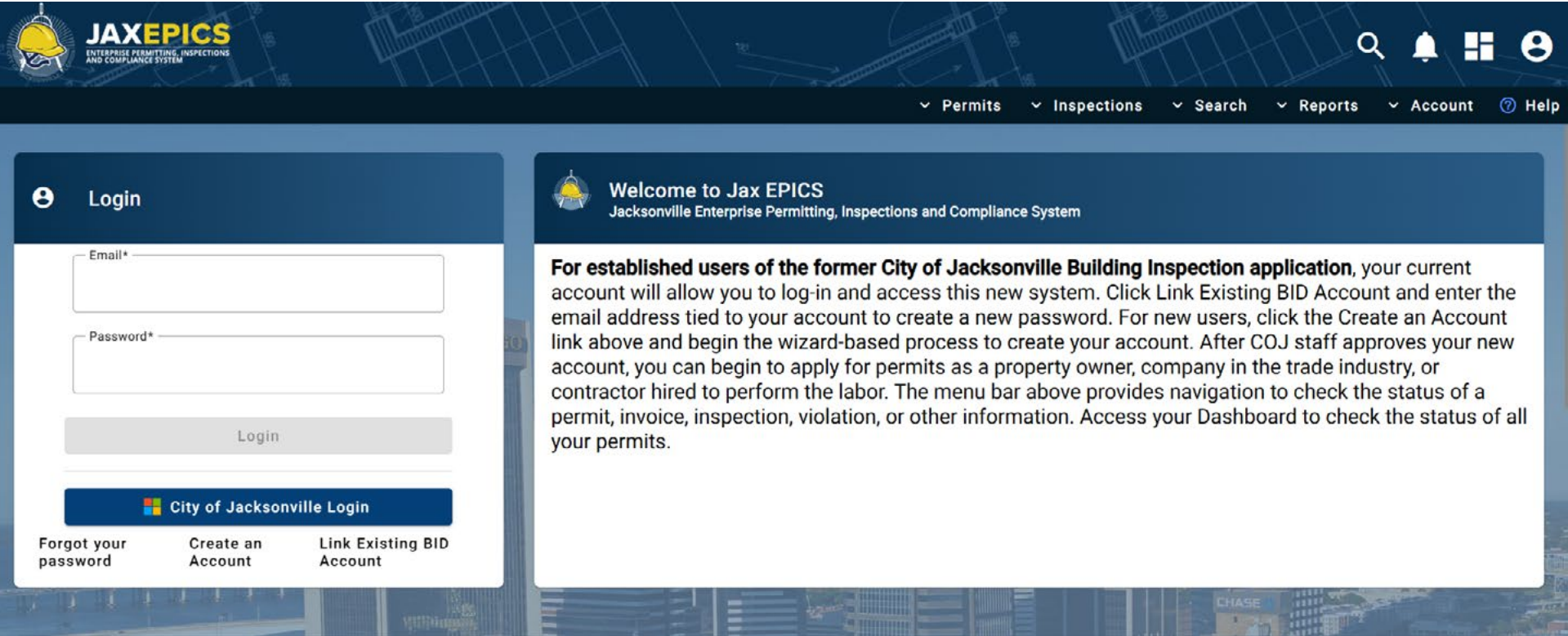
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# EPIC News for Jacksonville’s Permitting Process



BY MICHELE LEIVAS

On Wednesday, Jan. 10, Mayor Donna Deegan announced the launch of Jax Enterprise Permitting, Inspections and Compliance System, or JaxEPICS, the City of Jacksonville’s (COJ) new permitting system.

Deegan made the announcement at City Hall alongside City Council President Ron Salem and COJ Chief Information Officer Wanyonyi Kendrick.

The permitting process – and the amount of time it took to move through – was a recurring complaint Deegan said she heard during her campaign and one that was again voiced during the community conversations Deegan hosted in all 19 districts shortly after becoming mayor. At the January press conference, she said overhauling the permitting process “has been a priority of my administration since day one.”

JaxEPICS was soft-launched in December.

JaxEPICS and its website ([jaxepics.coj.net](http://jaxepics.coj.net)) was created in-house with the City’s development team, “saving millions in taxpayer dollars,” Deegan said.

“Overhauling the permitting process has been a priority of my administration since day one. We’re innovating with JaxEPICS to significantly reduce permit approval times and improve efficiency for our community.”

– Mayor Donna Deegan

“By working on JaxEPICS internally, we were able to innovate quickly and ensure needs were met for every department that was involved in the permitting process,” she added.

Through JaxEPICS, permit applications and the necessary accompanying documents can be uploaded from both computers and mobile devices, and all parties

involved – applicants and city staff – receive real-time notifications as the application moves through the process, along with any requests for additional information. Business owners are also able to see where their permits are in the process.

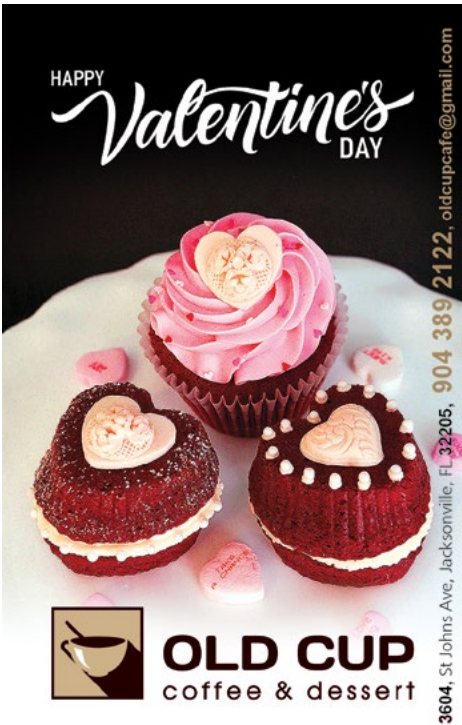
“We believe that JaxEPICS and these process improvements will significantly reduce the average time it takes to get a permit approved over the next six months, and we’ll now be able to accurately measure that process,” she said.

Deegan said the Mayor’s Budget Review Committee had also requested 10 new, full-time positions to help further reduce the review time for permit applications.

“I know as we went through our campaigns, ‘permitting, permitting, permitting’ was always a constant comment we heard from people all over this community,” Salem said at the January announcement. “I’m excited about the process, I’m excited about the timelines, and we will work with the mayor on those budget requests to try to get this moving in the right direction.”

On Jan. 23, legislation was introduced to the city council requesting the appropriation of \$512,866 from the Building Inspection 159 Fund Balance and General Fund to “various accounts within the Building Inspection Fund” to fund those positions.

According to the COJ, the city has received 2,261 building permit submissions between Dec. 18 through Jan. 24, during which time it has also completed 1,283 building permit final reviews. COJ added that it is still working through permits submitted originally through the old system, while concurrently “reviewing and issuing” permits submitted through JaxEPICS.





The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida's Art Ventures winners. Top row: Ithiell Yisrael, Jessica Q. Stark, Andrew Fallon, Emily Cargill and Raquel Benjamin; Bottom row: Glenn Van Dyke (Kairos Creature Club), Julian Bryson, Marcus Jamal Williams, Barbara Hionides and Andrew Kozlowski

# 10 Artists Receive Art Ventures Grants

Ten Northeast Florida artists recently received grants of \$5,000 each as part of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida's Art Ventures initiative, now in its 34th year. The awards provide a springboard for the artists to advance their artistic practices, pursue new projects and bring their work to new audiences.

"I hope this year's Art Ventures artists feel tremendous pride in their selection for these awards, which are a testament to the talent and ambition of our local arts community," said Amy Crane, senior director of grantmaking at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida.

The opportunity attracted more

than 65 applicants, a record-breaking number, and the awardees were selected for their artistic merit and determination to move to the next level of professional development, with additional consideration for how the artist is influenced by and impacts Northeast Florida. During this grant cycle, The Community Foundation increased the individual artist award amount from \$3,500 to \$5,000 and extended the award timeline from 12 to 18 months.

This year's selected grantees were drawn from the categories of Film, Creative Writing, Music, and the Visual Arts. The winners and their proposed projects include:

- Raquel Benjamin, Visual Artist – To support her fashion collection, "Protest Pinstripe."
- Julian Bryson, Music Composer/Conductor –To perform, record,

“ I hope this year's Art Ventures artists feel tremendous pride in their selection for these awards, which are a testament to the talent and ambition of our local arts community.”

– Amy Crane  
Senior Director of Grantmaking at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida

and produce his first professional recordings of original work, including a collaboration with Voices of Jacksonville, the adult professional ensemble affiliated with the Jacksonville Children's Chorus.

- Emily Cargill, Choreographer – To support the creation of a work titled "The Grief Project," which will be performed at the Women's Arts Exchange in April of 2024.
- Andrew Fallon, Filmmaker – To produce his first independent short film, "Cobalt," which explores the perspective of a Middle Eastern teen growing up in the American South in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

- Barbara Hionides, Visual Artist – To support the creation of a community-driven installation project in Historic Springfield titled "Main Street Series."
- Andrew Kozlowski, Visual Artist – To expand his studio's production capacity and create opportunities for it to be a resource for other creatives in Jacksonville.
- Jessica Q. Stark, Writer – To fund a book tour for her most recent publication, "Buffalo Girl," which includes poetry, original collaged photography, and prose influenced by folklore and her mother's immigration to the United States from Vietnam in 1975.
- Glenn Van Dyke, Musician and Audio Engineer – To market local ensemble Kairos Creature Club's debut self-titled album through an international promotion campaign.
- Marcus Jamal Williams, Visual Artist – To support a community engagement project involving video interviews with pillars in the African American community, evolving into a portrait series answering the question, "What makes you great?"
- Ithiell Yisrael, Filmmaker – To create a mini-documentary as a proof of concept for a larger project highlighting the underground hip-hop scene in Jacksonville.

