

Resident

17 YEARS COMMUNITY NEWS

RIVERSIDE | AVONDALE | ORTEGA | MURPHY HILL

UNCERTAIN TIMES AHEAD FOR DCPS FAMILIES

A new Master Facility Plan proposal has sparked a community outcry amid uncertain times as the Duval County Public Schools considers shuttering several schools throughout the district including John Stockton Elementary, Fishweir Elementary, West Riverside Elementary and Ortega Elementary. **MORE ON PAGE 10**



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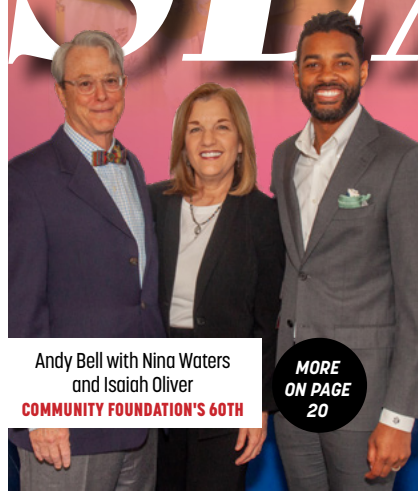
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IT'S SOCIAL SEASON



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Natalie and John Mills with Lana and Wayne Wood
RAP HOME TOUR TWILIGHT PARTY

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Gathering 'Round for Roundabouts

FDOT holds public meeting about Post Street roundabout

The Florida Department of Transportation held a public meeting last month to gather public input for its proposed Post Street from Cassat Avenue to Old Roosevelt Blvd Resurfacing and Rail Safety project, which includes an elongated roundabout. FDOT believes it will improve safety at the intersection of Post Street, McDuff Avenue South and Old Roosevelt Boulevard.

READ MORE ON PAGE 15

Improvements Underway at Memorial Park

Memorial Park is getting a glow-up as work is underway to re-sod the park's oval. A failed sprinkler system and foot traffic are factors prompting this landscaping improvement project. But that's not the only project planned for the historic park, which is currently celebrating its centennial year. A new memorial/art installation has been in the works, recognizing those who have played a part in preserving, maintaining and enhancing this iconic Jacksonville greenspace for the community to enjoy.

READ MORE ON PAGE 34

The Lowdown on Backflow

The installation, maintenance and oversight for backflow preventers may hit some businesses and homeowners in the wallet, but these devices are necessary to ensure safe, clean drinking water. While the responsibility for uncontaminated drinking water falls primarily on JEA, residents assume a level of responsibility as well by ensuring these backflow preventer devices are properly installed and maintained on their properties when required, like in cases where there is an irrigation system using reclaimed, pond or well water.

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IN HOMES BY MAY 5, 2024

You Asked FOR IT

You ask. We get answers. This column is dedicated to finding answers to our reader's most pressing questions. If there's a neighborhood-related question that you'd like help getting the answer to, submit it to our research team at editor@residentnews.net.

BY JENNIFER JENSEN

Many of us here in Ortega are waiting with bated breath to see what business will replace Simply Sara's restaurant in old Ortega's "downtown" district. Can you shed any light on this?

A new restaurant is in the works for the space in Ortega Village, according to Bill Gardner, who owns the building. While Gardner couldn't disclose the name of the restaurant, he did say it would be a fine dining, full-service restaurant. Gardner said he has been working with the potential tenant for more than a year to get it up and running. The owners of the restaurant have submitted their paperwork to the city and are currently waiting on approval.

"Hopefully a really great restaurant will be going in," Gardner said.

Once the business receives all the approvals, the building will be repainted and the tenant plans to open up the entire building inside and move the restrooms to the back, Gardner said. "It's a very unique space," he added.

If for some reason the restaurant doesn't receive the necessary approvals and permits, Gardner said there are several other businesses interested in the property.

The space has been vacant since Simply Sara's closed in 2022 after 12 years of business. The building, also known as the Village Store, was completed in 1924. At the time, it housed the Faulkner's Grocery Co. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places on September 29, 1988.

Will the new roundabouts on Herschel be landscaped, and how? Will we put art, a tree or flowers? Who will maintain that?

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) does not have plans within its Five-Year Work program to install landscaping at the roundabouts along Herschel Street and Fishweir Creek, according to FDOT Community Outreach Manager Hampton Ray.

"The FDOT is limited to the type of vegetation to be installed along medians and roundabouts that allow maintenance crews to properly maintain the landscaping and provide for line of sight requirements," Ray said. "These requirements ensure landscaping on state roadways is administered equitably across the state and are limited to standard maintenance requirements for consistency."

In some cases, medians or other areas are maintained by the local municipality, which may allow for more robust landscaping that falls outside FDOT's landscaping palette, Ray said. This agreement is typically initiated by the municipality in partnership with the state.

In 2019, prior to construction, community meetings were held in which landscaping and public art installations within the roundabouts were discussed as a possible initiative by the city of Jacksonville and local community groups, according to Ray. This would require a maintenance agreement with the state. In addition to the city, private groups can also approach the state to maintain the areas.

Currently, there are no agreements in place with the state for the roundabouts.

WANTED

The Neighborhood's Most Eligible

Do you know a dynamic and driven individual under the age of 35 who is making waves in the community? We are seeking nominations for our "Young Independents" feature, celebrating the rising movers and shakers in our community. Whether they're leading groundbreaking projects or making significant strides in their careers, we want to shine a light on these young trailblazers who are shaping the future of Jacksonville. Nominate a standout bachelor or bachelorette who embodies ambition, creativity and commitment. Submission names must be received by April 15. Send nominee's name, contact information, and 100 words or less on why they should be considered to editor@residentnews.net.

Real Estate Season Springs Into Action

The "selling season" in Northeast Florida has arrived, albeit a bit early this year. For single-family homes, prices, active inventory, and new listings are up, as well as the median number of days on the market. There are only two exceptions: pending sales for single-family homes dropped nearly 20%, and the Home Affordability Index ratcheted down slightly, 2.2%, to register at 66.5 out of 100 – with 100 being the point where a median-income family has the exact amount of income needed to purchase a median-priced existing home.

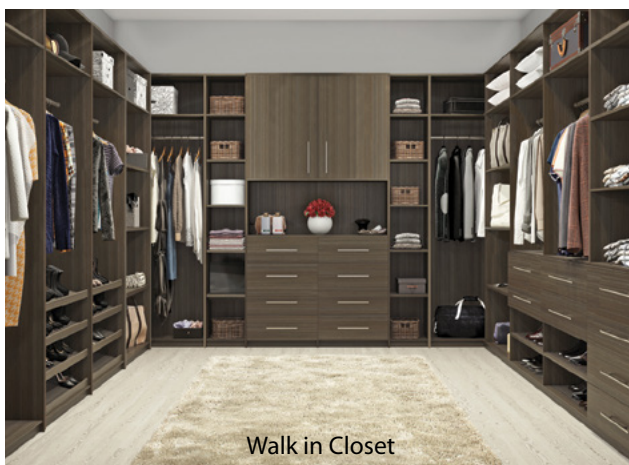
"The market is moving up in a positive direction each month," said Rory Dubin, 2024 president of the Northeast Florida Association of Realtors. "March saw over a 20% increase in closed transactions despite a slight increase in the median price. In fact, almost a third of sales were above list price, indicating high demand in our more affordable market compared with the rest of and most of the Southeast."

The median sales price for single-family homes in the region in March was \$389,000. For a full breakdown by county, visit residentnews.net.

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Avondale



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The Starbucks on Margaret Street closed March 15 for renovations.

Renovations Underway at Riverside Starbucks

Coffee drinkers who normally stop at the Riverside Starbucks across the street from Memorial Park will have to wait a little longer for their shop to open as it undergoes a “standard renovation.”

A Starbucks media relations spokesperson confirmed the shop, located at 1650 Margaret St., closed March 15 and is expected to reopen later this spring.

“As a standard course of business, we continually evaluate our store portfolio, using various criteria to ensure we are meeting the needs of our customers,” the spokesperson said.

Last month, the Jacksonville Daily Record reported additional renovation plans for the Starbucks located at 1980 San Marco Blvd. When asked about these plans, the Starbucks spokesperson responded, “Unfortunately, we have no additional information to share about a potential renovation at 1980 San Marco Blvd. at this time.”

A supervisor at the San Marco Starbucks told *The Resident News* that the renovation is slated for October, though no specific date is set, and the community can expect the work to take approximately four to six weeks.

Letters TO THE EDITOR

The views and opinions expressed in the Letters to the Editor belong solely to the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of this publication or its editorial team.

Taking Stock of Stockton

I am firmly against the proposal to close John N.C. Stockton Elementary School as outlined in the Master Facility Plan presented to the school board on March 11, 2024.

The plan does not consider all the important factors when promoting the merits of the closure.

1. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS. Stockton’s educational achievements, neighborhood school set-up, high parental involvement, and fantastic staff and teachers all attract students to the school and district. This is not guaranteed to be replicated at the new school; therefore, parents will pull their children as a result. Parents will likely select the top private and charter schools in the area, especially if Fishweir Elementary is shut down as well. The proposed plan only hopes to resolve 30% of the \$1.4B deficit, but it does not account for the resultant loss in funding when parents enroll their kids in private or charter schools.

2. SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT. Stockton Elementary is ranked #50 of the best Elementary Schools in the whole state of Florida. It currently is #2 in the district. Stockton has earned an A-ranking every year since ranking was established. In the 2022-23 school year, Stockton had 51 students on the waiting list for its magnet program and continues to be in high demand. Closing Stockton would be like a business deciding to close their top-performing store location.

3. SCHOOL DEMAND. DCPS will end up losing more money than it gains by closing Stockton Elementary. Families will shift their students to top-performing private and charter schools in the area instead of moving to the new Venetia location, costing the district money and continuing the outflow of funds from the Bold Plan.

4. PROPERTY VALUE. Stockton is a crucial driver for home sales, resulting in higher property values, in this area. Closing the school will have ripple effects throughout the community. Generations of families have attended the school and plan to continue the tradition of enrollment. The local community cares about Stockton and is concerned about its future. DCPS needs the tax base generated by Stockton.

5. SCHOOL CHOICE. By eliminating beloved neighborhood schools, you are severely restricting the opportunity for parents to choose their children’s schools within DCPS. In essence, you are limiting “school choice,” which is the reason why parents end up going to charter schools. Successful neighborhood schools are a defense against the current trend of moving to charter schools.

6. COMMUNITY VALUE. There are intangible benefits Stockton offers that are hard to calculate and present in a board meeting. In a world where kids are more isolated, the mental health crisis with our children is growing. Consolidating to a much larger school will not help address that crisis, but rather exacerbate it. Going to a neighborhood school where the teachers and administrators have an opportunity to know each student by name is invaluable. That personal touch helps a student feel safe and an important part of the educational community. Kids walk and bike to this neighborhood school. They play in the park together after the pickup line. Those important moments provide the connectedness kids need more than ever in today’s isolated landscape.

As outlined in the proposal, an estimated \$860 billion has been shifted by statutory law to charter schools. By closing Stockton, you are taking out one of your best schools to fight this attrition rate to charter schools.

With the approximate 50% drop-off in enrollment for middle school, more effort and focus should be on making Duval middle schools more attractive instead of shutting down successful elementary schools. Stockton’s success should be studied and replicated to help bring students back into DCPS schools.

I am writing this letter because I want a future in which Stockton exists. And more importantly, a future where Stockton is supported and allowed to continue in its efforts to educate the next generation into responsible, conscientious citizens of Jacksonville.

Celebrate Stockton’s success. Do not sacrifice it to short-term financial shortfalls. Closing Stockton is not the answer.

If our community feels the same way, please reach out to our school board member Charlotte Joyce at jaycec@duvalschools.org to voice your complaints and ask for a new proposal.

-Laura Garcia

We want to hear your voice! Do you have something you’d like to say to the community? Send your message, complaint, thoughts or other opinions to us at editor@residentnews.net for consideration in Letters to the Editor.

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Empowering Mothers

Prioritizing Breast Health this Mother's Day

BY LINDSEY GAST-PESSIA

Being a mother is good news in the fight against breast cancer.

"If you've had a child, and you've breastfed, all of this decreases your likelihood - your risk - of getting breast cancer," said Pink Ribbon Jax Chair Marica Pendjer.

Mother's Day is May 12, and Pink Ribbon Jax (PRJ) is on a mission to remind mothers - and all women and men - of the lifesaving benefits of mammograms, which have been shown to reduce breast cancer death across the board by 22%.

Pendjer said early detection is the key. When caught before it spreads, the 5-year survival rate for breast cancer is 99%.

Because of that, PRJ has two main goals in 2024: to raise \$500,000 to expand access for uninsured and underinsured patients, and to increase awareness through the Light Jax Pink campaign. Pendjer said the idea for the campaign came during COVID when she noticed social media posts of people having to go in alone to breast cancer surgeries while mammography rates simultaneously dropped more than 90%.

"How do you let people know that you're there for them when they can't see you? Lighting!" said Pendjer. "I want to see it keep growing until we have all of Jacksonville pink October 1-8, because 1 in 8 women gets breast cancer in their lifetime."

Since then, PRJ has shifted its funding strictly to free mammograms. Last year, thanks, in part, to large and

in-kind donors, PRJ's expense ratio was zero, meaning 100% of all funding taken in by PRJ went directly to mammograms.

"Mammography rates had fallen so much during COVID, we knew we had to do something to help people get back into the habit, or at least gain access. Until we get these rates back up, we have to fund mammograms. It is our first line of defense," said Pendjer.

Bromberg, gemologist with Underwood's. "This was and always has been a total volunteer effort. We all need to be involved in supporting screening."

In addition to on-site services with Baptist Health, PRJ helps bring mammograms into the community with programs like Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center's Buddy Bus, which provides mobile mammography throughout Northeast Florida.

Pendjer said she is hoping the program can expand to imaging centers, but cited after-care as the largest challenge if someone finds out they have breast cancer. Instead, PRJ is focusing on adding organizations like UF Health and Ascension St. Vincent's, which can enroll women into the Breast and Cervical Cancer Fund to help pay for their treatment.

"Obviously if they can't afford the mammogram, they can't afford the treatment," she said. "I couldn't live with myself if we didn't have a plan for those women and men who get diagnosed with breast cancer."

It costs around \$300 for a mammogram screening, and Pendjer encourages those who can to adopt the "get one, give one" model.

For qualifications and to request a free mammogram, visit pinkribbonjax.org/free-mammograms.



Pink Ribbon Jax helped fund Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center's Buddy Bus, which provides mobile mammography throughout Northeast Florida.



Jacksonville icons turn pink October 1-8 in support of breast cancer awareness.



The community has stepped up in support of the cause. What began in 2006 as one event, the Pink Ribbon Golf Classic, has grown into partnerships with many community businesses - like Underwood's Jewelers, Fields Auto Group and Kendra Scott - for events throughout the year.

"All of us here have had someone we know have breast cancer, including my wife, Christy, plus many others connected to our Underwood family," said Clayton

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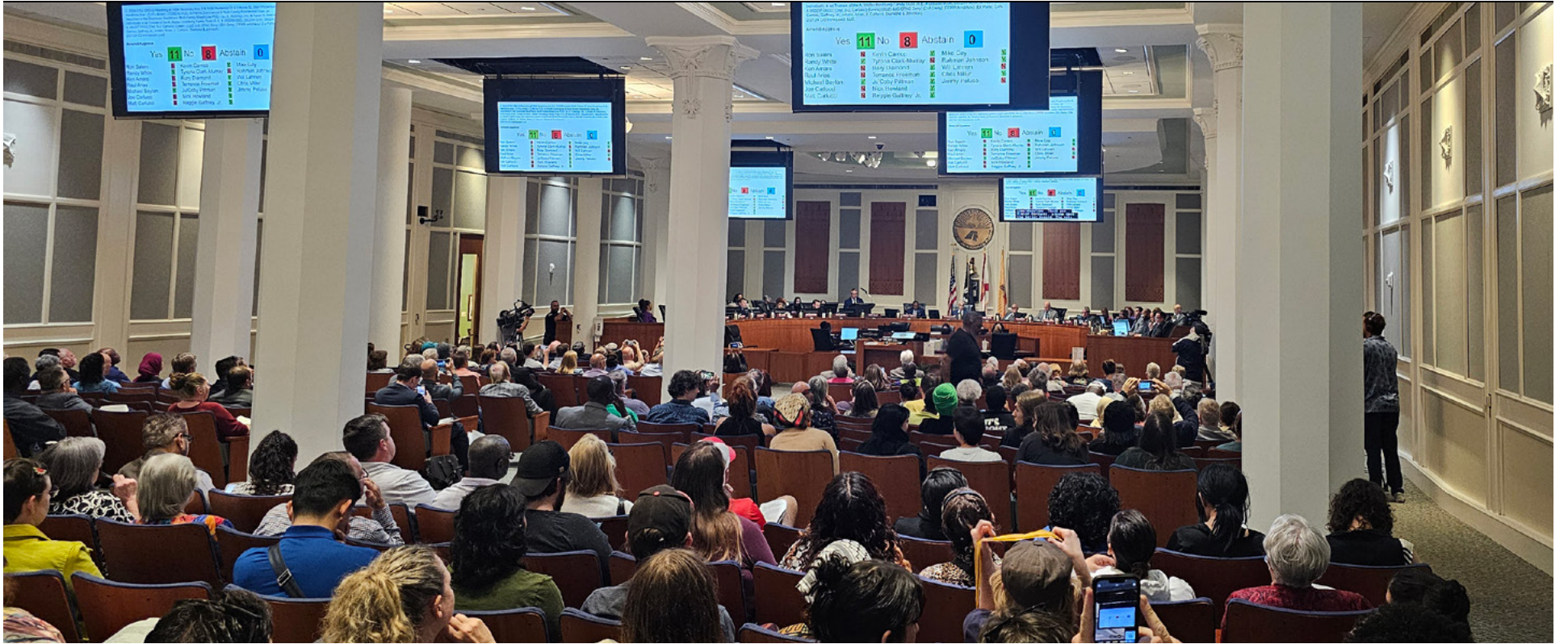


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The City Council voted 11-8 in favor of the PUD rezoning request for the Lofts at Southbank mixed-use development on April 23, before a packed crowd of attendees.

Self-Storage Coming to the Southbank

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

News from Across the River

While this story may not be area-specific pertaining to the Riverside, Avondale, Ortega and Murray Hill neighborhoods, our staff believes the story is pertinent to our readers living in historic districts and areas with zoning overlays and protections in place.

It came down to a 30-minute discussion at the April 23 city council meeting, during which City Councilmember Joe Carlucci implored his fellow councilmembers to back him in voting against the amended PUD rezoning for the Lofts at Southbank, the mixed-use development that would bring self-storage to the Southbank alongside retail and multi-family units.

Ultimately, only seven other councilmembers — Ron Salem, Ken Amaro, Raul Arias, Matt Carlucci, Tyrona Clark-Murray, Will Lahnen and Jimmy Peluso — opposed 2024-0152, and the rezoning was approved in an 11-8 vote.

Amendments to the PUD included a trio of conditions set forth by the Land, Use and Zoning Committee about retail square footage, ground floor usage and business hours for the self-storage component.

Councilmember Rory Diamond would have been the deciding vote for 2023-0007 — the previous iteration of the PUD that was voted down in a 9-9 vote last year — which he referenced during discussion prior to the vote.

“I wish I had been here so it would have been 10-9 and we wouldn’t be here tonight looking at this,” he said.

Previously voting against the rezoning last year, Councilmember Michael Boylan flipped his vote to in favor last night, calling this revised development “a good compromise and a markedly better product.” The addition of Vestcor to the development team and the addition of a minimum of 100 residential units — no less than 80% of which will be affordable housing — were some of the factors Boylan mentioned in his address as to why he supported the rezoning.

“It was disingenuous to call the prior application a mixed-use,” he said. “This time it is. Mixed-use now is far more balanced.”

Councilmember Matt Carlucci has been a steadfast opponent to allowing self-storage in the Southbank since legislation was introduced in 2021 to do just that. That legislation was ultimately withdrawn. At last month’s city council meeting, Carlucci said he was “shaking mad.”

“I’ve heard everything everybody said up here to justify their vote to go against the people,” he said. “We’re going against the district council member and the at-large geographical member who have spent our lives in San Marco and the Southbank fighting for what’s best.”

“The overlays are put together by the people to reflect what they want in their neighborhoods,” he added. “Wait till you get an overlay in your district. You’ll see how you feel about it.”

Joe Carlucci, the district council member, inquired about the possibility of future legal action for approving a PUD containing a use not approved by the 2045 Comprehensive Plan. Carlucci referenced a staff report stating two out of three are allowed (retail and residential) while the third (self-storage) is not.

“There’s case law actually from Jacksonville where a single use on a PUD was deemed to be inconsistent with the comprehensive plan and the court invalidated the entire PUD as being inconsistent with the comprehensive plan,” said City of Jacksonville Senior Assistant General Counsel Jason Teal.

Carlucci further argued the sole purpose of the PUD is to allow self-storage while the existing zoning would already allow the other uses in the proposed mixed-use development.

“I urge you, please, upon my recommendation, my ask, to deny this,” he said in conclusion.

In a later phone interview, Joe Carlucci said the vote was “disappointing,” though he hopes to “reengage” with the developer on the design elements as the project continues working through design review with the Downtown Development Review Board (DDRB), which

deferred voting on the project’s conceptual approval at a meeting earlier last month.

“I think that there’s a lot of work to do here on the architecture and I think that it’s got to come from a creative solution,” said DDRB Board Member Trevor Lee.

Fellow Board Member Gary Monahan added, “I appreciate the work that’s gone into this, but I think that the design does slightly miss the mark.”

While Board Member Joseph Loretta said he “was in disagreement with the rest of the group to some extent,” he also “underst[ood] where everybody’s coming from.”

Based on board comments, attorney Cyndy Trimmer, representing the applicant, ultimately asked to “table” the conceptual approval.

“I think that we’ve all got a lot that we’ve taken away here today, and I’d like the opportunity to work with [staff] and our team to determine which is the next appropriate step forward,” she said.

Following the city council vote, San Marco Preservation Society Board Member Logan Cross provided the following statement to *The Resident News*:

“The recent vote by the City Council to approve the Southbank self-storage rezoning proposal was the culmination of a multi-year effort to prevent the addition of a self-storage facility at a prominent intersection in the community. Though there have been many variations of the proposed structure, they all included self-storage as a core component. For this reason, the San Marco Preservation Society (SMPS) has been consistent and persistent in its opposition to the development. SMPS board members did participate in discussions focusing on improving the structure, but we remained resolute in our opposition to any version that included self-storage. Throughout this arduous process, the residents of the community were fully engaged and persistent in the opposition efforts. It is that commitment to sustaining the character and quality of the neighborhood that makes San Marco a wonderful place to live.”

The Resident News reached out to attorney Steve Diebenow, representing the developer, for comment but did not receive a response by press time.

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Master Facility Plan Sparks Concern for DCPS Parents

To view "Blueprints for Tomorrow: Strategic Adjustments for a Stronger Future" visit residentnews.net

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Communities across Jacksonville are still reeling from a Duval County Public School (DCPS) Master Facility Plan (MFP) proposal that would ultimately see extensive school closures throughout the county.

"I think shock is the first thing that anyone who read that list felt," said Tacoma Perry from the Fishweir Elementary PTA.

The list Perry referred to is found within "Blueprints for Tomorrow: Strategic Adjustments for a Stronger Future," a presentation first given to the DCPS Board in March, which identified a \$1.4 billion deficit between adjusted revenue and costs in a post-pandemic climate where material and labor shortages, material cost increases and longer lead times greatly impacted the bottom line.

This is a series of adjustments from the previously released Master Plan Facility Recommendations ("A Bold Plan for DCPS") that was created to "address the District's aging buildings (among the oldest in the state of Florida), create safe and secure spaces for students and staff, remove most of the district's portable classrooms, decrease excess seat capacity, and increase utilization capacity. Additionally, this plan removes over one billion dollars in deferred facility

maintenance over the next 15 years."

According to the presentation for the new MFP proposal, the "revised plan assumptions" include: "continue overall goal to right-size the district;" "enhance school safety at elementary and middle schools;" and "maximize operational costs by reducing the small school premium," among others.

New Feeder Patterns

The presentation featured 12 proposed feeder patterns which detailed potential plans for each school within that boundary, including replacement, renovations/additions, deferred maintenance and closures (potential swing or demolition).

In our *Resident News* communities, the proposed high school feeder patterns are the Riverside High School and Englewood High School patterns.

While the feeder pattern for the Riverside Avondale area doesn't change — elementary schools would still feed into Lakeshore Middle School and then on to Riverside High School — the proposal for this area's feeder pattern calls for the closure of six elementary schools, making it the third-hardest hit feeder pattern in the MFP, behind Terry Parker and Raines



DCPS Vice-Chairman Charlotte Joyce speaking at an April 16 John Stockton Elementary School Advisory Council Meeting.

high schools, both with eight proposed closures.

The proposed closures in the Riverside High School feeder pattern are Bayview Elementary, Fishweir Elementary, Hyde Grove Elementary, John Stockton Elementary, Ortega Elementary and West Riverside Elementary.