Art Ventures began in 1990 as a commitment to invest in local individual artists as well as small arts organizations. To date, it has made more than 240 grants to individual artists and 150 grants to small arts organizations, totaling more than \$1.4 million.



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# Phone Numbers Now Need Full A-TEN-tion

## Mandatory 10-digit dialing hits Jacksonville

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) announced mandatory 10-digit dialing went into effect on Monday, Jan. 29 for all phone calls in the 904 area code.

This is in preparation for the launch of the region's new 324 area code, which will occur on Feb. 26.

In July 2022, The Resident News reported on the implementation of the new area code overlay, which will go into effect once all 904 telephone numbers have been assigned.

"Since August, permissive 10-digit dialing has been allowed," said PSC Chairman Mike La Rosa in a PSC press release. "My hope is that residents and businesses have had plenty of time to reprogram contacts and equipment. With the February launch of the new 324 area code quickly approaching, mandatory 10-digit dialing is necessary for two area codes to service popular Northeast Florida."

A text message regarding the 10-digit dialing was sent out through JaxReady's AlertJax Emergency Notification System on Jan. 29.

"Today begins mandatory 10-digit dialing for all local calls," the message read. "You must now dial the area code + the telephone number to complete calls within Duval County. This will not affect calls made to 911."

After Feb. 26, customers seeking new or additional telephone lines or, "in some cases, moving their service, may be assigned a phone number with the new 324 area code," the release added.

All or most of Duval, St. Johns, Nassau, Baker, Bradford, Clay and Union counties are covered by the 904 area code.

The press release noted that entering the new area code is not required when dialing 911 or other three-digit numbers like "211, 311, 411, 522, 611, 711, or 811 if they are currently available in their community."

Residents will have to update existing contacts in their cell phones to include the area codes to ensure the mandatory 10-digit dialing for outgoing calls.



# MLK Day of Service Benefits Blue Cypress Park

The Timucuan Parks Foundation (TPF), along with more than 40 volunteers, came together on Jan. 15 for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service Event at Blue Cypress Park in Arlington. The group, who ranged in age from 8 to 80, spent the morning cleaning up litter from under the boardwalk and along the shoreline of the St. Johns River.

Volunteers included TPF's Trail Team, members of TPF's new Young Professionals Group, a group of students from Sandalwood High School, volunteers from MW Builders and others, who collected 62 bags of trash and wood that had washed ashore.

The cleanup event was held in partnership with JaxParks. For more information on future clean-ups, visit [timucuanparks.org/volunteer](https://timucuanparks.org/volunteer).



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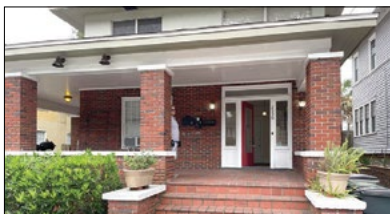
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Cameron Frazier with Alexis Jackson



Thomas Lee IV with Chris Warren, Mike Hightower and Andrew Kisz



Niko Negron with Andrea Williams, Belkis Plata, Megan Hayward and Shannon Schott

# Empowered and Engaged

## Gala celebrates Emerging Leaders grads

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Class VII of the Hightower Emerging Leaders Fellowship celebrated its graduation at the annual black-tie holiday party at the River Club of Jacksonville on Jan. 6.

Seventeen individuals were selected for the 2023 class from more than 70 applications – with an equal representation from both the corporate and nonprofit sectors “because a great city has to have that balance,” explained fellowship co-founder and namesake, Mike Hightower.

“For those of you all who got here, congratulations, because you’re the best of the best,” he said.

In addition to celebrating these individuals, the evening recognized the passing of the torch from Immediate Past Chair Lauren Braddock to the 2024 Chair Belkis Plata.

“She’s going to represent you all so well and she’s so genuinely humbled and proud to be the chair this year,” Braddock said, introducing Plata. “The fellowship is going to be in such good hands with her at its helm, and I have been a better leader with her as my partner.”

“As we look forward ahead, our focus remains on harnessing our collective talents to better our community,” Plata said. “This program is not just about individual success; it’s about creating a lasting impact on Jacksonville and beyond. I’m deeply thankful for this opportunity to lead and learn among such inspiring individuals.”

The Hightower Emerging Leaders Fellowship was created in 2017 and is a program of the JAX Chamber.



Robin and Laura Braddock



Daniel and Janine Burkhardt



James Shepard with Belkis Plata



Yanira “Ya Ya” Cordova with Nicole Hamm and Megan Bush Del Pizzo



Whitney Meyer with Sarah Small and Amber Wilson



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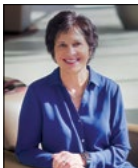


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Janet Wozniak with Jennifer and Chris Spires and Suzanne Hinckley

Elli Zimmerman with Gracie Register

Michael Grove with Clancy Houston and JoJo Grove

# Wozniak Warms Up the Forum

The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital hosted Steve Wozniak at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts on Jan. 17 as part of its Florida Forum speaker series. A Silicon Valley icon, technology entrepreneur and philanthropist for more than 40 years, Wozniak helped shape the computing industry with his design of Apple's first line of products and co-founding of Apple Computer Inc. He was inducted into the Inventors Hall of Fame in 2000.

Wozniak is the second in the Florida Forum lineup. Funds raised from the evening will go toward a new Kids Kare Mobile ICU, a neonatal and pediatric critical care transport vehicle for Wolfson Children's.

The final speaker in the Florida Forum series will be retired Adm. James Stavridis on Monday, Feb. 26 at 7 p.m. at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts.



Rick and Sammie Graham with Dr. Mark and Ellen Gould, Andrew Wooten and Grace Wooten



David and Susanna Barton with Lindsey and Ryan Riggs



Jennifer and Chris Spires with Janet Wozniak, Leslie and Will Montoya



Nathan and Kat Miller with Meg and Tom Davis



Percy and Susan Rosenbloom with Jim Agee, Renee Parenteau, Marie Foster Gnage and David Gnage, Howard and Terry Wanamaker

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Jenny Kashman with Sally Suslak and Joni Berg



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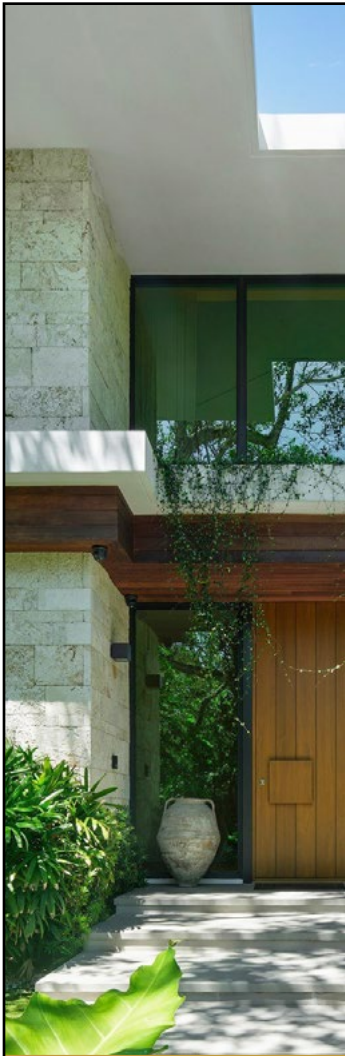


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# Celebrating 100 Years of Olmstead Brothers in Jacksonville

Memorial Park Association celebrated the kickoff of Memorial Park's Centennial Anniversary with a gala at Timuquana Country Club on Saturday, Jan. 20. The evening of celebration, live music, dinner and drinks reflected

on the history of Memorial Park and raised money to preserve and protect the park for generations. The Olmstead Brothers-designed Memorial Park was officially dedicated on Christmas Day in 1924 in honor of

the more than 1,220 Floridians who died in the first World War. The park is home to Florida's World War One Memorial, the iconic Spiritualized Life sculpture and 100 years of Jacksonville residents' memories.



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# LOCAL FOLKS

BY JENNIFER JENSEN

Bryan Arnold's family tree has wide roots in Jacksonville, specifically the Ortega area. He is a Jacksonville native, and his father practiced law in the city for 54 years.

"All my dad's family grew up here," he said. "If you run across any Arnold, I'm probably related to them."

A self-proclaimed "simple guy," Arnold has a career that is anything but simple. For the past 12 years he's owned a business in computer repair. He has always had a passion for computers and found them incredibly interesting. In 1984, at age 14, he got his first computer.

"The computer, back then, was just the size of a 13-inch television with a monochrome screen," he said. "It was a basic model."

Since then, he's "pretty much owned every type of computer." He can take them apart, put them back together, load them and figure out what's causing any issues. While he doesn't do programming, he has considered learning it.

"I do have time now to do that stuff," Arnold said. "But then I wonder if I really want to. I mean what am I going to program? Sometimes, once you get old enough to do the things you previously wanted to do, you realize you don't really feel like it anymore."

“To have somebody telling you how hard you have to work to make them money... No thanks.”

– Bryan Arnold

Before landing on computer repair officially, Arnold had different odd jobs over the years. He delivered subpoenas, worked for a private investigator and waited tables at a retirement home. Having spent most of his life in the Jacksonville area, Arnold left for a short stint to central Illinois. He lived in a small town of less than 500 people, working for TruGreen and traveling throughout central Illinois doing lawn care maintenance.

"I had fun on the job, but it was a dirty job and wasn't as good as computers," he said. "Computers always pays more." He liked it there, but eventually returned home to the Ortega area.

Arnold was working for a struggling computer repair business when he chose to strike out on his own. Many of his clientele chose to follow. Now that he works for himself, he said he could never go back and work for anybody else. In his experience, working for oneself has far more ups than downs.

"To have somebody telling you how hard you have to work to make them money...No thanks," he said. "You don't have anybody breathing down your neck telling you when to work or trying to tell you that you need to work on weekends or take on a job during your personal time."

When he isn't working on computers, he relaxes at home with his 14-year-old Belgian Shepherd named Jet, watching television shows like "Yellowstone," "Joe Pickett" or a good sci-fi. He also enjoys playing video games on his PlayStations.

"I grew up in the arcade area, in the '80s and early '90s," he said.

Arnold also enjoys hanging out with friends, including hitting Mexican restaurants with his best friend from his University Christian days.

"I was a bad influence on him back then," Arnold joked. "Not so much anymore, though."

In the future, Arnold hopes to do more traveling around the United States, and to places like Japan, Ireland and Australia. Until then, he enjoys being surrounded by beaches and fishing that the waters of Jacksonville afford.

"There's a lot to do here in Jacksonville that people don't realize," he said. "You've got the beach, the river. You can go hiking. And the national forests aren't too far from here."

But it's the people that truly make Jacksonville his home.

"People are just friendly here," Arnold said. "They'll wave at you and say 'hello.'"



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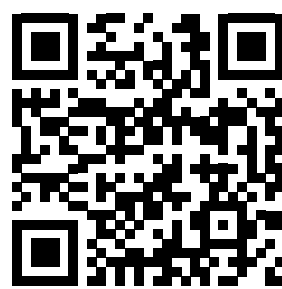
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Major Keith Biggers with Sheila Jackson and Major Candice Biggers

# Salvation Army Women’s Auxiliary preps for Celebrity Chefs Luncheon

The Salvation Army Women’s Auxiliary gathered its members for a preview of its signature fundraiser, Celebrity Chefs – Tasting Luncheon and Silent Auction, which will celebrate its 38th year April 2024. The group of philanthropists met at Epping Forest Yacht and Country Club for their January meeting over breakfast as they enjoyed good company, faith-filled dialogue and camaraderie.

The ladies invited special guest and celebrity chef Matthew Roop to speak about his leadership role as the Northeast Florida Multi-Area Director for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). Roop took time to share the mission of supporting coaches, athletes, schools and congregations with the spiritual equipment to grow programs full of leaders and mentors on their path to achievement. The luncheon was hosted by Marilyn Carpenter, who graciously welcomed each guest upon arrival as the event kicked off Monday, Jan. 22.

For more information about the event, or to learn more about sponsorships and how to help celebrate 38 years of caring for others, contact [darlene.uhler-batiste@uss.salvationarmy.org](mailto:darlene.uhler-batiste@uss.salvationarmy.org), or call (904) 301-4841.



Diane Bailey and Debra Register



Event Co-Chair Susie O’Quinn and Nee Cee Lee with guest speaker and celebrity chef, Matthew Roop and Event Co-Chair Rita Cannon

# Tim and Stephanie Cost Make Transformational Gift to Launch Cost Honors College

Jacksonville University (JU) announced the formation of the Cost Honors College with plans to formally launch in 2025. The naming of the Cost Honors College, endorsed by JU’s 26-member board of trustees, recognizes President Tim Cost and First Lady Stephanie Cost for their philanthropic support of the university, which now totals \$10 million. The Costs’ catalytic gift enables JU to elevate its honors program and transition to become an honors college. The Cost Honors College will focus on three pillars: academic excellence, residential life and global citizenry.

“Tim and I believe in the impact that a high-quality, challenging education can have on a student’s life and their trajectory,” said Stephanie Cost. “Our lives bear witness to the critical importance of education as students ourselves, as parents of two children who graduated from excellent universities, and now having observed and influenced the life paths of thousands of students over the past decade. We’re gratified to make this investment in the Honors College that will benefit today’s students and future generations.”

JU’s Honors Program has been offered for more than three decades. Today, there are 220 students in the program. All students already enrolled in the Honors Program will become members of the Cost Honors College with the first cohort graduating Spring 2026.

“This is the next important step toward again upgrading what we do here,” said Tim Cost. “Our goal has always been to build a much better university, serve the broader Jacksonville community, unlock potential, and graduate more ambitious, competitive and well-rounded citizens.”

The University has already established The Honors College Executive Council, comprising 22 well-respected business leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators, alumni, trustees and staff who will serve as thought leaders and advisors through JU’s transition from the Honors Program to the Cost Honors College.

Lisa Sutherland has been tapped to lead the Cost Honors College as executive director.

For more information and a full list of Executive Council members, visit [residentnews.net](http://residentnews.net).



Jacksonville University President Tim Cost with Cost Honors College Executive Director Lisa Sutherland and First Lady Stephanie Cost

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An installation from A Walk on the Wild Side.

## Local Collector's Works on Display at MOCA

MOCA Jacksonville opened *A Walk on the Wild Side: '70s New York in the Norman E. Fisher Collection* at MOCA Jacksonville on Jan. 18. The exhibition explores the dynamic culture of New York in the 1970s that spurred a decade of collaboration and innovation between artists working in a variety of genres. It features a special collection within the museum's permanent collection paired with loans from around the country, including artists like Joseph Kosuth, Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Mapplethorpe, Richard Nonas, Yoko Ono and Andy Warhol, as well as writers, dancers, musicians and singers including William Burroughs, David Bowie, Lou Reed, Philip Glass and Robert Wilson.

Comprised of nearly 700 objects in a variety of media, the Norman E. Fisher Collection is one of MOCA Jacksonville's most significant holdings. It was donated to the museum in 1979 by the family of Jacksonville native Norman Fisher, who became immersed in the New York cultural scene in the 1970s, befriending many of the luminaries of the time.

"It has been incredibly exciting to work with the Norman E. Fisher Collection in preparation of the exhibition," says Senior Curator Ylva Rouse. "The artworks, printed media and documentation that Norman Fisher amassed give us a rare insight into this boundary breaking period in American Art, that in many ways prefigured the ways in which artists present their work today."

The exhibition will be on display at MOCA Jacksonville through June 30, 2024.



Brenda Councill works on the Harriet Beecher Stowe statue at the historic Mandarin Store and Post Office.

## Historic Statue Nearing Completion

Renowned local artist Brenda Councill recently completed work on a life-sized sculpture of Harriet Beecher Stowe, which will be installed at Walter Jones Historical Park on Mandarin Road later this year. With the sculpting completed, the statue of Stowe and two young children is currently at the foundry and will return after bronzing. A model of the sculpture can be seen at the Walter Jones Historical Museum.

Councill, who grew up in Mandarin, is dedicated to promoting the legacy of Stowe's contribution and promotion of education for children, regardless of race, and to recognizing her place in local history.

Stowe is best known as the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and lived on Mandarin Road during the winter from 1867 to 1884 where she operated an orange grove.

## "Dignity and Pride" Comes to The Ritz Theatre

"Dignity and Pride," a new exhibition by Marcus Williams, opened at The Ritz Theatre and Museum on Jan. 21. The exhibit seeks to challenge prevailing narratives and foster a deeper understanding of the impacts of colonialism by shedding light on its obscured stories. While the dominant discourse has often highlighted the achievements of colonial powers, "Dignity and Pride" takes a step towards acknowledging the voices that were discouraged, marginalized and silenced during this period.

The exhibit highlights hand-based communication within the Black community, its use as a means of survival, and its related cultural significance between Black people across various geographic and social landscapes. By highlighting the intricacies in the language of our hands, from greetings to rhythms, accessorizing to prayer, Williams celebrates the spirit of dignity and pride within the Black community.

"This is for the culture, for the art lovers, for the community," said Imani Thorne. The exhibit will run through March 3.



## The Cummer Honors MLK with Free Admission



Families celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day with free admission to The Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens on Jan. 15. Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, the George W. and Kathleen I. Gibbs Director and CEO, said while the museum is typically closed on Mondays, it opened specifically for locals to "gather together and reflect on the extraordinary contributions of Dr. King and Coretta Scott King to the betterment of humanity."

## Brentwood Public Library Hosts Poster Exhibition

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture comes to Jacksonville in February as The Friends of the Brentwood Public Library presents "A Place for All People: Introducing the National Museum of African American History and Culture."

A grand opening and reception for the commemorative poster exhibition will be held on Feb. 1 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at Brentwood Public Library in celebration of Black History Month. The celebration will continue on Feb. 24 at 12:30 p.m. for the organization's 124th Anniversary of Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Place for All People Symposium, and God's Trombones at Brentwood Branch.

"A Place for All People" highlights key artifacts that tell the rich and diverse story of the African American experience. From the child-size shackles of a slave and the clothing worn by Carolotta Walls on her first day at Little Rock Central High School to Chuck Berry's Gibson guitar, "Maybellene," and the track shoes worn by Olympian Carl Lewis, the exhibition presents a living history that reflects challenge, triumph, faith and hope.



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# ANIMAL HOUSE

## FEATHER: A Second-Chance Champion

BY JULIE KERNS GARMENDIA

Feather is a regal, brindle-colored racing greyhound. Alone in the shelter at approximately one year old, she no history except a tattooed ear. She was assumed to have likely failed on the racetrack like countless other greyhounds and given away, but unlike the other dogs who often met worse fates, this “failed” dog became an inspiring story of how a second chance can uncover a sleeping champion.