Students from John Stockton and Ortega would consolidate into Venetia Elementary. Fishweir students would be absorbed into Ruth N. Upson; West Riverside into Central Riverside.

The original Bold Plan actions (which still proposed closing Ortega, but suggested a renovation and/or addition at Fishweir and John Stockton, and deferred maintenance at West Riverside) had an escalated cost of \$217.1 million. This modified proposal, with the additional closures, would save an estimated \$64.3 million.

Families in the San Marco area are not impacted as strongly in this new proposal, save for an adjustment to the split in feeder patterns rerouting students from both San Jose and Hendricks Avenue elementary schools to Englewood High School via Alfred I. Dupont Middle School.

The existing feeder patterns split them into Atlantic Coast or Terry Parker high schools. The proposed Englewood High School feeder pattern does still suggest closing two elementary schools — Kings Trail and Windy Hills, to the south and east of San Marco, respectively. These, and all other proposed actions for the Englewood High School feeder pattern would save nearly \$8 million from the escalated Bold Plan cost of \$434.8 million.

Alternate feeder patterns were presented for Englewood, Terry Parker, Sandalwood, Fletcher and First Coast high schools.

Community Reaction

Since the MFP proposal was released, there has been immense pushback from communities across the district, particularly from those whose schools are slated for potential closure. "Save our school" Facebook pages have popped up on social media, relaying information to, and gathering questions from, concerned parents.

An April 16 DCPS board meeting was filled with parents ready to speak in support of their schools, including

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

50

YEARS

1974-2024



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West Riverside Elementary parent and Riverside area resident Andrew Murdoch, who said neighborhood schools, like West Riverside, are places where division is “leveled,” opportunities provided, diversity celebrated and learning goes beyond textbooks and grades.

“It’s not just about getting the grades,” he said. “It’s about growing individuals who have the ability to realize that things are greater than themselves, to invest in their community, to explore ideas with each other from different cultures, different backgrounds. That’s how we get a great educated person – the love of learning. We have that in our local schools.”

“People are thoroughly, thoroughly scared about what you are looking to do,” he added. “There is fear amongst households.”

At a John Stockton Elementary School Advisory Council meeting that same morning, before the DCPS board meeting, DCPS Vice-Chairman Charlotte Joyce emphasized that this MFP proposal is “a very high-level, analytical synopsis” and, in its current form, she believes, “1000% will not be what we actually are voting on. It will change, pieces will move around.”

Joyce also touched on some of the existing problems of the area’s grade A schools — Fishweir, Ortega, Venetia, John Stockton and West Riverside among them — feeding into Lakeshore, which has “a lot of issues” around it.

The MFP proposal would call for a rebuild of Venetia Elementary.

“The thought process was rebuilding that as a K-8 and then consolidating Ortega, Venetia and John Stockton, so now you have a brand-new K-8 with just these

three attendance zones and your families may choose to stay in the K-8 arena. That was what they said and that was the logic behind it,” said Joyce.

She added that there are many other pieces of the puzzle to consider.

During that same meeting, John Stockton Elementary School Principal Stephanie Brannan said, “I will be very honest with you, I’m not nervous right now.”

Fishweir Elementary School held an event the following week, during which parents and community members were brought up to speed on the situation as

Kriznar responded, “I would say the chances of Fishweir closing depend on voices like you because when I see students come to board meetings...you know, board members are really busy, but when a student comes up to the podium, every single board member looks up and listens. So, I think that students have really powerful voices.”

Next Steps

Following the Fishweir Parent Meeting, *The Resident News* spoke with Kriznar, who explained that while nothing will be voted on until later this fall, there will be a lot of activity between now and then, including the formation of another revised proposal from the DCPS board itself. This revised proposal, she said, will consider the intangible factors of each school.

“When the revised plan comes out, it’s going to take into consideration all the comments that we received, all of the questions, all the intangible things,” she said.

Kriznar said the board will begin working on its revised proposal later this summer, after it’s had an opportunity to gather all the questions and recommendations from the community meetings it intends to host throughout



DCPS Superintendent Dr. Dana Kriznar speaking to Fishweir Elementary School student Oscar B., who asked about the likelihood of Fishweir closing.

May and June.

These community meetings were discussed during a board workshop on April 16. DCPS plans to host a series of seven public meetings — one for each district, with dates to be determined — to ensure parents have every opportunity to learn about the proposed plan, ask questions, share feedback and voice concerns. These meetings will not be district-specific and will discuss the proposed plan as a whole, so parents can

attend any meeting. Also included in its plan for community engagement is a DCPS website sharing proposed feeder patterns that will allow comments and questions.

In a telephone interview, DCPS Board Chairman Darryl Willie said first and foremost, he wants to ensure the community “understands the why behind everything we’re doing.”

“I think when you’re making any decision, that’s going to be critically important,” he said.

For some time, DCPS has been considering selling its administrative headquarters on Prudential Drive and relocating. *The Resident News* asked Willie if that sale could help the current situation.

“I think it could, a bit, but it would be a small amount because if we sold this building at a certain amount, we would then have to get into another building,” he said. “So, then we would be kind of almost at a break-even point or maybe a small sort of profit from selling the building. So, it would not help to offset the amount of deficit that we have in some of the capital projects that we’re anticipating with the Master Facilities Plan.”

Like Kriznar, Willie also emphasized that further analyses will be done to take into consideration school ratings, existing school programs and success rates while also factoring in the impact consolidations would have on communities.

“What does it mean to close or consolidate one, what does that do to traffic patterns, what does that do to community empowerment and thriving communities? There’s a lot of factors that will come into play as we move into making further decisions,” he said.

The Resident News will continue to report on this situation as it develops. Next month, we will explore the impact that charter schools have hand on the landscape and climate of the DCPS system.



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Neighborhood Associations to Receive Micro-Grant Funding

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Neighborhood organizations Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP), Springfield Preservation and Revitalization Council (SPAR) and Murray Hill Preservation Association (MHPA) are the recipients of a cumulative \$80,000 in city funds through an initiative spearheaded by their District 7 City Councilmember Jimmy Peluso.

The funding was already approved in last August's budget meeting with \$75,000 set aside for a Neighborhood Investment Micro-Grant program proposed by Peluso and an additional \$5,000 coming from a designated contingency of \$100,000 for Community Development Corporation capacity-building grants.

Now that term sheets have been worked out for each organization, the funds were passed as an emergency in bill 2024-0254 to get them to the organizations as quickly as possible. They will have until the end of the year to use these dollars.

The city council passed 2024-0254 in an 18-to-1 vote at its April 9 meeting with Councilmember Rory Diamond opposing.

Diamond shared his reasoning behind opposing the bill at an April 1 Neighborhoods, Community Services, Public Health and Safety Committee (NCSPHS) meeting, prefacing his statement with an appreciation for these neighborhood organizations and a recognition that "what's happened [in these neighborhoods] is special."

"Neighborhood associations are all over Jacksonville and most of them are paying for themselves," he said. "I'm not sure why this is a responsibility to taxpayers for

the rest of the city."

"Everything that I can do to help empower our neighborhoods and our small businesses and our small commercial areas is really what kind of drives me," Peluso said in a later interview. "If we just do that all throughout the city, really empower our neighborhoods and our neighborhood associations, people start to believe and want to put in the effort and show that they've got a sense of community pride. That's what really starts rebuilding neighborhoods."

Of the \$80,000, RAP will receive \$50,000; SPAR \$20,000 and MHPA \$10,000.

RAP's funding will address improvements and enhancements in the Five Points and Park and King merchant districts.

RAP Executive Director Shannon Blankinship later said that more than \$30,000 will go to addressing the continued issue of trash and litter in the Five Points area by installing new trash cans. These receptacles will be the same fully enclosed, larger-capacity Bigbelly Element trash cans recently installed in San Marco Square, though Blankinship said RAP is looking into getting an artistic wrap around these cans to match the existing banners in Five Points for a more "artsy" look.

These cans will be large enough to hold empty pizza boxes, she added, which has been an issue for Five Points merchants and residents as the current trash cans are continuously topped by pizza boxes too large for them.

"It only takes one person to put a pizza box on top of [a trash can] and then to have all the litter sort of spill

over into the street for days without being able to go into the trash," she said. "We're hoping that, although different and although more expensive, these are really going to solve the biggest litter issues that we have in the area, while also sort of keeping the city accountable for regular waste pickup and merchants accountable for not using these trash cans for their own business purposes."

Funding will also be used to install banners in the Park and King merchant district, similar to the banners other neighborhoods or districts have already installed.

New banners will also be going up on the historic light poles on Main and Eighth streets "celebrating preservation" in Springfield, thanks to this new funding, said SPAR Executive Director Michael Haskins.

According to MHPA's grant proposal, the \$10,000 will be used for communications and branding, including a new association website, brand identity and collateral, including marketing booths, signage and light pole banners along Edgewood Avenue in the heart of Murray Hill.

"The overall impact of this project is multi-fold, but really comes down to better communication," reads the MHPA grant proposal. "MHPA's goal is to share our community with as many people as possible, not only supporting Murray Hill as an amazing place, but also supporting Jacksonville as a whole."

Each organization will pay for their respective projects up-front and seek reimbursement from the city through this allocated funding.

Duval County Implements New Voter Registration Form

The Duval County Supervisor of Elections (SOE) has announced the implementation of a new, statewide, uniform, voter registration form.

The implementation deadline for the new registration form was April 24; a press release from the Duval County

SOE Office announced it implemented the new forms ahead of deadline on April 19.

There are minor changes to the new voter registration forms. The new form includes a QR code that will take users to the Florida Department of State's Florida Online Voter Registration website, which has pertinent dates and deadlines for the upcoming election. The website also includes features to check whether or not someone is already registered to vote, to submit a new registration or make updates to one's status (i.e. a change of address, party affiliation, name or signature) or request a voter information card replacement.

The new form is available in both English and Spanish.

"The new, state Spanish voter registration form contains a change to the original Spanish form," read the release. "The language was changed to mirror the abbreviated language more closely in the English version."

The SOE Office will still accept the old versions of the application from voters, but only this new form will be distributed moving forward. These forms are also available at all Jacksonville public libraries.

The deadline to register or change one's party affiliation for the 2024 Primary Election is July 22; the deadline to register for the 2024 General Election is Oct. 7.

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- Fishweir has special needs areas.
- Where is the closest school to accommodate them?
- What is the city going to do with this land? Sell?
- The public passed a bill to increase school taxes. Due to charter school issues, it seems like they are the ones benefitting.
- How can the city close 30 schools? We don't even have a superintendent! Where is the info on the candidates? Is this a quick decision to find one because we didn't do this last year?
- I've sent 3 children through public schools, through high school.
- I've lived and worked in these neighborhoods since 1980.
- I have sold real estate here since 1989. People buy here for our schools.
- This is a horrible idea and needs more work....

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An Ounce of Prevention Can Be a Pound of Pain

Annual backflow preventer tests irritate some JEA customers, but offer worthwhile prevention for safe drinking water

BY LAURA PHELPS

In a time when neighbors are often sharply divided in their opinions and beliefs, there is at least one issue upon which we can all agree: drinking water should be safe.

For residents and business owners that live and work in the historic districts, the responsibility of ensuring safe, uncontaminated drinking water falls mainly on JEA. But JEA customers also have an important role to play by maintaining backflow prevention devices on their properties.

If you don't know what a backflow prevention device is, and you own property, keep reading. This may save you time, money and trouble down the road.

Backflow occurs when water flows in the wrong direction from a customer's water system into the public water supply. It may be caused by back-siphonage or back pressure, according to JEA.

A backflow prevention device, or backflow preventer, is a mechanical device that prevents water from entering the public water supply. These devices are required on properties that have an irrigation system that uses reclaimed, pond or well water.

The issue of testing, repairing or replacing backflow preventers emerges every few years here in Northeast Florida as property owners are unexpectedly notified that they must pay hundreds of dollars to repair or replace their malfunctioning backflow preventer.

Estimates vary from just over \$500 to more than \$1,400 to replace the devices – a not-so-insignificant investment for small businesses or homeowners on a fixed income.

Why such a wide range of cost estimates? Who performs these tests? And is it ethical for them to offer repairs on a backflow preventer they tested? Why are these notifications catching property owners by surprise? And are any properties exempt from this requirement?

The Resident News went searching for answers to help inform readers and here's what we found.

Testing and Compliance

Since 1990, the Florida Building Code has required that residential irrigation systems have a backflow preventer. According to JEA's website, the City of Jacksonville and JEA both require that all commercial water services install a backflow preventer device "unless specifically exempted."