### A Change of Fate

Samantha Valle is a professional trainer of herding dogs. Remembering when she first saw greyhounds running, she thought they were the most majestic, athletic dogs she had ever seen and decided she wanted to adopt one. So, she contacted Star City Greyhound Adoptions in Roanoke, Virginia.

“I emailed all the greyhound rescues and decided to drive the four hours to Star City. Feather came right to me, and I knew she was the one,” said Valle. “She was my first and only greyhound.”

Valle, who started training dogs at age 15, believes the key to success is never comparing them, but instead responding to each dog’s needs with patience and consistency.

“People have misconceptions about rescue dogs, believing that because someone else threw them away, there must be something wrong with them,” she said.

While Feather may not have won races, she shocked Valle one day by jumping so high that she accidentally hit the ceiling. Seeing her natural jumping ability, Valle decided to train Feather to perfect it.

“Her talents became apparent so fast. As soon as she understood what I wanted her to do, she jumped a height of 60 inches like it was nothing, and just kept going,” Valle said. “Plus, her heart sets her apart. She’s just a bundle of affection.”

In 2017, Feather jumped the officially recorded 75.5 inches to win the Guinness World Record for the highest jump by a dog, surpassing the previous record – held

by greyhound Cinderella May – by more than 19 inches.

“Every adopted dog cannot be a champion, but Feather is living proof that rescue dogs can be as loving, talented and remarkable as any other dog out there,” Valle said.



Feather and Samantha Valle



Feather in action on her world-record jump.

### Impressive by Design

Historically, hunters prized greyhounds because of their speed up to 45 mph, chasing and killing game by sight. Kept as pets since at least the age of Egyptian Pharaohs, greyhounds were immortalized on tomb paintings, murals and artifacts. They are highly adaptable, devoted pets, often chosen by adopters for their calm, gentle, sensitive, affectionate temperaments and intelligence.

Greyhounds are natural runners built for speed with larger than normal hearts and long, strong legs on a slim, lightweight, sleek-coated body. They also have the highest percentage of fast twitch muscles of any dog breed. Their unusually flexible spines stretch to maximize the body length of catapulting leaps from rapid-fire steps.

When racing, they are airborne 75% of the time, gathering speed and covering increasing ground with each stride.

It is a misconception, however, that retired greyhounds require miles of running each day. Routine daily exercise is sufficient, and soft surfaces are easiest on their feet and bodies. When adopted, most racing greyhounds are unfamiliar with a home and must learn to walk on floors or stairs, as Feather did.

### Tour of Champions

During the pandemic, Scott and Joan Houghton, producers of the *Mutts Gone Nuts UNLEASHED* Show, adopted Feather from Valle. They knew when public performances resumed that their show was the perfect way for her to continue interacting with people and performing when she retired from jumping.

Feather, now eight years old and 55 pounds, loves performing her comedic routine for people, especially children. Feather recently visited Jacksonville and the Florida

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Feather, with her adopter and trainer Samantha Valle, is still unbeaten in her 2017 Guinness World Record Highest Jump by a Dog honor.

Theatre stage with her other *Mutts Gone Nuts* canine castmates – many of whom were also adopted – and all-star trainers. The cast entertained and highlighted the adoptability of shelter dogs and the animal welfare work of K9s for Warriors and EPIC Outreach.

Joan Houghton said Feather typically naps on a dressing room couch before performances. Then, when it is time for her to go on stage, “it’s like a switch flips on; she’s instantly awake and excited.”

“We had a show outside, and it began to rain. We did not want Feather to attempt any jumps, so we put her into our mobile home at the venue,” Houghton said. “Feather is so smart and driven to be on stage, when she heard her performance music, she broke through a screen door and appeared onstage, right on cue!”

The Houghtons plan for Feather to live out her life with them on their Maryland farm enjoying her golden years. Adoption and a second chance to live a happy life is their wish for every homeless animal. Locally, Jacksonville’s Animal Care & Protective Services and Jacksonville Humane Society stay critically full with hundreds of homeless dogs and cats desperate for fostering or adoption.

As World Greyhound Day is celebrated on Feb. 1, Feather’s incredible life story as a failed-racing-greyhound-turned-shelter-dog who beat the odds to become world-famous is slated to be part of a documentary film in fall 2024.

# Hey Jude

## Wolfson Children’s Adds First Facility Support Dog

Patients at Wolfson Children’s Hospital are benefiting from a new member of the Family Support Services care team, but this team member has four legs and a tail. Jude, the hospital’s first facility dog and founding member of “Wolfie’s Woofpack,” works with Child Life Specialist Kara Williams to provide therapeutic interventions for pediatric patients and bring a little joy to their hospital stay.

As a specially trained facility dog, Jude complements Williams’ efforts by reducing patient anxiety and motivating patients to achieve clinical goals. Williams said Jude has been “trained specifically to assist in service dog tasks such as providing a deep pressure comfort hold to alleviate anxiety or serving as an alternate focus during painful procedures.”

Jude came to Wolfson Children’s Hospital after a two-year training program with Canine Companions and was matched specifically with Williams, who he lives with full-time.

“When you’re going through the matching process, the staff tells you that you won’t pick the dog, the dog will pick you,” she said.

Jude knows over 40 commands and assists children through activities like rolling a ball back and forth with a patient to improve motor function, motivating a patient to walk around the unit, or

taking “medicine” from a syringe in his mouth during a medical play session to help make syringes less scary for patients. With Williams’ help, Jude also “writes” encouraging notes to patients he has assisted.

“These dogs play such a vital role in the healing process and make such a significant impact on patients. Facility dogs can turn a sometimes-scary place into a safe place,” said Williams. “It has been amazing to see the difference that he makes in patients’ lives. They truly light up when he walks into the room.”



Jude with Child Life Specialist Kara Williams

PHOTO: FACEBOOK@WOLFSONCHILDREN



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17 REASONS TO



OUR HISTORIC  
NEIGHBORHOODS

BY WINDY TAYLOR

As everyone begins to embrace the spirit of love this month, let’s celebrate by turning our affections toward the heart of our community. It is a great time to reflect on the many reasons we’re lucky to live here - not just in Jacksonville, but in one of her historic neighborhoods. These communities have deep roots, made possible by residents committed to tending them. Sometimes, like when our city is turned into a (hilarious) running joke on television’s “The Good Place,” it’s easy to lose sight of the reasons we chose to come here and the reasons we choose to stay. Whether this is your first year in a historic neighborhood or you’ve loved your community for decades, we’re honoring our 17 years here with the 17 things we can all appreciate about the unique place we call home.

- 1

**Water, Water Everywhere**

Jacksonville is known as the River City, but that goes way beyond the St. Johns. Many rivers flow through the county, giving every resident a chance to enjoy views of the water, even on a trip to the grocery store. Water does more than hydrate our bodies - it soothes the soul. The city’s original planners grasped this, and residents of our historic neighborhoods enjoy the most exposure to our waterways.
- 2

**A Culinary Oddity**

According to the New York Times, the camel rider (a pita stuffed with anything from lunch meats to tabbouleh) is Jacksonville’s most recognizable contribution to the American culinary landscape. Traditionally served with cherry limeade, Jaxsons can find these tasty lunch staples at many locations throughout our neighborhoods – from Pinegrove Market in Avondale, to Gina’s in Murray Hill, to the Sheik on the edge of San Marco. They’re delicious reminders of our vibrant Middle Eastern community.
- 3

**The Dolphin Show**

Who needs Sea World? For a taste of the life aquatic, head to the riverfront near downtown to view dolphins frolicking in the channel. They are most active during the warm months in the morning. Excellent viewing spots include the gardens of the Cummer Museum in Riverside and the South Bank Riverwalk in San Marco.

- 4

**Food**

In Jacksonville, the answer to “What’s for dinner?” is “Anything!” From fine dining to food trucks, there’s something to please every palette. Jacksonville’s ethnic diversity is showcased in its culinary offerings. Ethiopian? Got it. Caribbean? Check. Syrian? Thai? Turkish? Absolutely. But if you’re craving pizza, barbecue or seafood, we’ve got that covered too, with local restaurants to serve up whatever your heart desires.
- 5

**Drink**

From morning coffee to an evening cocktail or a Jaguars tailgate, your lips never have to taste a beverage made outside the city limits. Rise and grind at Brew in Five Points or Southern Grounds in San Marco. Crack open a cold Duval Light while you cheer the Jags at home, or mix up something special with spirits from Manifest. Murray Hill’s Fishweir Brewery and San Marco’s Aardwolf have become neighborhood gathering places for the happy hour crowd.
- 6

**Neighborhood Character**

Our neighborhoods don’t have strict borders, but you can almost feel the moment you cross from one into another. Each of our historic ‘hoods has a distinct flavor, from the quirky vibe of Murray Hill to the Spanish influences in San Marco. In some ways, Jacksonville feels like a collection of small towns, each with its own walkable commercial district.
- 7


**Trees and Parks**

Jacksonville has the largest urban park system in the country, and many of those parks are in our historic districts. From the understated elegance of Memorial Park to the wild beauty of Tillie Fowler Park or the hidden gem that is Inwood Park, Jaxsons can always find a place to relax. Many of our parks are right on the water, giving everyone access to our most beautiful resource. And most of our parks are dotted with beautiful shade-giving trees, providing respite from the heat in the endless summer.
- 8

**Houses of Worship**

Jacksonville has both long-standing worshiping communities as well as a fine collection of historically significant houses of worship. Congregation Ahavath Chesed, the oldest Jewish congregation in Florida, worships in a modern building in San Jose, while the recently rebranded Riverside Church at Park and King worships in a Mizner-designed sanctuary that appears on the National Register of Historic Places. These buildings serve as important gathering places for the neighborhoods in which they stand, as well as architectural landmarks that contribute to neighborhood character.