In 2014, to further protect drinking water from possible contamination, Florida updated the code, requiring utilities to establish and implement a cross-connection control program using backflow protection. This update created more stringent rules for the frequency of testing and reporting to the Department of Environmental Protection.

According to JEA and publicly available state codes, backflow preventers must be tested every year for commercial properties and every two years for residential properties. For residential

customers, this process is automatic. The devices are tested by JEA contractors, "unless [customers] choose to opt out and have their own vendor perform the test," according to a JEA spokesperson.

However, commercial property owners "are responsible for maintaining their own compliance," the JEA spokesperson said. According to its website, JEA sends emails and automated phone calls to remind commercial customers that their backflow preventer is due for testing.

"Whether or not you receive a courtesy reminder from JEA, you need to contract to have your backflow preventers tested before the due date," the JEA spokesperson said. Commercial property owners may also opt-in to JEA's backflow testing program to have a JEA-approved vendor test their devices.

Qualified Vendors

On its website, JEA offers a list of qualified vendors with phone numbers, though the utility does not recommend one vendor over another.

JEA states on its website: "JEA Qualified Vendors also may contact you to schedule testing. While you're not required to hire any vendor that contacts you, the vendor you select must be a JEA Qualified Vendor," though the spokesperson added they "recommend" customers contact several vendors before making a decision.

JEA does not prohibit its qualified vendors from offering to repair or replace the same backflow preventers those vendors have tested. In fact, it's common practice for vendors to follow up with a cost estimate after they have notified that customer that their backflow preventer failed.

Mike Barker, who owns several commercial properties in Riverside and is a JEA customer, believes this is problematic.

"In my opinion, it is a conflict of interest," Barker wrote in an email regarding his experience with JEA vendor Fire Sprinkler Services FL (FSS), which inspected several of his properties. "Shortly after alleging the failure, FSS sent us a repair quote of \$1,100 to remedy the violation."

"FSS positioned themselves to benefit from their own report, and quoted twice what our plumber did for a repair," Barker stated. Barker provided The Resident News with a similar quote from FSS for \$1,445, dated November 15, 2021.

According to Rosie Ailstock with FSS, the company performs thousands of residential and commercial backflow preventer tests every year for JEA and other direct customers. Ailstock said the company notifies customers that they are not required to use FSS for repairs.

"We sometimes have this stated in quotes, emails and we let people know over the phone. We believe it's good business to get multiple quotes to keep companies honest with their pricing," Ailstock said.

The November 2021 quote from FSS

shared by Barker, states "We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with our price for the following scope of work." However, the quote does not contain any statement notifying him that he is not required to use their services.

JEA's spokesperson said, "Vendors contracted with JEA to perform backflow preventer testing are required to communicate that the customer does not have to use their services for repairs."

The Resident News also reached out to Bob's Backflow and Plumbing Services, another JEA qualified contractor that performs thousands of backflow preventer tests every year.

Kari Gardner, who serves as vice president and runs the company with her husband, said they take a more direct approach. After performing a test, they leave a JEA-supplied door-hanger that summarizes the results of the test, and they attach an additional note to customers stating "you are not obligated to use our company for repairs." Gardner said her employees then follow-up with customers via phone and offer a cost estimate on the repairs.

"We're just very up front with people that they don't have to use us," Gardner said. "Our business model is we're just honest. If we've screwed up, we tell people."

A Range of Costs

Gardner said Bob's Backflow and Plumbing Services charges approximately \$560 to replace a typical residential backflow preventer on a 1-inch water supply line. That estimate includes cutting out the old device, installing the new one and weatherizing it for added protection.

Ailstock estimated approximately \$595 to "several thousand" for a replacement with FSS. She said variables include size, type, whether it's surrounded by concrete, whether the work must be done after hours, etc. – "not to mention the cost of materials that keep going up."

The cost of the devices themselves ranges from around \$150 to more than \$500. Gardner said her company orders parts in bulk to help keep costs down for customers. "[Backflow prevention] is all we do, so we buy large quantities for better pricing," she said.

There are additional costs for failure to comply. If a commercial property owner neglects to get their backflow preventers tested by the annual deadline, JEA may schedule a test and add that cost – roughly \$35 – to the customer's next utility bill.

Failure to repair or replace a backflow preventer could result in additional fines and the discontinuation of utility services, though JEA's website states it "only uses these actions as a last resort to ensure the safety of the public water supply."

Exemptions

In a statement, JEA said it has an "exemption program" and only "low-risk commercial premises are eligible," citing an example of a low-risk commercial

property as an accounting office in a converted home.

"The customer must apply for the exemption and be approved by the Cross-Connection Control team. The guidelines are on the application," JEA said. However, when asked for a copy of the application, the JEA spokesperson did not send it before our print deadline.

JEA said it tracks exempt properties, however, the utility requires property owners to reapply for exemption every two years regardless of whether they were granted exemption in the past.

JEA's Cross Contamination Control Policy states that JEA "requires backflow preventers to be maintained on all commercial facilities built since 1990. Commercial facilities built prior to 1990 that present a hazard to the public water system must also maintain a backflow preventer."

In the policy, JEA lists nearly 50 types of facilities that present a "hazard" to the public water system and, therefore, are not exempt. These categories include medical offices, hospitals, restaurants, schools and dozens of various industrial facilities.

For more information on exemptions, JEA customers can contact its Cross-Connection Control Team at (904) 665-6250 or email backflow@jea.com.

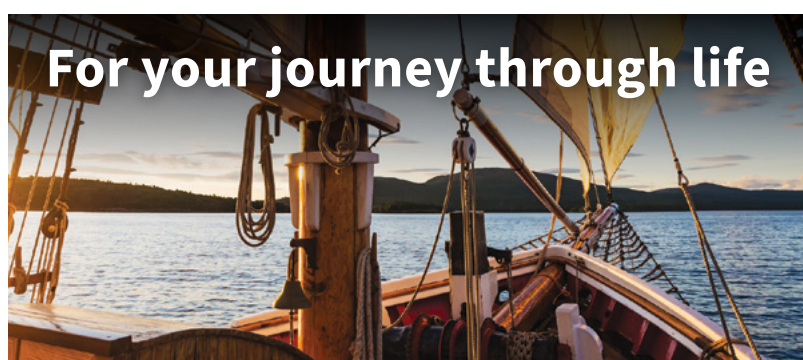
Caught by Surprise

Some JEA customers appear to be surprised when it's time for their backflow preventer test. For some, this may be an entirely new issue to navigate, whereas customers like Barker are irritated by the "absurd" and complicated process for exemptions and the lack of clear communication from vendors.

JEA appears to have taken a proactive approach to informing its customers of its policies and notifying them of imminent deadlines. The utility has created several pages worth of educational material and resources on its website. It has published, in full, its Cross Contamination Control Policy and its full list of qualified vendors. The site also says JEA has sent annual reminder letters to all commercial water customers for the past several years. A JEA spokesperson confirmed that by 2016, the utility was contacting all commercial customers annually and "most of our customers with JEA residential irrigation services biennially."

"We are also working to increase awareness through customer education programs," the company states.

For many, backflow preventer maintenance might seem as appealing as filing federal taxes or getting a colonoscopy. It's certainly not something you look forward to doing. However, it's an obligation that won't disappear anytime soon. And like a colonoscopy, this ounce of prevention may be worthwhile if it keeps drinking water safe for the broader community.



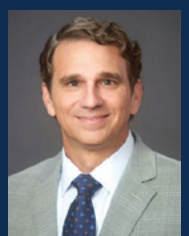
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DIA Still “Willing and Able” to Discuss Negotiations for Laura Street Trio

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The door remains open for negotiations between the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) and the developer for the Laura Street Trio following a pair of DIA board and committee meetings last month.

Conversations regarding funding for the massive historic renovation and adaptive reuse of the three buildings have continued between the City of Jacksonville and SouthEast Development Group LLC Principal and Managing Director Steve Atkins following a January Committee of the Whole meeting which discussed emergency bill 2023-0876 for funding for the project based on a proposal presented to the city by the development team.

The Resident News reported previously on the meeting, during which city officials – including City of Jacksonville General Counsel Michael Fackler, Chief Financial Officer Anna Brosche, Council Auditor Kim Taylor and DIA CEO Lori Boyer – all expressed concerns regarding the legality and constitutionality of the proposed deal.

The emergency was eventually withdrawn, and the city council tasked the DIA Board with finding a viable redevelopment agreement to which all parties could agree.

DIA Resolution 2024-04-10 was introduced at the April 12 Strategic Implementation Committee meeting. In

it, DIA stated, in part, that it found “the proposal submitted by the developer on March 30, 2024, is untenable and recommend[ed] that no further action be taken on said proposal.”

According to the resolution, at a March 29 meeting between the DIA and the development team, Atkins “presented a proposal and delivered multiple term sheets” which included the above-referenced proposal: an “only slightly modified” Capital One proposal requiring an unconditional city guaranty, which did not alleviate the previously mentioned constitutionality concerns.

In its conclusions, the DIA resolution read, in part, “The DIA therefore forwards to the Mayor and City Council its recommendation that the current Developer proposal be rejected and recommends that 2023-876 be withdrawn as no acceptable substitute has been agreed upon that can be considered by the Board.”

Atkins addressed committee members at the April 12 meeting.

“Our interpretation of the resolution is, ‘We’re done. We’re not having any more discussions, period, regarding the project. Only in the last 24 hours have we heard, ‘Well we’re open and willing to listen to listen to other options that you might present.’ I think that is what we need to do,” said Atkins.



SouthEast Development Group Principal and Managing Director Steve Atkins spoke at the DIA Strategic Implementation Committee meeting on April 12 regarding a resolution pertaining to negotiations surrounding the Laura Street Trio.

DIA Board Chair Jim Citrano countered Atkins’ interpretation of the resolution by stating he believed the resolution meant negotiations were over “only if Mr. Atkins doesn’t have any other options because we know the Capital One term sheet is not constitutional.”

After a lengthy conversation, the committee ultimately decided to amend the resolution and defer it to the DIA Board meeting the following week.

“I’m very encouraged by what I heard from the board today,” Atkins said following the meeting. “I really appreciate the board weighing in.”

At the April 17 board meeting, an amended resolution was approved in a 5-to-0 vote with Board Member Micah Heavener abstaining. The amended resolution remained steadfast in the DIA’s opposition to the Capital One proposal presented to the DIA Board at the March 29 meeting, yet kept the door open for future discussions and negotiations. Sections five and six of the amended resolution read, respectively, as follows:

- Section 5: “The DIA therefore forwards to the Mayor and City Council its recommendation that the Developer proposal presented March 29, 2024, is

unacceptable and be rejected.”

- Section 6: “The DIA remains willing and able to evaluate future alternative financing structures that exclude the unconditional Guaranty of the City and are otherwise legally permissible as determined by the City’s Office of General Counsel.”



At the request of City Councilmember Matt Carlucci, the DIA also removed its recommendation to the city council that it withdraw 2023-0876. Carlucci stated that, as a bill sponsor, he should be the one to withdraw it.

“The sponsor of the bill is the one who traditionally withdraws. So, if you recommended that Matt Carlucci withdraw the bill, that might be a different thing. But when you’re talking to the council as a whole, I kinda lose a little bit of control over my baby,” he said.

Following the April 12 committee meeting, The Resident News asked Atkins if he has any plans should the City reach the point where it does cease discussions.

“At this point, I probably wouldn’t even entertain the idea,” he said. “We know what needs to happen and we’ll cross those bridges when we come to them.”