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**9 Unique architecture**  
After the Great Fire of 1901, Jacksonville drew the attention of many up-and-coming architects. Rather than seeing a charred devastation, they saw a golden opportunity. Luminaries like Henrietta Dozier and Henry Klutho blended architectural styles in ways that remain fresh and harmonious to this day. Dozier in particular kept her focus ferociously local.  
“Every house should be designed for the climate and all materials should be suitable to this climate,” she said. “I believe, wherever it is possible, it is wisdom to use all Florida materials, also Florida labor. For the houses I build, all material is purchased right here in Jacksonville.”

**10 Education Matters**  
The St. Nicholas neighborhood has the distinction of housing not one, but two of Jacksonville’s finest high schools: Episcopal and Bishop Kenny. However, every neighborhood offers a range of educational opportunities. Bolles, a top-ranked boarding school, brings students from all over the world to San Jose. New charter schools, like Jacksonville Classical Academy in Riverside, are offering even more choices to families.

**11 Planes, Trains and Automobiles**  
Everyone who lives in Jacksonville’s historic neighborhoods has had the exquisite frustration of being held up by a train, either in San Marco or on Roosevelt Boulevard. But while these delays are aggravating, our neighborhoods just wouldn’t be the same without the railroad lines that cross them. The same is true for the air traffic from the Naval Air Station, especially when the Blue Angels are in town for the air show, which Ortega residents have affectionately dubbed “No Nap Weekend.”

**12 Walkability...**  
While Jacksonville itself is too big to be walkable, each historic neighborhood functions as a small, walkable town. Our flat terrain and shady trees make walking or rolling easy for all ages and abilities. And that walkability extends to our four-legged residents! Many restaurants and shops are dog-friendly, and dogs seem to enjoy the weekly Riverside Arts Market as much as their humans do.

**13 ...But Also, Driveability**  
As cozy and insulated as our historic neighborhoods seem, they are also conveniently located next to two major interstates. In as little as 20 minutes, historic neighborhood residents can get to Jacksonville International Airport, EverBank Field or the Jacksonville Zoo. Additionally, because our historic neighborhoods don’t have walls or limited access, there is always an alternate route to your destination.

**14 Home Team Spirit**  
Whether you’re sipping a crisp sauvignon blanc at one of our country clubs or throwing back a domestic draft at one of our dive bars, one topic of conversation is sure to come up: How ‘bout those Jaguars? No matter if it’s a rebuilding year or a championship season, our hometown team dominates the discourse from August until February. Riverside Avondale Preservation schedules its annual Luminaria evening around the Jags schedule, and many a bride has breathlessly awaited the release of the NFL season to choose a wedding date. College loyalties have long divided Jacksonville, but the Jaguars are one thing we can all agree on (even if, for years, we only agreed they were terrible.)

**15 Shop Small**  
If your mission is to keep your shopping dollars local, you are in luck. Our historic neighborhoods each boast a great variety of small businesses to tempt you, from well-established shops like Underwood’s in Avondale, to Syrene, the new kid on the block in San Marco. Quirky Murray Hill has Bee Friends Farm, a beekeeping supply shop. And if you find yourself in need of sustenance, head somewhere like Mixed Fillings Pie Shop in Five Points, where the delicious pies come with delightful names.

**16 To Protect and (Pre)Serve**  
Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP), and its southside counterpart, the San Marco Preservation Society, advocate strongly for their neighborhoods to retain their distinctive characters. San Marco has submitted a neighborhood action plan to the City Council to act as a blueprint for future growth that is sustainable and thoughtful. RAP hosts events like the Home Tour, Garden Tour and Riverside Arts Market that bring many Jacksonville residents into the neighborhood to experience for themselves the historic character of the area.

**17 The Resident News**  
There is only one paper committed to exclusively covering Jacksonville’s historic neighborhoods – and you’re holding it in your hands right now. For the last 17 years, *The Resident News* has been a valuable resource for citizens of the city’s distinct communities. Every month, we bring you the stories of the people who make up the fabric of these neighborhoods, look to the past with humility and look to the future with enthusiasm.

LOCAL LOVE LETTERS:  
**What Makes Our Neighborhood So Special?**



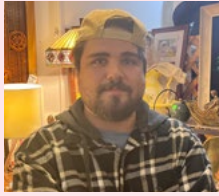
“Memorial Park for sure. Also, the new Spruce that opened in Murray Hill. I spend a lot of time in Five Points. I spend a lot of time at Birdies and Hoptinger.” – Kaylan Brown and Chris Carter



“Happy Mushroom Co., Soluna Yoga and Wildcrafters. Honestly, for the healing modalities. The yoga studio and spa is the spiritual side and Wildcrafters is the herbal, medicinal side. And the mushrooms are just healing.” – Kayla Collins




“Body and Soul on King Street and College Street. And Kickback, my next-door neighbor, and Buchner’s Bierhalle. It’s a nice, little cool spot to have a drink and good food.” – AJ Copeland



“The nostalgia. The antique stores. The bars. I’ve lived here almost a year now; I moved from St. Johns and it’s very different.” – Paul Haddock

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# RESIDENTS

Junior



District 6 Senior Vice Commander Rich Possert with essay winner Fabianna Nassar

## Nassar Wins Patriotic Essay Contest

Fabianna Nassar, eighth grader at Assumption Catholic School, won first place for Veterans of Foreign Wars (FVW) Post 3270 in the Patriotic Youth Essay, Patriots Pen contest, sponsored by the VFW and VFW Auxiliary for Florida District 6. Students were challenged to write about how they were inspired by America. Nassar's essay advanced to win second place in the district and a cash scholarship. She was recognized at an awards ceremony on Saturday, Jan. 13, where she had the opportunity to read her essay to the audience. In addition to Nassar, eighth grader Brooklyn Denmark also placed first for Post 7909 and won a scholarship.

## Harden Wins Cross Country Coach of the Year

Jackie Hardin, Bishop Kenny High School's Girls Cross Country Coach, was recognized as the Florida Dairy Farmers 2023 Girls Class 2A Cross Country Coach of the Year.

Under Hardin's leadership, the lady Crusaders placed first in their district and region before winning the FHSAA Class 2A State Championship – the ninth title in program history and their first since 2008.

"I am honored to receive this award and I know that I am only one of a very large number of cross country coaches who are deserving of this recognition," said Hardin.

Hardin has been at Bishop Kenny since 2016 as a guidance counselor in the Office of School Counseling and the girls head coach for eight years.

"I couldn't do this without [assistant coach] Mike Curran. We have worked together for eight years, and he has been instrumental in the success of this program. The expertise that Mike brings to our girls and the training regime is incredible. We wouldn't have the success this year without his valuable knowledge and love for the program."



Jackie Hardin



## Students Connect with Cross-cultural Expert

More than 20 Bolles upper school students gathered in the Chahlavi Center for Global Learning and Engagement in Ulmer Hall on Jan. 10 to hear from Cheryl Obal via videoconference about living and working in Saudi Arabia. Obal, who has lived in eight countries, has more than 20 years of experience as a culture and communication skills trainer, executive coach and consultant, and her organization's mission is to give individuals the tools needed to thrive when working abroad.

The conference content included explanations of cultural differences, breaking down stereotypes and discussing business and career opportunities in the area. The session was part of the department's Student Dialogues series.

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Sophomores Hallie Stewart, James McCranie and H Burkett helped dig a hole for a septic tank on their mission trip to the island of Jamaica.

# Community Kindness Reaches Jamaica

Six Bolles upper school students traveled to Jamaica on a mission trip with St. Mark's Episcopal Church's youth group during winter break to help those living in the small mountain town of Mandeville. From Jan. 1 through Jan. 6, Hallie Nelson, Ellie Stewart, William Barakat, H Burkett, James McCranie and Harrison Spencer helped build a kitchen for a community center and dug a 7-foot-deep septic tank hole. Alumnus Dan Dearing also joined the students to assist them on their trip.



Assumption kindergarteners put on a joyful Christmas musical presentation.



Benjamin Martin, Owen Lanahan, Reagan Meyer, Eliana Gebreyesus and Thomas Felix represent the Nativity.

# Honoring the Reason for the Season

Assumption Catholic School students honored the true meaning of Christmas with a kindergarten musical presentation and first grade Nativity play in December. Kindergarten students spent weeks practicing with music teacher Katie Rewa to perfect a medley of Christmas songs that they performed for their families prior to the holiday break. The highly anticipated, annual first grade Christmas Nativity play involved the entire first-grade student body, dressed either for a specific role or in their Sunday best as part of the ensemble.



PHOTO: JANET WATSON PHOTOGRAPHY

# Debutante Coterie Presented at 146th Christmas Ball

Twelve debutantes in traditional white gowns made their final, formal bow on Dec. 28, 2023, at the 146th annual Florida Yacht Club Christmas Ball and Presentation, held at Timuquana Country Club. The coterie included, front row: Mimi Page Kurlas, Meagan Dianne Donovan, Sarah Alice Craddock, Hannah Pendleton Goldfield, Catherine Kelly Kunz, Barley Jemison Hilpert, Elizabeth Alston Rachels; back row: Evelyn Elizabeth Miller, Catharine Tucker Ogletree, Ann Genevra Miller, Wentworth Grace Pajcic and Eleanor Somerset Acosta-Rua.

# Chen Performs at Carnegie Hall



Bolles senior Yancin Chen performed in the Weill Recital Hall in New York City's famed Carnegie Hall on Dec. 23 as a winner of the 2023 American Protégé International Piano and Strings Competition. Chen won third place in the Piano Intermediate Category (age 15 to 18), earning a recital spot at the renowned classical concert venue.



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# New AI Policy Changes Address the Good, Bad

Episcopal School of Jacksonville's (ESJ) division heads and Student Life office recently worked to develop a new policy for grades six through 12 regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom, balancing its frequent misuse with the need for graduates to work within technological advancements such as AI.

ESJ's new policy reads: "Our approach and philosophy regarding this type of content is authentic to the future our students will live and work in, but more importantly is rooted in our mission and our learner-centered approach to education. Episcopal will teach students to utilize machine intelligence ethically and efficiently, ensuring that our programs and pedagogy continue to emphasize the irreplaceable value of that which makes us human."

"The most important word in our policy is 'human,'" said Natalie Herford, ESJ Head of Upper School. "We are and our students are, first and foremost, human beings. No machine can take the place of our creativity, our joy for learning, our Harkness classroom discussions or our imagination. But we can use AI for learning with parameters placed around it."

In the past, much of grading has depended on the final product a student submits. With the development of AI, the process the student goes through to create that final product now becomes exponentially weightier. Learning now has become the process, instead of learning being the final product.

With AI, it is easy to turn in a polished product and learn nothing in the process," said Herford.

While AI can be useful in the classroom for problem set generation, brainstorming idea generation, and even as a tutor in certain circumstances, faculty is also using the misinformation AI produces as a learning tool, having students correct and edit AI responses. Methods to further protect the learning process include the increased use of Google docs and assignment checks throughout the project.

# Award-winning Singers Return Home for Concert

The award-winning Washington and Lee University Singers, conducted by Shane Lynch, will perform at St. John's Cathedral on Sunday, Feb. 5 at 5 p.m. as a part of the choir's national tour of the Southeast.

Members of the renowned a capella choir include Jacksonville locals Libby DeVooght and Will Pittman. DeVooght is a 2022 graduate of Stanton College Preparatory School, previous worship leader at Southside Methodist and veteran of the Jacksonville Children's Chorus and the Florida All-State Women's Chorus. Pittman graduated in 2020 from the Episcopal School of Jacksonville.

The performance will include music from Bach to Mendelssohn to Argentinian composer Ernesto Herrera, highlighted by set from renowned composer Rosephanye Powell. As is tradition, the University Singers will end their performance with folk songs. Admission to the concert is free.

In 2022, the University Singers choir took third place at the City of Derry International Choir Festival in Ireland and was the first to represent the U.S. at the competition.



Libby DeVooght and Will Pittman



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Alex Torres John Erdal Sawyer Weakland with her mother, Ang Weakland

# Making Waves

## Jacksonville water polo trio shines at Olympic Development Tournament



Members of the Jacksonville Water Polo Club practice at Bolles.

Three standout members of the Jacksonville Water Polo Club showcased their skill and dedication at the USA Water Polo Olympic Development Program (ODP) Super Regional Tournament held in Dallas, Texas, Jan. 12-14.

Alex Torres, John Erdal and Sawyer Weakland played on separate Southeast Zone Super Regional Teams during the three-day tournament: Torres and Erdal on the Development Blue and Red teams, respectively, while Weakland contributed her skills to the Youth Red team.

Torres, a 12-year-old student at Landon Middle School, Erdal, an 11-year-old attending Pine Island Academy, and Sawyer Weakland, a 17-year-old student at Episcopal School of Jacksonville, all excelled as attackers with each scoring multiple goals for their respective teams during the tournament.

“Playing as part of the Southeast Zone team has opened up doors to play with clubs from NYC, North Carolina, and beyond. It allowed me to compete at much higher levels, including the Super Futures Tournament in San Francisco, California,” said Weakland, now in her second selection for the Southeast Zone team.

“ODP was a great way for me to meet players from other teams and develop new friendships. I also loved playing against top-level players from around the country,” said Torres. “It allowed me to see a higher level of competition and different playing styles.”

John Erdal said the thing he loved most about the experience was traveling to play against people he’d never competed with before.

“It was an exciting event with a lot of players and fans,” he said.

Coach Manny Torres believes – with the 2024 Olympics approaching, and as awareness of water polo increases in the community – that more families will be inspired to have their children try the sport. To learn more about the Jacksonville Water Polo Club, visit [jaxwaterpolo.com](http://jaxwaterpolo.com).



# Bolles Students Show “Love is the Gift”

More than 90 Bolles upper school students spent over 40 hours collaborating to create a sculpture entry titled “Love is the Gift” for the Jacksonville & The Beaches Unite with Lights Student Challenge as part of the inaugural Deck The Chairs at James Weldon Park. The design won the Judges Award for exemplifying the meaning of this year’s theme.

Senior Trent Carter proposed the chair’s design with the help of his Honors 3D Art class. The concept was brought to life by the Art Club and students taking Foundations in Art and Painting with upper school fine arts teachers Tiffany Gonzalez and Lily Kuonen.

The student artists provided the following description of the piece: “Inspired by the idea of elves preparing gifts for the world, the final design represents the symbolism of gifting as an expression of love. Love is the real gift, uniting us all in its light.”

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Student Council Secretary Sarah Ruen, Student Council Vice President Louise Schwegel, Principal Maryann Jimenez, Fr. Jason Trull, mascot Georgie, Fr. Mousa, Assistant Principal Jennifer Jardine, Student Council Treasurer Brooklyn Denmark, Student Council Chaplain Isa Miller and Student Council President Cesca Werstine in front of Assumption Catholic School's new playground.

# A New Castle for Assumption Knights

Students at Assumption Catholic School celebrated the installation of brand-new playground equipment in a ribbon cutting ceremony on Jan. 23.

This new playground equipment cost nearly \$250,000 and Principal Maryann Jimenez said it took two cycles of the school's annual fundraisers to fully fund. The school selected New York-based Play By Design – the same company that designed and installed the equipment for Jacksonville Beach's Sunshine Playground at South Beach Park – for this new installation, which created custom-designed and -built, castle-themed playground equipment for the Knights to enjoy during their recesses.

"That was something very unique about this company that we really loved," Jimenez said. "We didn't want playground equipment that you could see at other places. A lot of the playground equipment around town is just similar pieces, and this was very special to us because this company specifically designs for your community."

The fundraisers for this new equipment saw support from current Assumption families and the Assumption community, but also from Assumption alumni, the Knights of Columbus Bishop Kenny Council 1951 and the Men's Club from Assumption Catholic Church.

This new equipment replaces the previous setup, installed sometime in the early 2000s, Jimenez said, and completes the first of the school's multi-phase long-term fundraising goals for "Outdoor Enhancements." Phase two is comprised of a new sports court featuring basketball and, possibly, pickleball courts, for which the school has already raised nearly \$20,000 as of Nov. 17. Later phases include ideas like an outdoor classroom and a greenhouse for the school's STREAM program.

## Dads + Donuts

Camilo Ramirez and his daughters enjoyed donuts, coffee, a chapel service and visit to the book fair during the January Dads & Donuts event at San Jose Episcopal Day School.



## Free Family Fitness on the Riverfront

**Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays  
Feb. 2 through March 10**

The Riverfront Parks Conservancy announced it will begin a pilot series of free, downtown riverfront programs for youth and families for six weekends starting Feb. 2 and running every Friday, Saturday and Sunday until March 10. The pilot series is in collaboration with the City of Jacksonville's Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) and the Winston Family YMCA.

"We are thrilled to offer opportunities for youth and families to enjoy our riverfront and promote health and wellness," said Barbara Goodman, board chair of the Riverfront Parks Conservancy.

A variety of programs for youth and families of different age levels are planned with local community partners. Programs include Double Dutch with Jump4Jax, Strollin' on the River with the YMCA, handpan performances by Streams of Sound, Dance Trance classes, family Zumba with the YMCA, family yoga with Yoga4Change, lawn games and more.

The programs will be held Fridays and Sundays at the Ford on Bay site on Bay Street – formerly the old courthouse site next to the Hyatt – and on Saturdays at Sidney Gefen Park along the Riverwalk near the Winston YMCA. Program times, location and additional information is available at [riverparkjax.org/events](http://riverparkjax.org/events).



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# THE WAY WE WERE

## Agnes Anderson Ellis Danciger

BY SUSAN D. BRANDENBURG

Agnes Ellis (Danciger) was the first female to walk across the Mathews Bridge. Living just one door south of the bridge that was being built to connect downtown with Arlington, Agnes remembers the noise of construction and the excitement of making the bridge a one-of-a-kind playground.

"My sister, Sarah, and I would roller skate, ride bikes and have picnics on the bridge," she recalled. "All the workmen knew us, and we watched as they placed rivets by hand." When the bridge officially opened in 1953, Agnes, 12, walked across it, followed close behind by her sister, Sarah, 14.

Born to George and Agnes Ellis in 1941 at Riverside Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida, Agnes is a 5th generation Floridian whose mother was the daughter of Jesse Williams, the first periodontist in North Florida. Her older sister, Sarah, and her younger brother, George, remain in Jacksonville.