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FDOT Proposes Post Street Roundabout

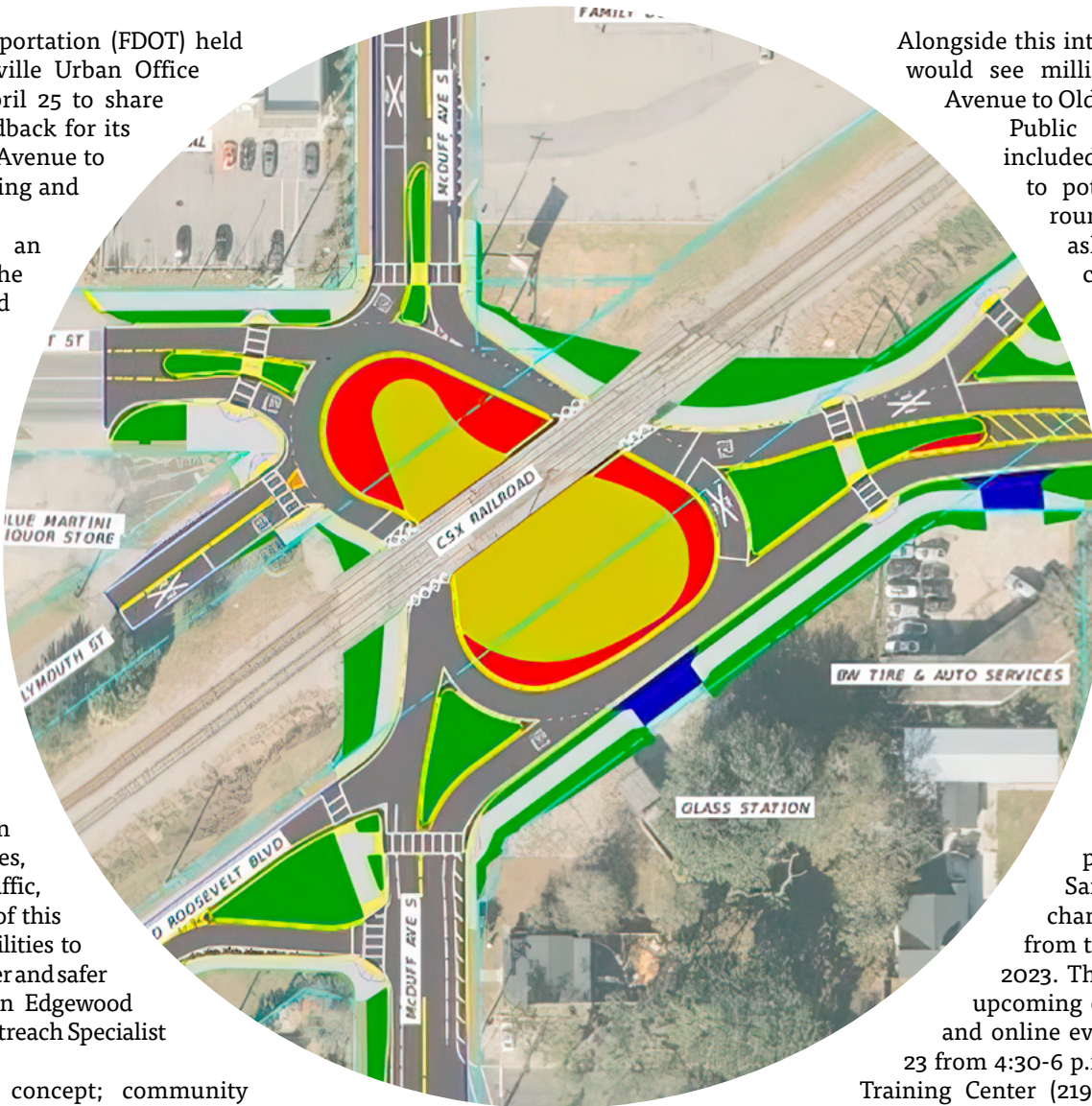
BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) held a public meeting at its Jacksonville Urban Office Training Center on Thursday, April 25 to share plans and gather community feedback for its proposed Post Street from Cassat Avenue to Old Roosevelt Boulevard Resurfacing and Rail Safety project.

The project would bring an elongated roundabout to the intersection of Post Street and Old Roosevelt Boulevard along with other safety enhancements and updates, including updated ADA sidewalk upgrades and new signage, signals and lighting. The sidewalk enhancements will include six-foot-wide sidewalks, with 10-foot-wide sidewalks within the roundabout.

“This elongated roundabout concept has been studied to improve safety at the intersection in the following ways: reduce the number of travel lanes that intersect with the railroad crossing from seven to two, eliminate three traffic signals in order to help prevent rear-end crashes, and create more of a free flow of traffic, all while upgrading the efficiency of this location by increasing all users’ abilities to enter and exit the community quicker and safer while becoming less dependent on Edgewood Avenue,” said FDOT Community Outreach Specialist Jacob Pickering.

“This is just the proposed concept; community feedback is very important to the processes of the Department and how we design and build projects,” he added.



A rendering of the proposed elongated roundabout for the intersection at Post Street and Old Roosevelt Boulevard.

Alongside this intersection modification, Post Street would see milling and resurfacing from Cassat Avenue to Old Roosevelt Boulevard.

Public commentary at the meeting included safety questions pertaining to potential queueing issues with the roundabout, with one online attendee asking if a traffic simulation had been conducted.

“Simulations are routinely performed regarding queuing related to proposed projects, including this project,” FDOT responded. “The elongated roundabout is a free-flowing condition and will improve the existing conditions at the location in question. The proposed improvements have been designed and studied to improve the current conditions.”

The project is expected to begin early 2025 and end in the summer of 2026. It would cost an estimated \$6.5 million.

Later this month, FDOT will be hosting an open house for the project SR 211 Resurfacing from San Juan Avenue to I-95, which has changed based on community feedback from the public hearing held in February 2023. These changes will be shared at this upcoming open house. The hybrid, in-person and online event will be held on Thursday, May 23 from 4:30-6 p.m. at the Jacksonville Urban Office Training Center (2198 Edison Avenue). To register to attend virtually, visit nflroads.com/VPH or call (562) 247-8422 and enter access code 478-681-968.

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Feeding Northeast Florida President and CEO Susan King explains the floorplan for the organization's forthcoming, expanded facility during an April 17 hard hat tour.

A Sneak Peek at Feeding Northeast Florida's New Digs

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Feeding Northeast Florida hosted a hard hat tour of its new food bank and community distribution center on Wednesday, April 17.

This invitation-only tour offered a behind-the-scenes look at the new center, which is currently under construction, and "provide[d] insight into how this expansion will transform our

fight against hunger in North Florida."

The new facility is located at 5245 Old Kings Rd. in Northwest Jacksonville.

Feeding Northeast Florida announced its plans to move into its new campus at the end of 2022. The new warehouse complex will allow the nonprofit to consolidate its operations – two warehouses, multiple cold storage trailers and a temporary office trailer – into one location. The new facility will double cold storage capacity, allow for larger food donations, simplify receiving and distribution, triple the space for food pantry partners, increase volunteer capacity by 400%, and facilitate future growth with a commercial kitchen, culinary center and learning space.

According to county records, the organization purchased the property in December 2021 for \$3.47 million.

The Jacksonville-based nonprofit organization is the largest food bank serving Baker, Bradford, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties. According to the organization, 1 in 10 adults and 1 in 7 children within their service area are affected by food insecurity.



Testicular cancer survivor and team owner Ken Babby greets the crowd at a Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp game.

Striking Out Testicular Cancer

During April's National Testicular Cancer Awareness Month, Baptist Health and the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp launched a campaign to raise awareness about urological cancers, with a specific focus on testicular cancer, which most commonly affects men between the ages of 15 and 40.

The campaign included two family-fun home games, April 14 and 21, and five additional home games during the week in between. Attendees donated toward the Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center to benefit urologic cancer patients, and all donations were matched by the Jumbo Shrimp.

"Some health issues can be uncomfortable for people to discuss, so we want to make it easy to learn about testicular cancer," said Ken Babby, owner of the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp.

Babby was diagnosed with testicular cancer in April 2023 after he noticed an unusual lump.

"I was instantly scared. I knew it wasn't supposed to feel or look the way that it did, and I knew I needed help," said Babby.

He sought that help at Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center with urologist Dr. Lael Stieglitz. Thanks to early detection and treatment, he was back in the ballpark in short order.

Dr. Stieglitz encourages men to pay attention to anything that feels different, like asymmetry. Self-exams can help detect those changes, and early detection – before the cancer has spread – can yield a greater than 95% cure rate.

"Small tumors can be subtle. Sometimes they are just a change in texture, like a hardened area of the testicle, and not a mass or lump," she said. "If you feel something, say something!"

Bass Tournament Angles for Pediatric Philanthropy



Oliver Martin

The 35th annual Wolfson Children's Hospital Bass Tournament will return to Palatka, Florida, May 16-18, 2024. Since its inception in 1989, it has grown to more than 1,000 anglers and raised more than \$7 million.

Sam Dean is the tournament's co-chair and Baptist Health system director of Plant Facilities. He said he is inspired by the support the tournament receives from anglers who come from across the Southeast.

"While they have a passion for fishing, they also have a passion for making a difference in the lives of Wolfson Children's patients," he said. "These are anglers with a heart."

And hearts are at the heart of this year's tournament, as the proceeds will benefit Wolfson Children's C. Herman and Mary Virginia Terry Heart Institute. The institute provides a full range of cardiac services for children, including two-year-old Oliver Martin, the 2024 Wolfson Children's Bass Tournament AmBASSador.

With kickoff events May 16-17, the main tournament begins May 18 with more than \$48,000 in cash prizes at stake, including a bass boat giveaway. For a suggested donation of \$20, anyone – even those not in attendance – may enter a drawing to win a 21' 2024 Bullet Boat model 21XRS, valued at \$97,000.

For tournament registration or to enter the bass boat drawing, visit wolfsonbasstournament.com. Pre-registration is open until noon on Tuesday, May 14; on-site registration re-opens Thursday morning, May 16, at 4 a.m.

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The Easter bunny joined Bree Townsend, Anthony Fidler, Akai Seagroves and Owner Justin Riddell at The Garden Dog Spa's grand opening celebration.

New Pet Spa Opens in Fairfax

For Justin Riddell, going to work every day is for the dogs – in the best way.

He is the owner of The Garden Dog Spa in Fairfax Manor, at the corner of Roosevelt Boulevard and Woodmere Street.

The new dog and cat grooming spa held its grand opening March 23, complete with photos with the Easter bunny and free pup cups for all furry guests to enjoy.

Riddell is no stranger to dog grooming; he also owns Luba's Pet Grooming Studio in Riverside. The Garden Dog Spa is his first venture that's he's built from the ground up, though, and watching it come to life from purchase to renovations to opening for business has been an extremely satisfying experience for him.

"This has been quite a challenge as well, as I'm bursting with pride at times, going from nothing to everything," he said.

The Garden Dog Spa offers grooming services for dogs and cats of all breeds. In addition to the traditional grooming services — full grooming, mini makeover, bath and blow dry and nail trims, Riddell's team also offers "creative grooming," which involves safe, pet-friendly colored hair dye.

Riddell said the unconditional love he gets from the dogs he works with every day is "a wonderful feeling."

"I'm so blessed that I get to feel it every single time I walk in the shop," he said.

The Garden Dog Spa is open Tuesday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. It is located at 4465 Woodmere St. All pets must provide current rabies shot records to receive service.

MOVERS & SHAKERS



Wanda J. Willis, Gregory Owens, Velma Monteiro-Tribble, Irvin "Pedro" Cohen, Judge Brian Davis and Barbara Darby at the check presentation to LISC Jacksonville.

A.L. Lewis Black Opportunity & Impact Fund Grants \$275,000

The A.L. Lewis Black Opportunity & Impact Fund announced its first competitive grants, totaling \$275,000, designed to help Black communities thrive in Jacksonville.

Fruit of Barren Trees Pipeline, INC, (FBOT) will receive \$90,000 for affordable housing, workforce development and community resiliency in the Moncrief Park neighborhood.

\$85,000 is slated for Kappa Alpha Psi Jacksonville Foundation to assist with the construction of the Dr. C. B. McIntosh Community Achievement Center, a community health and education center in Northwest Jacksonville.

LISC Jacksonville was awarded \$50,000 for its down payment assistance program through Project Boots, focusing on first-time home buyers located in the ZIP codes of 32206, 32208, 32210 and 32216.

The Fund also awarded 25 small grants of up to \$2,000 each.

"These grants would not have been possible without the volunteer time and financial support of the A.L. Lewis Fund members and donors, and we want to thank them for their commitment, passion and support," said Velma Monteiro-Tribble, chair of the Fund. "We also wish to congratulate our grantees on their important work to make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities in Jacksonville."

As a collective giving initiative of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, the A.L. Lewis Fund launched in 2022 with a focus on health, education and economic development in Jacksonville. It is named after Abraham Lincoln Lewis, a local entrepreneur, humanitarian and philanthropist who became Florida's first African American millionaire.

Baptist Health Goes Blue

A ribbon-cutting award ceremony was held at Baptist Health on Thursday, April 11 to celebrate Baptist Health's designation as a Blue Zones-approved worksite.

Baptist Health is the first health system and the largest Northeast Florida employer to receive this designation.

"This is distinctive, and especially meaningful, to us because we were part of the original team that helped bring Blue Zones to our community," said Baptist Health President and CEO Michael A. Mayo.

Various benchmarks must be met during the Blue Zones approval process, which assigns points for "evidence-based actions and lifestyle principles" workplaces have, or plan to implement, in employee resources and programs. Baptist Health offers several resources to provide physical, mental, spiritual and social support for its employees.

"I think the history of Baptist is one that creates a work environment that people want to belong to and improve their life and their lifestyle," Mayo said after the ceremony. "And so not only [are we] providing a place that people can earn a living and carry out their mission of caring for others, we need to be healthy, too."

Following the ceremony, Blue Zones Project Jacksonville Executive Director Nicole Hamm said it was "validating" to see an employer as large as Baptist Health – with more than 14,000 employees – achieve this approval.

"I think it's just such a message that we're ready to do this work, and we're doing it



Nicole Hamm, Carla Reddick, Mary Beth Torres, Michael A. Mayo, Brittnay Camps, Hannah Reese and Scotty Robinson celebrate Baptist Health's Blue Zones Project approval.

together," she said.

Several other smaller businesses have already received their Blue Zones approval, among which are KraVegan in San Marco and European Street Cafe in Riverside.

The Blue Zones Project is a worldwide research initiative devoted to studying and improving well-being in cities across North America. The Blue Zones Project Jacksonville is a six-year project that will focus specifically on neighborhoods that are "typically and historically underserved" in Jacksonville's West-, North- and Eastside as well as the city as a whole.

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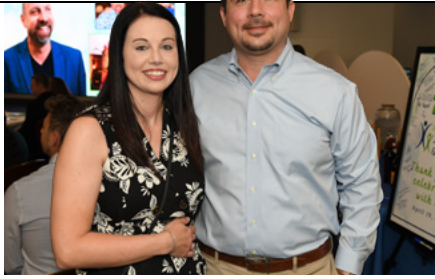
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A Diamond Anniversary for Jacksonville Speech and Hearing Center

The Jacksonville Speech and Hearing Center (JSHC) held a birthday reception on Friday, April 19 at the Jessie Ball duPont Center to celebrate 75 years of serving the communication needs of Northeast Florida residents.

Since its founding in 1949, the organization has spent three-quarters of a century fulfilling its mission “to provide the highest quality professional and compassionate care to all individuals in our community with speech, language, and/or hearing disorders, regardless of ability to pay.”

Notable guests included Mayor Donna Deegan, who spoke at the April celebration, city officials and corporate leaders from the Jacksonville community, including members from Haskell, Florida Blue and BDO Jacksonville.

JSHC Board Chair Jim White led a toast to the organization’s future while President and CEO Michael Howland made an address sharing “snapshots and gratitude” for the nonprofit’s milestone anniversary.



Jackie Culver with Erika Hooper



Scott Wohlers with Kyle Dorsey



Andy King

King Elected Chairman for Gator Bowl Sports

The Gator Bowl Sports board of trustees recently elected its 2024-25 volunteer leadership and announced Andy King as chairman for the 2024-25 season. King has served in a variety of volunteer roles with Gator Bowl Sports since 2008, including hospitality and vice chairman of game and team operations.

King is the vice president at GFL (Green for Life) Environmental, a diversified environmental services company. He has lived in Jacksonville since 2006 with his wife, Jessica, and children Grace, John, Mary-Kate and Andrew. In addition to his service with Gator Bowl Sports, King has served for numerous years on the board of directors for the Jax Chamber, THE PLAYERS Council, Cathedral Arts Project and the Tony Boselli Foundation. He is also a Leadership Jacksonville alumni.



Patrick Buckley

Buckley Joins NAI Hallmark

Patrick Buckley has been appointed senior vice president of brokerage for NAI Hallmark. He has more than 18 years of experience as a commercial real estate advisor. In his new role, he will focus on tenant and landlord representation for industrial and office properties. Buckley said he was thrilled to join the team, and that culture and team have been “particularly important” to him throughout his career.

Buckley began his real estate career in 2003 at Colliers before joining Richards Barry Joyce & Partners in 2010, which was eventually acquired by CBRE. In 2019, he moved to Avison Young as a senior member prior to coming to NAI Hallmark.

“Pat’s transactional experience and his natural aptitude for nurturing lasting relationships will be invaluable in our continued pursuit of being the go-to commercial real estate services provider in Jacksonville,” said NAI Hallmark’s Co-CEO, Christian Harden.

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Florida Blue's Susan Towler and Charlie Joseph with Candace Hodgkins, holding her 2024 Sapphire Award.

Hodgkins Receives Sapphire Award

\$50,000 in support will be directed to Gateway Community Services

The Florida Blue Foundation recently honored nine statewide nonprofit programs, organizations and individuals working to improve health outcomes and healthcare access in their local communities during its Sapphire Awards ceremony April 3 in Orlando.

Among the 2024 Sapphire Award recipients was Candace Hodgkins, president and CEO of Gateway Community Services, who received a second-place award and \$50,000 in support, which will be directed to Gateway Community Services to provide addiction treatment for adults and adolescents in Northeast Florida.

"Our Foundation recognizes the important role community-based initiatives play in strengthening neighborhoods and improving overall health and well-being," said Susan Towler, executive director of the Florida Blue Foundation. "We applaud these nine recipients for their commitment to improving health outcomes and ensuring families have the resources, support, and care they need to live their healthiest lives."

For more information and the full list of honorees, visit residentnews.net.

New Fieldhouse for Bolles Baseball



Bruce Chappell Sr. stands next to a rendering of Bolles baseball's forthcoming Jerry and Bruce Chappell Fieldhouse.

During the Agnes Cain Painter & Glynlea and Heritage Society reception April 4, Bolles announced that a gift from Bruce Chappell Sr. and the Chappell-Walker Family will bring a newly designed baseball fieldhouse to the Upper School San Jose Campus in honor of Chappell's late wife, Jerry "Poppy" Chappell.

The Jerry and Bruce Chappell Fieldhouse will feature a player locker room and training room, coaches' offices, an entrance lobby and a tribute plaque. Construction on the project will begin this fall.

Chappell said his family is "thrilled to death" to dedicate the fieldhouse to his wife and pleased to be part of the future of Bolles.

"There are two things you can give your children or grandchildren that no one can ever take away: love and a good education," Chappell said. "And let me tell you, this institution offers a pretty good education."

Weaver Receives Prize for Civic Engagement

The Northeast Florida philanthropist is the first woman and only third person to receive the honor

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida honored Delores Barr Weaver, philanthropist and activist, with its Prize for Civic Engagement at The Foundation's 60th anniversary celebration April 17.

The Prize for Civic Engagement pays tribute to Weaver's record of speaking out courageously for the common good on matters of civic importance. It has only been awarded twice before: in 2014 to William E. "Bill" Scheu, past chair of The Community Foundation's Board of Trustees, and in 2007 to Bill Brinton, founder of Scenic Jacksonville.

"I am truly honored to accept the Prize for Civic Engagement on the occasion of The Community Foundation's 60th anniversary," said Weaver. "I often say that it's the nonprofits who make it possible for me to play a part in building a better community. So, to all who are

involved in their work, whether as a volunteer, a board member or supporter, thank you for all you do."

Weaver has shown her leadership through many programs, including the Jaguars Foundation's Straight Talk program, and has shown her support for people with intellectual and development disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and, especially, women and girls. She jumpstarted the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center and co-founded the Women's Giving Alliance.

"Delores Barr Weaver is nationally renowned for her unprecedented philanthropy in our region," said Michael DuBow, chair of the board of trustees of The Community Foundation. "The prize recognizes her equally remarkable legacy of using her voice and platform to spark thoughtful community dialogue around important and under-

recognized issues."

Weaver indeed has an extraordinary legacy of philanthropy in Northeast Florida since moving to Jacksonville as co-owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars in 1993. After her historic \$50 million gift in 2012 to establish the Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund, she went on to provide numerous multi-million-dollar gifts through her partnership with The Community Foundation, including the Foundation's largest-ever gift of \$61 million in June 2023. She has established permanent endowments for more than four dozen nonprofits, including 20 that receive ongoing annual support through the Delores Barr Weaver Forever Event Fund. Today, her grantmaking exceeds \$209 million to more than 300 organizations in Northeast Florida and beyond.

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The only three presidents in The Community Foundation's history – Isaiah M. Oliver, Andy Bell and Nina Waters – talk at the 60th anniversary.



Ted and Nancy Powell with Glenn Ullmann and Lisa Landwirth Ullman



Ellen Wiss with Mary Pat Corrigan, Jim and Susan Towler, Terri Florio

Community Foundation Celebrates 60 Years of Impact

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida honored both its, and Jacksonville's, philanthropic leaders April 17 during its 60th anniversary celebration at the Garden Club of Jacksonville. Created in 1964, the Foundation manages assets of more than \$630 million and has made more than \$695 in grants since its inception.



Courtney Weatherby Hunter with Kacie Smythe



Martha Baker with Beverley Brooke and Sherry Magill

Board Chair Michael DuBow welcomed fund holders, friends and invested partners to the event, which included a Q&A session. In attendance were all three – and, notably, the only three – of the organization's presidents throughout its long, 60-year history: Andy Bell, Nina Waters and Isaiah M. Oliver.

The evening also honored Dolores Barr Weaver with its Prize for Civic Engagement. For the full story on her award, turn to page 19.



The Women's Board Committee leaders



Jessie Drew Hawkins with Drew Haramis

Women's Board Hosts Annual Spring Luncheon

Awards announced, service honored

The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital held its Spring Luncheon April 24. Over 150 members gathered alongside hospital leadership at the annual meeting to celebrate the past year's accomplishments. President Kendra McCrary announced the combined fundraising efforts 2023 First Coast Design Show and the 2023-24 Florida Forum, which totaled \$848,000. "I am grateful to the 2023 Design Show co-chairs Emily Magevney and Gracie Register and 2023-24 Florida Forum co-chairs Meg Folds, Drew Haramis and Robin Love for their leadership and all of the members, volunteers and donors who made this past year a wonderful success," said McCrary.



Robin Albaneze with Karen Wolfson

Chris Heib was named the 2025 Incoming President and will serve as Women's Board President 2026-27. This year's event leadership was introduced: Kelly Novak will chair the 2024 First Coast Design Show. Randy DeFoor and Maxine McBride will co-chair the 2024-25 Florida Forum.



Anna Catherine McCrary with Kendra McCrary and Lillian Morgan



Heather Creel with Kimberly Wolfson and Kristina Powell



Joy McDonald with Gracie Register, Emily Magevney and Simmons Skinner

The Abbie Award, named for The Women's Board Founder Ellen Cavert's twin granddaughter whose early passing inspired the organization's founding, was presented to member Jean Watson for outstanding commitment and service. June Duncan, Director's Assistant at The Women's Board, was also honored for her 20 years of service.

New members Margot Althuis-Wrenn, Jessie Drew Hawkins, Anna Catherine McCrary, Lillian McCrary Morgan, Liz Parks, Alexa Quaritius, Macy Rising, Lizzie Roth, and Stephanie Verlander were also welcomed to the board.

The mission of The Women's Board is to raise awareness and funds for Wolfson Children's Hospital to ensure the finest available pediatric health care. For more information, visit womensboardwch.com.

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John Anderson with Michael and Beth Kirwan, Angela Gomez, Don Schoendorfer and Wendy Anderson at the Kirwans' evening reception in honor of Free Wheelchair Mission.



Ted Tsighis with Michael Kirwan and Robby Hidalgo



Beth Kirwan welcomes her friends and neighbors beside Don Schoendorfer.

A Movement for Mobility

Avondale residents host reception for Free Wheelchair Mission

Beth and Michael Kirwan welcomed friends and neighbors to their Avondale residence on Saturday, April 13 for a drinks-and-hors d'oeuvres reception in honor of the California nonprofit Free Wheelchair Mission and its founder, Dr. Don Schoendorfer, who spent the weekend holding various talks about his organization throughout Jacksonville.

An MIT-educated biomedical engineer by profession, Schoendorfer founded Free Wheelchair Mission in 2001 with a mission of building and delivering wheelchairs to people with mobility disabilities in developing nations across the globe, where they are often shunned by their societies and trapped in their homes or reduced to crawling or dragging themselves to get from one place to another.

A chance encounter in Morocco decades earlier, when Schoendorfer and his wife witnessed a woman dragging herself across a crowded road, would be the calling that led Schoendorfer to build a rudimentary wheelchair with bicycle tires and clearance patio furniture. After delivering his first set of four prototype wheelchairs on a mission trip to India, Schoendorfer launched

Free Wheelchair Mission, which has created three generations of wheelchairs and distributed more than 1.4 million wheelchairs in 95 countries around the world.

The World Health Organization estimates there are approximately 80 million people in need of wheelchairs around the world, though Free Wheelchair Mission Director of Development - Major Gifts and Institutional Giving Angela Gomez, who joined Schoendorfer on this trip to Jacksonville, said the number is likely higher than that.

"We have seen, over the years, that when you go into a village and you give a wheelchair out to someone already identified, usually the neighbors and people come out and say, 'Oh you're here for a wheelchair? I have an aunt, I have a neighbor, I have somebody else,' so we know that number [80 million] is probably on the lower end," she said.