Agnes began her schooling at Arlington Elementary when she was six years old, from first through sixth grade, and then went to the Bartram School for junior high, graduating from Robert E. Lee High School in 1959.

As a girl, she was always involved in church and social happenings in Riverside and Ortega.

"I was part of Riverside Little Women, sponsored by the Women's Club of Jacksonville. I participated in the May Fete put on by the Woman's Auxiliary of the Church of the Good Shepherd," said Agnes, adding that she was also a member of the Junior Assembly, a cotillion put on by the parents of eighth and ninth grade students. She still remembers each and every one of her group from Junior Assembly, as most have remained her friends all of their lives.

In May 2021, Meta Magevney and Neely Towe hosted a gathering of friends who were 1959 graduates from

Robert E. Lee High School, followed that evening by a dinner given by Beth Slifer. Many of the names from the Friday Musicales group attended the 2021 gathering.

After a lovely girlhood of cotillions, fetes, high school parties and being active in clubs at school as well as activities at church, Agnes attended Duke University. Although her mother had gone to Sweet Briar, Agnes chose Duke, following in her sister's and father's footsteps. She opted to take a six-week European trip in place of making her debut and then settled down to higher learning. Again, she was active and popular, being courted by young men from the neighboring University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While she was at Duke, Agnes and her mother were pictured in the Jacksonville Journal's February 17, 1960 edition in a pictorial article titled "You Look Just Like Your Mother." She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1963.

Agnes's daughter-in-law, writer Susanna P. Barton, wrote in her book *The Girls of Your Genes* that Agnes resisted the young men from Chapel Hill and Duke and fortunately (for Susanna) "married Quinn R. Barton, Jr. on September 7, 1964, in St. Matthews Church with a grand reception at Timuquana Country Club with over 500 guests and a treasure trove of fine silver wedding gifts." That marriage produced



Agnes and Sarah on the Mathews Bridge



The Ellis family in 1948: George, Sarah, Agnes (mother), George Jr. and Agnes (daughter).



Agnes Ellis at age 12.



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Linda Burbridge (Knight), Bonnie Patterson, Beth Walker (Slifer), Brian Rosborough, Agnes Ellis (Danciger), Bob (Robby) Breen, Meta Bond (Magevney), Bill Gibbs, Dorothy Coulter (Adams), Gress LeMaistre, and Robin Rhodes (Browning) pose for a group photo at a 1950s-era Junior Assembly dance at Friday Musicale.

four children, including Susanna's husband, David.

As a young mother of four, Agnes demonstrated a unique ability to multi-task, volunteering her time, tenacity and energy to many community endeavors without ever skipping a beat as a homemaker. Over the years, she served as president of the Junior League of Jacksonville, Volunteer Jacksonville, Inc., Greenscape of Jacksonville, Inc., Tree Hill, and was chosen as the first female president of the American Cancer Society, Duval County Unit. Growing up in Jacksonville with so many friends who knew her well definitely helped groom her for her volunteer career, and her no-nonsense, friendly and fearless approach was also a factor in her leadership success.

“My sister, Sarah, and I would roller skate, ride bikes and have picnics on the bridge. All the workmen knew us, and we watched as they placed rivets by hand.”

– Agnes Ellis (Danciger)

Her active membership as a board member of United Way of Jacksonville Executive Committee, the Greater Jacksonville Fair Association, Friends of Guana, Hurricane Island Outward Bound, and St. Johns Riverkeeper have garnered her lasting respect and admiration throughout the community. However, as a board member of Jacksonville's Memorial Park Association, Agnes played



Agnes and her mother reading together, as photographed for a 1960 Jacksonville Journal.

a key role in having the park named to the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, she served as co-chairman of the Spirit of Victory Campaign that helped raise \$1.5 million to preserve and enhance the park. For that stellar service, she was a finalist in 2018 for the coveted Florida Times-Union EVE Award. She was also appointed to serve on the City of Jacksonville Parks & Recreation Committee, the Florida Cancer Control and Research Advisory Board, and the Vestry of St. Mark's Episcopal Church. She was editor of St. Mark's magazine, The Marksman.

Professionally, Agnes served as assistant trainer for the National Information Center on Volunteerism, worked as an advertising representative for Jacksonville Today, the director of advertising for Jacksonville Monthly, a health care consultant for Florida Health Alliance, and was the Director of Community Affairs at the College of Health, University of North Florida.

The special brand of individualism, energy and enthusiasm possessed by Agnes Danciger – whose second marriage was in 1993 to Ed Danciger, now deceased – manifested itself in much more than service to her family and community. In the 1980s, for example, Agnes ran the 26.2 Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., went snow skiing in Vail, Colorado, and even learned how to windsurf. After her marriage to Ed Danciger, she learned to sail and live on a sailboat, sailing to places as far away as Maine and the Bahamas.

Beloved by her four children: Margaret, Quinn, Ellis and David, and fondly called “Gigi” by her eight grandchildren, Agnes was presented



Back row: Angie Jones (Conway), Dorothy Coulter (Adams), Beth Walker (Slifer), Hazel Harby (Donahoo), Meta Bond (Magevney), Neely Paul (Towe). Front row: Robin Rhodes (Browning), Betty Stanly (Cates), Billie Kirby (Haynes) and Agnes Ellis (Danciger).



Agnes Ellis Danciger as president of Junior League

a special book on her 70th birthday by her family that listed by number her many accomplishments as well as her personality traits. Among her accomplishments were “caught a barracuda,” “rode in hot air balloon,” “read countless books,” “sailed the Thousand Islands,” “survived a possum bite and the subsequent series of rabies shots,” and “taught her grandchildren how to enjoy life.”

Among the 70 “Things We Love About Agnes” were: “Agnes would do anything for her family and is always at the forefront in times of need,” “She is the world's best mother,” “Her dancing skills – they not only wooed Ed, but they also got her awarded the Ms. Mama Jama at the Florida Yacht Club 4th of July Party,” “She is a wonderful hostess,” “She always finds a way to get things done.” Number 70 simply stated, “She is our Agnes!”

Currently, Agnes is an active legacy member of the Women's Giving



Agnes, second from right, with her adult children David, Margaret, Quinn and Ellis.

Alliance, an Honorary Director of Leadership Jacksonville, on the board of Jacksonville University's Marine Science Research Institute, and continues to enjoy sailing, entertaining, travel, reading and exercise. Agnes Danciger is, according to her children and grandchildren, “the quintessential matriarch everyone loves to be around.”

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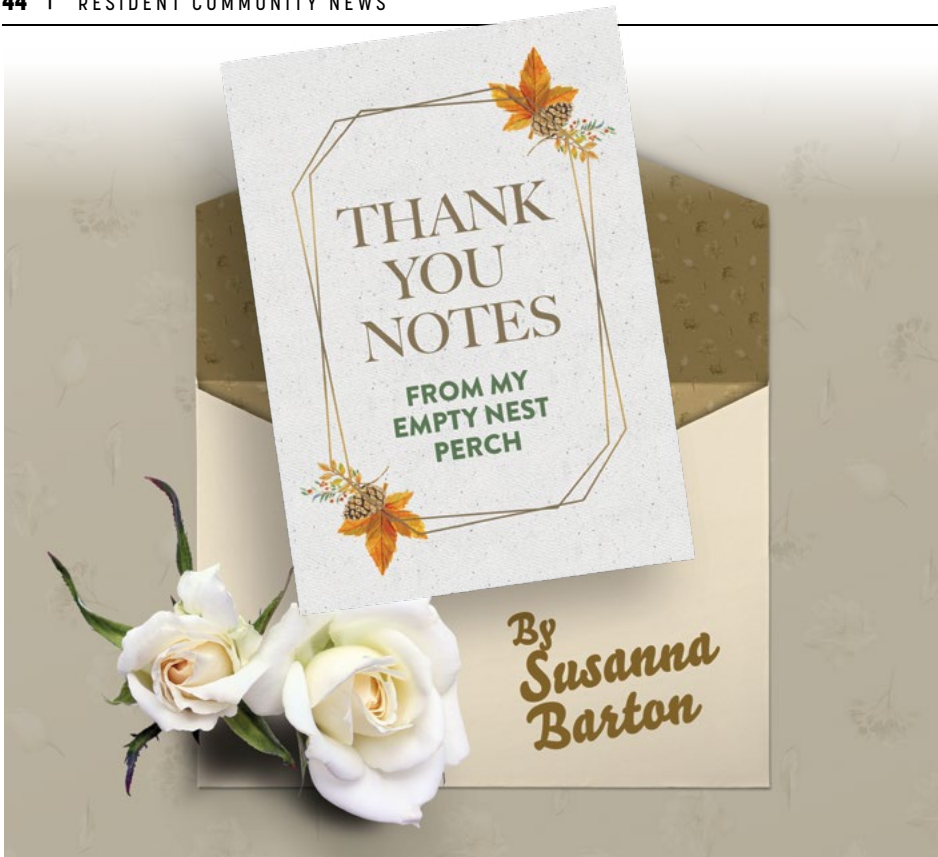
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I had no idea how rich our neighborhoods were in local bookstore offerings until writing my own books in late 2023: *Grand Plans: How to Mitigate Geri-Drama in 20 Easy Steps* (and its workbook pairing, the *Grand Planner*) and the 2024 latest Lenten challenge book, *Rolling My I-s: A Lenten Challenge to Give Up Me, Myself & I Talk*. I learned there is no excuse for anyone in our neighborhoods to be bored, dull or stupid with that much creative work and mind-stimulating material nearby. Dog-ear this, dear readers: proximity to local bookstores makes our Resident community a smarter, super shelf-righteous place to live.