For \$96, Free Wheelchair Mission can build, ship and deliver a wheelchair to someone who needs it, effectively changing a life.

A long-time supporter of Free Wheelchair Mission and parishioner of



The third generation of Free Wheelchair Mission's adjustable, durable and collapsible wheelchair.

St. John's Cathedral, Wendy Anderson connected the organization to both the cathedral and the Kirwans.

For its Eastertide mission, St. John's Cathedral has launched RISE!, a four-times gift challenge through which each wheelchair purchase of \$96 will be doubled through a matching gift by an anonymous Cathedral supporter; in turn, Free Wheelchair Mission will again double that gift with its own donors, resulting in four wheelchairs for \$96.

"We believe that Jesus rose from the dead," said Cathedral Dean Kate Moorehead Carroll. "To celebrate Jesus' rising, we are going to help people rise

all over the world. Eighty million people across the developing world have no access to mobility. They crawl in the dirt. They sit inside. Free Wheelchair Mission gives them the chance to rise off the ground and build a whole new life."

Beth Kirwan said it was personal connections she had to people who require wheelchairs that inspired her to get involved and open her home for the reception.

"I think that's what set me, is the people in my life who I know need one and to think they wouldn't be able to get one and they would either just be in a room or, God forbid, crawling," she said. "There's so many great causes out there, but I don't know what it is about this one. And Avondale is just such a wonderful neighborhood, and our neighbors just rally together for everything."

Schoendorfer called this show of support from the Jacksonville community "amazing."

"You might think the battle is getting people wheelchairs," he said. "The real battle is in this country because we are so blessed with things God has given us, more than we need. What He wants me to do is influence the people in this country, because we have to be generous to other people in this world."

St. John's Cathedral's RISE! Campaign will run through May 19. To make donations or learn more about it, visit jaxcathedral.org/free-wheelchair-mission.



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Jacksonville Sheriff's Office Chief Deloris O'Neal with Assistant Chiefs Adrian O'Neal and Petena Tillman

A Serving of Philanthropy

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

More than 800 tickets were purchased for the 38th Annual Celebrity Chefs Tasting Luncheon and Silent Auction, hosted by the Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary of Jacksonville, on Thursday, April 4.

The event was held at the Prime Osborn Convention Center. It is one of the largest annual fundraising events for the Salvation Army of Northeast Florida.

This year's lineup of celebrity chefs included Jacksonville Beach Sea Turtle Patrol Supervisor Kevin Brown; CBS47/Fox30 Action News Jax Chief Meteorologist Mike Buresh; St. John's Episcopal Cathedral Dean Kate Moorehead Carroll; CSX Executive Vice President and COO Mike Cory; Beacon Fisheries, Inc. Owners Mike and Karen Eddy; HS Turner Real Estate, Inc. and Emeritus Salvation Army Board Member Hank and Sue Turner; The Bearded Pig Owners Michael Schmidt and Chad Munsey;

Northeast Florida Fellowship of Christian Athletes Multi-Area Director Matthew Roof; Stellar Properties, Inc. President Ernie Veale and Jacksonville Sheriff T.K. Waters.

Waters walked away with the People's Choice Award for his Cajun-style turkey and smoked sausage chili.

Before or after dining, guests were able to browse and bid on items in the silent auction, which had more than 100 contributors.

"It's always an honor for us to collaborate with community partners and businesses when we work to serve our community's needs," said Major Keath Biggers with the Northeast Florida area command. "We appreciate the tremendous support of The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary, who have organized this event for the last 38 years."

This year's Celebrity Chefs Tasting Luncheon and Silent Auction was co-chaired by Rita Cannon, Susie O'Quinn and Debbie Veale.

Fundraiser Elevates Exhibit, Women in Sports

Sports attire was in fashion at the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens Saturday, April 20. Titled Sport Your Fashion: A Curated Experience & Fundraiser, the event featured live music from The American Sirens, food from Chef's Garden, art, putt-putt, table tennis, shuffleboard, a costume contest, scavenger hunt and auction.

The night's host committee consisted of Gina Donahoo, Barbara English, Whitney Meyer, Velma Montiero-Tribble, Marsha Oliver, Donna Orender, Heather Wingard and Ellen Wiss.



Ozzie and Sharon Cuffie with Andrea Barnwell Brownlee and Michael Munz

Garrett Ho with David Thone

Ben and Katie Sharkey with Gina and John Donahoo

Jim and Ellen Wiss



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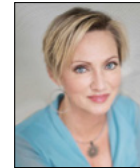
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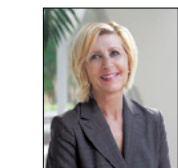
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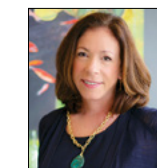
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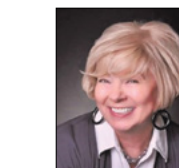
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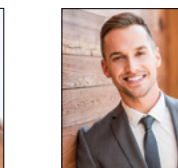
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MOCA TAKES A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

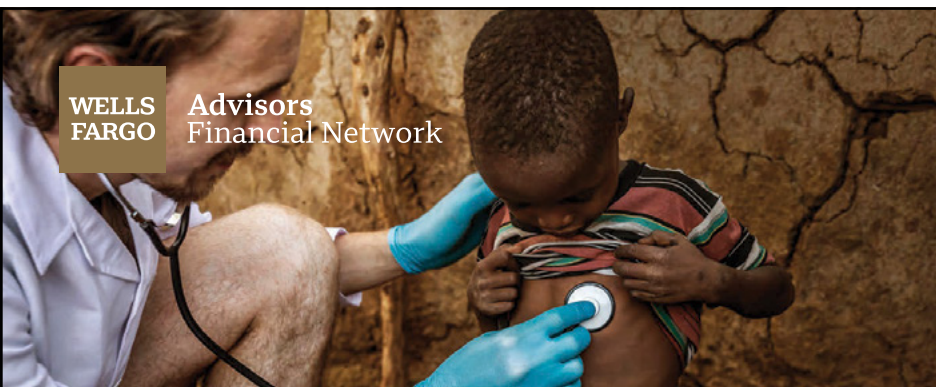
The Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville (MOCA) celebrated its 100th anniversary with a Centennial Gala themed for its latest exhibition, *A Walk on the Wild Side*. Held April 6 at the museum, the event brought the spirit of the '70s alive with music, art, dancing and artful moments that celebrated the beauty MOCA has brought to Jacksonville since 1924. Funds raised at the gala will enable the museum to present new exhibitions, public programs and educational initiatives that help elevate our city as an arts and culture destination.

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Jennifer Bowman with Emily Inman and Jennifer King

Fran Galloway with Tyrone Clark-Murray

Meredith Guess with Sheila Collier

Beth Langley with Kendra McCrary

Three Charities Mark on, Impact and Service

A CENTURY OF UNITY



Sophia Morgan with her granddaughter Nyla McIntosh

The United Way of Northeast Florida and CSX presented Uniting for Tomorrow: A Community Concert Celebration April 13 at James Weldon Johnson Park, featuring live music throughout the decades in honor of United Way's 100th anniversary of impact in Northeast Florida.

The event, held at the location of the first-ever United Way rally in April 1924, brought headliners John Lumpkin and The Covenant, The Katz Downstairz and Mama Blue with additional special performances by Reese the Poet, Jacksonville Dance Theatre and Dr. Doom. It also hosted a Jacksonville Jaguars Kids Zone, activities, food, drinks and prizes.

The United Way's milestone was underscored by its mission to give hope and opportunity to those who need it most through providing basic needs, strengthening financial well-being and advancing racial equity.

JUNIOR LEAGUE CONTINUES SUPPORT OF WOMEN



Audra and Patrick Macabasco

The Junior League of Jacksonville turned in a centennial of service in 2023, marking the occasion with a 100th Anniversary Gala at the Garden Club of Jacksonville Saturday, April 13, 2024. Attendees, including dozens of the organization's past presidents, gathered to enjoy the evening's elegant offerings of a plated meal, open bar, silent auction and dancing.

The mission of The Junior League is to advance women's leadership for meaningful community impact through volunteer action, collaboration and training.



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Sid Spano with Emma, Anthony and Frances Jabbour, Sam and Olivia Jabbour, Selena Spano

Catholic Charities Celebrates Service with Soiree

It was an evening of simple elegance as supporters flocked to Catholic Charities' flagship event, the Black and White Soiree. Held at the Adam W. Herbert University Center Saturday, April 20, the night comprised of dinner, a wine pull, fundraising and a keynote speech by State Attorney Melissa Nelson. Funds raised went toward empowering the Catholic Charities initiatives and the vital, behind-the-scenes work at Catholic Charities Bureau. Attendees also celebrated the contributions of honorees Frank and Marisa Martire and Anthony and Frances Jabbours.



Bishop Emeritus Felipe Estévez with Event Chairs Greg and Karen Montana



Sean and Devon Larkin with Denny and Toosie Williamson, Melissa and Jason Nelson, Troy and Jenni Smith



Lou Larmoyeux III and Stacy Larmoyeux



Youth Crisis Center board members Cathy Hurst, Bill Joel and Katie Krisher



Gwen Yates, former Jacksonville City Councilwoman and founder of the Transient Youth Center that would become the Youth Crisis Center

Boogie to Benefit Youth Crisis Center's 50th

Youth Crisis Center (YCC) celebrated a milestone 50 years of service with a vibrant, 70s-themed party complete with bell-bottoms, platform shoes and dazzling disco attire. Guests danced the night away with drinks, refreshments and a look-back at five decades of impact since 1974. The night included



Youth Crisis Center President and CEO Kim Sirdevan and Board Chairman Landon Strickland look on as Founder Gwen Yates gives a speech on the creation and legacy of the organization.

heartfelt speeches, joyous moments and the incredible legacy of support the YCC has provided to countless young people. The organization's emphasis on care is for those who have been exposed to traumatic situations such as divorce, homelessness, relocation, loss of life, bullying and abuse.



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Dan Gallagher with Steve Pajcic and Cherry Gallagher



Paula McCaffrey, Aimee Aleman and Tara McCaffrey

Pajcic Yard Golf Drives \$1M for Legal Aid

Since its inception a decade ago, the annual Pajcic Yard Golf and Lawn Party has raised more than \$1 million for Jacksonville Area Legal Aid (JALA).

The 2024 kid-friendly event teed off Saturday, April 6, with dual nine-hole courses at the Avondale homes of Steve Pajcic, and Michael Pajcic and Katy DeBriere. Local celebrities, attorneys and community members played a round on the Yard Course and Back Nine while enjoying surprise appearances, food, entertainment and a day of fundraising. All proceeds from the event went to support JALA's mission to provide civil legal services to those who cannot afford an attorney.



Janeen Mira with Lydia McRae, Paul McRae and Kathleen Pajcic



Hank Coxe and Donna Deegan with Michael and Katie Fackler

"It is really just a big lawn party, and we happen to golf and raise money for a most worthy cause. Generous, kind-spirited people stepped up even more this year," said Steve Pajcic.

The event boasts its famous "island green" hole-in-one competition, a nod to the 17th-hole island green at Ponte Vedra's TPC Sawgrass, where a hole-in-one wins the golfer \$6,000 and sends a matching \$6,000 to JALA. This year, a similar \$7,000 hole-in-one prize, sponsored by the Schultz Family Foundation, was added on the back nine's 7th hole. Curtis Bai was the inaugural winner. In the celebrity shoot-out, former Jaguar kicker Josh Scobee landed closest-to-the-pin to win \$6,000 for his chosen charity of Guardian Catholic Schools, with the match going to JALA.

"One of the best features of the event is that every donation and sponsorship is matched by the Pajcics dollar-for-dollar, so every penny raised is doubled for those in need at Jacksonville Area Legal Aid," said JALA President and CEO Jim Kowalski.



Beth Luna and Steve White



Ryan Sharrit, Jim Terrell, Artis Gilmore and Judge Mike Sharrit



Notes written upon paper suns dot the Impact Zone at the 2024 walk event.

Walk Exceeds \$100K Goal to Support Domestic Violence Survivors

More than 1,500 people gathered March 30 to show support for local survivors of domestic violence at Hubbard House's 15th Annual Stand Up & Stride Domestic Violence Awareness Walk. The event raises awareness and funds for Hubbard House's shelter and services.

The event exceeded its \$100,000 goal; it costs around \$75 to provide one night of shelter and services to one person, and Hubbard House provided 36,635 shelter nights last fiscal year.