According to a 2019 study from the Washington, D.C.-based American Enterprise Institute, local amenities like bookstores promote social connection and trust – essential ingredients to neighborhood health, sustainability and value. Key points from the study include:

- “Americans who live closer to community parks, libraries, restaurants and theaters are more content with the neighborhood, more trusting of others, and less lonely regardless of whether they live in large cities, suburbs, or small cities or towns.

- Residents of amenity-packed neighborhoods are likelier to say their community is an excellent place to live, to feel safer walking around the neighborhood at night, and to report greater interest in neighborhood goings-on.
- Americans living in communities with little access to amenities are likelier to feel socially isolated.”

Bookstores provide many other important perks to our Resident communities – namely, cultural vibrancy, opportunities to connect with and support each other, and, let’s not forget their big cha-ching factor: bookstores keep local dollars in local circulation for local prosperity and local growth. No plot twist there.

All of the bookstores I encountered during my local book-marketing extravaganza demonstrated these strengths and more. My first stop was a late November book launch for *Grand Plans* at the Literary Lounge in Murray Hill. It had only been open for about eight weeks when I hauled my books in there for a signing event. Mother-daughter proprietors Terri Reynolds and Shelby Giltz, who had recently moved to the area with their family from North Carolina, designed a beautiful little re-

treat on Edgewood Avenue with dark library-green walls and a broad collection of yummy titles. They were so hospitable and generous with their space, and like the other bookstore owners I encountered, they made me feel important as a new author. They encouraged future use of their bookstore for book clubs, author events and workshops. I noted how community-building seems to be one major cornerstone of local bookstores in our neighborhoods. I look forward to being a part of it.

My next stop was San Marco Bookstore in San Marco Square. Store Manager Desiree Molyneaux Bailey, part of a three-generation ownership team that has been running the bookstore since 1999, met me for coffee at Bitty & Beau in the square to discuss options for a December launch in her family’s store. She, too, talked about workshops and book clubs and opportunities to showcase my books at the square’s holiday happenings – Black Friday, Small Business Saturday and Holiday Magic events. The bookstore helps manage and publicize these important seasonal retail events – events that benefit every single business in the square! She made me feel like my literary contribution was part of the neighborhood buzz and that my work was part of the greater good.

Along the way, I also ducked into CX904 The Creative Exchange – a light, spacious and whimsical retail space in a street-level corner of downtown Jacksonville’s Bank of America tower at 50 North Laura Street. An extension of Fogle Art Consulting, this beautiful market promotes, sells and showcases local art, books, jewelry, gifts and more. Their emphasis is on benefiting creators and the community. Underscore community. My conversation with the CX904 folks was mostly about sharing with the community and bringing people in. We discussed opportunities to participate in Art Walk events and other fun possibilities. As an author, this store made me feel like an integral part of a creator’s community; it made me feel like a changemaker and contributor!

My final stop on the local bookstore tour was the St. John’s Cathedral Bookstore & Gift Shop, managed by my friend and neighbor Kathryn Bissette. Actually, the Cathedral bookstore was my first stop earlier in the year when I launched (late in the season) a bound collection of Lenten challenge books I’d published on the Facebook over the years. This store has serious comfy vibes – and it’s like going to church or your grandmother’s house, but where you can browse and flip through juicy books and buy pretty things. They are providing a wonderful resource to the downtown residential community. I made plans with Kathryn to launch my 2024 Lenten challenge book, *Rolling My I-s*, there in late January.

The four stores with which I connected are just a few of the book-gettin’ and -borrowin’ places in our neighborhoods today. We are fortunate to have so many options. Other fabulous bookshops in our area include:

- The San Marco Public Library, the Bill Brinton Murray Hill Branch Library, the downtown Jacksonville Public Library and the Willowbranch Library
- The Chamblin Bookmine in the Ortega area and Chamblin Uptown in downtown Jacksonville
- Happy Medium Books Café in Riverside
- Femme Fire Books on Park Street
- And of course, all the Free Little Libraries we see throughout our neighborhoods.

Author John Updike described bookstores as “lonely forts, spilling light onto the sidewalk. They civilize their neighborhood.” And how can we best show gratitude for this community staple, this essential, incredible light-spilling fort? I say participate in their events, patronize their businesses and promote, promote, promote their existence! Supporting our bookstores makes a big difference for all of us, whether you’re a new author like me, or simply a person who likes to engage neighbors in illuminating conversations about timely topics. Bookstores are a valuable resource. The End.

Susanna Barton loves books and writing, especially during Lent when she publishes unconventional challenges. This year’s series is called “Rolling My I-s: A Lenten Challenge to Give Up Me, Myself and I-Talk,” and it is available at the Literary Lounge, St. Johns Cathedral Gifts & Bookstore and the San Marco Bookstore. Her favorite authors are Ann Patchett, Anne Lamott and anything by David Sedaris. A Granada resident, Barton has written professionally for The Jacksonville Business Journal, *The Resident News*, Jacksonville University and The Bolles School. She currently manages an online community called *Grand Plans*, which encourages healthy conversations about aging and preparing for it on [www.mygrandplans.com](http://www.mygrandplans.com).

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# A Celebration Worth Pre-Planning

by Elainah Ehrlichman

**P**re-planning your funeral service gives you the freedom to customize your service and grants you the peace of mind that comes with knowing your plans are safe and secure.

## What is a Pre-Planned Funeral Arrangement?

Prepaid funeral arrangements are funeral plans that are made before the imminent need for a funeral service arises. You can make these plans at any point in your life, and though there is no right or wrong time to make these arrangements, we strongly suggest making them as early as possible.

## Why Are Pre-Arranged Funeral Plans Important?

Many people progress through their lives without stopping to consider their own funeral, and some even make active efforts to avoid thinking about it at all. We understand the hesitance that surrounds facing this topic head-on, but we want you to understand why it's so important to take the time to think about your funeral plans. Many people opt for pre-planning their funeral because the price locks in from the time of purchase, meaning that even if prices increase in the future, your price remains untouched. Another reason people choose to pre-plan their service is for peace of mind for both themselves and their family.

## Let's Look At Martha...

Martha constantly goes out of her way to make sure she takes care of the people around her. Throughout her life, she's done everything for everyone. She's seasoned and stirred hot home-cooked meals for her family, tended to her children's wounds when they hurt themselves playing games, rooted for her husband during his various business ventures, and consistently showed up to every music recital and hockey game with posters and megaphones (and all other necessary supporting mom gear) to support her kids. Martha has been an amazing, caring member of her family, and in the coming years, she will face the next major chapter of her life: Her golden years.

This will be an exciting new time for Martha, and to ensure these years are as stress-free as possible, she decides to pre-plan her funeral service. Now she can relax and enjoy the comfort of knowing that her funeral arrangements are handled, and that her family won't need to worry about a thing. She's paid for all expenses and made all of the big decisions. Her kids won't have to second-guess what their mom would have wanted because Martha secured these decisions in advance. There won't be any tension or fighting between family members over different options because Martha took care of everything - just like she always has.

## What's the Process?

One of the first steps to officially pre-planning your funeral is to speak with one of our trusted funeral professionals. When you arrive for your arrangement session, our staff will welcome you and help you feel comfortable (we promise we're friendly!). During your meeting, you will cover all of the most important aspects of your service. You'll discuss casket or urn choice, catering, displaying memorabilia, music selection, Life Story displays, and so much more. You'll have the opportunity to highlight everything that's important to you and that you'd like to have represented at your service, because after all, this is your day. It should be exactly how you envision it. You'll be able to finalize all details with the funeral professional helping you through each step of this intimate process. We're here to help you so that pre-planning your service is as easy as possible. We promise you'll thank yourself for thinking ahead!

## Common Questions

We understand that you likely have questions and concerns about the pre-arrangement process, so here are answers to some common questions. Of course, this is not all-encompassing, so please reach out to any of our Hardage-Giddens locations to discuss your pre-arrangement plans in detail.

## ***I don't have the financial capacity to pay for my pre-planned service in full. What happens now?***

If you aren't able to pay for your pre-arrangement in full, that's okay! We have other available options that are easier on your wallet. Our flex options allow you to make payments toward your service on a monthly basis at a rate that works for you.\*

## ***If I move, will I still have to use the same funeral home I set my pre-arrangements with?***

Great news! Even if you move away from the funeral home you've pre-planned your service with, you can take that arrangement with you as long as you use another Dignity Memorial provider.\*

## ***Can I alter my choices if I change my mind?***

Even after your pre-arrangement plans are complete, you'll still have the freedom to change most aspects of your service.\* We want your service to be everything you want it to be, so please feel free to contact us so we can discuss the changes you have in mind.

## **A Celebration for You, Created By You**

The milestones in our lives are important. From our first steps to our last birthday, and for everything that comes in between, those around us celebrate with us to ensure we know how special we are. A funeral service should be no different because it is your very last celebration: a celebration of your life.

Pre-arranging your funeral service allows you to harness full control over all of the big decisions and provide your family with one last gift: The gift of eliminating worry over what you might have wanted. Thanks to you, your family will never have to worry about if they made the right choice - because just like Martha, you made it for yourself.

Please call any of our Hardage-Giddens locations to discuss pre-planning your funeral today! Prices fluctuate, so don't delay. We look forward to assisting you.

*All information is credited to official Dignity Memorial literature. Special thanks to Hardage-Giddens Sales Manager Donald Sharp for providing up-to-date information regarding pre-planning services.*

*\*Restrictions Apply. Please See Associate for Details.*



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