"To see the passion here at this event, to feel your energy, and to know how strong your support is for local survivors of domestic violence and of Hubbard House... thank you!" said Hubbard House CEO Gail Patin. "When we stride together, as a community, the story of one survivor's strength becomes the courage for us all to stand up and say, 'No more domestic violence.'"

This year's walk featured a Family Fun Zone, with family-friendly games and prizes, and the Impact Zone, an interactive display where event attendees wrote notes to honor the 4,828 survivors and children Hubbard House served last year.

Hubbard House provides 24/7 hotlines for anyone needing support in a domestic violence situation. Trained advocates are available through Hubbard House Hotline at (904) 354-3114 or Textline at (904) 210-3698.



This year's Feature Home at 3407 Pine St.



RAP volunteer Alysa Carmichael and RAP board member Jeff Graf with RAP Executive Director Shannon Blankinship.

Milestone Attendance for 50th RAP Home Tour

BY MICHELE LEIVAS



Tony Tindol with Charles Gardner



Mike Green with Olivia Edwards, Cindy Foster and Sarah Provost



J.D. Fox with Leann Fox



Laura and Bob Burris



Linda Cummings and Diane Casjens

Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) couldn't have asked for better weather for attendees to enjoy the 50th anniversary of its Historic Home Tour, presented by David Gray Home Services on Saturday and Sunday, April 13 and 14.

The festivities kicked off Thursday at the Twilight Party exclusive preview event held at this year's Feature Home – a Mediterranean Revival-style brick residence on Pine Street owned by John and Jan Hirabayashi.

Eleven homes made up the roster for this year's home tour, including the 1926 Love-McGinnis House at 2063 Oak Street, designed by architect Henry J. Klutho and built by Charles J. Davis, Jr. Another Mediterranean Revival-style home, it was originally built for Drs. James Love and R. H. McGinnis with their physician offices on the first floor and living quarters on the second.

RAP Executive Director Shannon Blankinship said the attendance this year felt like a "milestone" and the lineup of homes, "distinct."

"We [had] a big turnout this weekend and I think that just means that people really love, and appreciate, and value the historic district – and what makes the historic district are these incredible, unique, signature, feature homes," she said.



Thomas and Susan Clayton with Blake Clayton, Shelly Goodwin and Denise Clayton as they prepare to visit the residence at 1610 Osceola St.



Volunteers Tru Levertette Hall, Jodi Smith and Brandi Pacheco



Aurora Patterson and Alexandra Martin in front of the Henry Klutho house on Oak Street.



Salvation Army Launches New Golf Tournament

The Salvation Army of Northeast Florida kicked off its inaugural golf tournament and silent auction Monday, March 25 at Queens Harbour Yacht and Country Club. The shotgun-style tournament raised \$13,000 in funding for year-round support of Salvation Army programs, which assist the area's most vulnerable communities with basic needs like food, housing, counseling, rehabilitation and disaster relief.

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ANIMAL HOUSE



The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office's Anthony Yannuzzi and K9 Patriot, a tracking bloodhound.



Officer Anthony Yannuzzi and K9 Patriot deploy by helicopter.

Yannuzzi and Patriot: Bringing Home the Missing

BY JULIE KERNS GARMENDIA

By the time local news stations began reporting that an 11-year-old child was missing, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) Officer Anthony Yannuzzi and his tracking bloodhound K9, Patriot, were already on the hunt.

"When we arrived, the child's scent was already over an hour old. Once K9 Patriot was given the scent, he took off and trailed for more than half a mile. He found the child between two cars," Yannuzzi said.

Officer Yannuzzi and K9 Patriot are the department's full-time canine tracking team, on call 24/7. They respond to missing person calls: children, senior citizens, other missing or suicidal persons, those with dementia, autism, mental illness, or who are otherwise incapacitated or at-risk.

K9 Patriot is the only single-purpose, scent-discriminate bloodhound at JSO. That means that K9 Patriot specializes solely and exclusively in tracking or trailing, unlike some other law enforcement canines that may be trained for two tasks. Yannuzzi said

that his partner was born to track the missing.

"Even as a puppy weighing 10 pounds, he barreled right through the thick brush like a wrecking ball on the scent; he never needed any prompting. Now at two years old, he goes crazy on the scent and is so stubborn. He's like a heat-seeking missile and does not stop," Yannuzzi said.

K9 Patriot's unusual backstory includes an unintended arrival in Santa Rosa County, Florida, when two police bloodhounds managed to do more than track missing persons. Copper, the female, turned up pregnant and delivered 12 puppies. The department sent a message to all Florida sheriff's departments explaining their unexpected situation and offering a free bloodhound puppy. JSO responded.

On January 17, 2022, K9 Patriot, eight weeks old, arrived in Jacksonville. JSO Sgt. Charlie Byrd took the puppy home to live with him. Byrd immediately began training the newest recruit to earn his certification as a tracker and trailing K9. Byrd said that the training process to locate missing persons is complex, but the puppy caught on immediately. K9 Patriot earned his certifications at six months old and completed seven missions during his first months on the job.

"K9 Patriot's parents, Copper and Champ, were great trackers who had found 50 or 60 runaways," said Yannuzzi. "One of his brothers works in Nassau County, and the other siblings work all over Florida."

As Sgt. Byrd planned his retirement during 2023, he chose Yannuzzi from five applicants to become K9 Patriot's handler and complete the extensive training. It was a difficult transition for Byrd to say goodbye to his partner, but he and Yannuzzi made a pact: Byrd has open visitation with his favorite bloodhound.

When K9 Patriot is off duty, he lives with Yannuzzi, enjoying an everyday dog life and daily fun with the family's other three dogs. Although bloodhounds are born trackers, Yannuzzi said they must learn to discriminate between scents to track and locate a missing person. He compared K9 Patriot to a professional athlete who requires daily training to maintain physical conditioning and hone skills.

Scent-discrimination is the ability of the trained tracking canine to locate and follow one scent. The canine is given an article of clothing or an object, such as a key fob, that belonged to the missing person. When the person's scent is given to the canine, the dog ignores all other scents and locks onto the trail left behind by the missing person.

The physical terrain and location of the trail left by the missing person are contributing factors in every tracking mission. Out in the woods or a rural area, there may only be one human scent for the canine to follow, versus a highly populated city with hundreds of competing scents. Weather or other conditions may contaminate, alter or disturb the trail, making the canine's job more difficult.

The time that has passed since the missing person left the trail is another critical factor. K9 Patriot has found missing persons on trails up to seven hours old, including trails that hundreds of other people and animals may have walked on, contaminating the scent. Tracking canines learn to stay on the scent despite any conditions: other people, wildlife, domestic animals, vehicles, garbage, birds and countless competing odors, some of which may be strong or overwhelming.

Even if a person has been missing for 20 hours or more, or the search location is a highly contaminated area, K9 Patriot can still assist. He can at least indicate a direction of travel to the search teams, such as "this way on Baymeadows," Yannuzzi said.

"These dogs serve a critical purpose. If officers had to search for missing persons or runaways in a grid, it would take a massive manpower effort and energy, requiring a huge grid and valuable time, which is so important in these cases. The canines can accomplish a search so much more quickly," Yannuzzi explained.

To help speed response time and better assist missing or endangered persons in an emergency, JSO also urges families to utilize Duval County's new, free, voluntary Registry for Endangered, Vulnerable, or Missing Persons (REVAMP) by visiting jaxready.com/REVAMP or calling (904) 255-3172. Individuals can be registered if they have cognitive or memory impairment, sensory disabilities or other challenges that make them vulnerable if they are missing or lost.

The REVAMP registry records critical information that aids in emergency search-and-rescue efforts, like recent photographs, frequently visited locations, known medical conditions, communication needs and other vital details. The secure registry was created by the City of Jacksonville Emergency Preparedness Division, in partnership with the JSO and Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department (JFRD).

Free First Responder Awareness Stickers are also available. These stickers can be placed on a home entrance or vehicle window to alert responders to the presence of individuals with special needs or impairments. Family or caregivers may request three stickers per qualifying individual by calling Jacksonville's Missing Persons Unit at (904) 255-3172 or Jax Ready/City of Jacksonville Emergency Preparedness Department at (904) 255-2712. Stickers are also available from the JFRD.

JSO Officer Christian Hancock, who assists with public information, reminds citizens not to approach police canines; the dogs are on-duty and working. While K9 Patriot is social and does tracking demonstrations for children, Hancock advises that all dogs have distinct personalities, and some may be unfriendly to strangers.



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Who's Reading Your Mammogram?

Boutique Breast Imaging provides a better mammogram because they're read by breast experts

Kathryn Pearson, M.D. is a trailblazer in health care and one of the country's most respected breast-trained radiologists. Having been personally impacted by breast cancer through a deep-rooted family history and the need for surgery herself, Dr. Pearson continues to advocate for better patient care. Trained at Stanford and University of California San Francisco, and practiced in breast imaging for over 25 years, Pearson recently opened the doors to a new breast imaging center in Jacksonville's Southside: Boutique Breast Imaging, a state-of-the-art clinic providing the highest level of breast care, screening and diagnosis by experienced, fellowship-trained breast imaging radiologists.

"Patients receive a better mammogram when read by breast experts, and unfortunately that's not always the case - more than 60% of mammograms are interpreted by general radiologists," said Dr. Pearson.

Breast imaging radiologists have additional breast fellowship training and expertise beyond radiology board certification and are experts in breast cancer screening and diagnosis. Dedicated breast imagers are proven to have increased diagnostic accuracy with earlier detection of breast cancer and less false-positive "breast cancer scares."

"If you want an expert in breast cancer diagnosis, you see a breast imaging radiologist," said Dr. Pearson. "I want physicians to take back control and optimize patient care, and in my breast world, this means allowing fellowship-trained breast radiologists to have the time to talk with, examine and help educate patients."

Dr. Pearson is providing the highest level of breast care, ultimately increasing screening and

diagnosis access and workflow through experience, collaboration and state-of-the-art technology at Boutique Breast Imaging.

"Patients deserve this," Dr. Pearson said, "By improving and expediting cancer diagnosis, helping to answer questions, educating patients, and - quite literally - holding their hand, we will be able to improve patient care, reduce unnecessary stress and anxiety, and save lives. Our patients leave feeling they were really cared for and not just rushed through an impersonal process, valued only for their insurance card."

Pearson has been pushing the envelope on breast health for decades. As the founder of Mammosphere, a technology company that stores and exchanges mammograms in a secure cloud, she constructed a platform providing physicians and patients access to prior mammograms for comparison.

"Having prior images for comparison helps us detect breast cancer earlier, reduce additional unnecessary imaging and exposure to radiation, while also reducing health care costs," she said.

Through Dr. Pearson's dedication to advancing medical knowledge and the compassionate care she provides, she opened Boutique Breast Imaging knowing it would make a significant impact on the lives of the patients.

"When I look at a mammogram, I see more than just breast tissue. These are images of women who often have children, grandchildren, family and friends who depend on them. I want to do everything I can to provide the best health care possible for women, and it starts by having the right people read your mammogram," she said.



Kathryn Pearson, M.D

Boutique Breast Imaging is located at 6871 Belfort Oaks Pl., Jacksonville, Florida, 32216, accepting most insurances and providing concierge services.

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Lee Hutchens with Matt Allen, Tom Harris, Andy Allen and Michael O'Neal

River Garden Classic Tops \$2M

River Garden Senior Services hosted its 28th River Garden Classic, with title sponsor Hardage-Giddens Funeral Homes & Cemeteries, on April 10 at Deerwood Country Club. Since its inception, the tournament has raised more than \$2 million to benefit the residents of River Garden.



Brian Crooke with Chip Greene



Betty Sorna with Mauri Mizrahi and Bobbie Jo Mentz

"We should all be proud of supporting an organization that excels in providing the highest quality of care for seniors with dignity and compassion," said Tournament Chairman Tom Harris.

The 29th River Garden Classic is scheduled for April 28, 2025.



Chloe Wood and Laura Smith



Greg and Beville Anderson



Justin and Bridget Markley

An Installation of Inspiration

A Vision for Art blends an elevated canvas of artists, collectors

Community support for Episcopal School of Jacksonville (ESJ) came into focus during A Vision for Art, ESJ's annual art event, presented in 2024 in conjunction with Northern Trust. The five-day art shopping experience kicked off with an opening night celebration on April 19 at ESJ's St. Mark's Campus, where attendees had a chance to meet the 42 established and emerging artists from around the Southeast, including featured artist EMYO. Proceeds from the event supported the community of artists as well as the enhancement of the fine arts program and projects on ESJ's St. Mark's Campus.



Louise Van Tartwijk with Elizabeth Dakens, Sharon Lucie and Kaye Glover



Chris and Chloe Wood with Travis and Laura Smith



Drew and Jordan Cleland

Chamber Welcomes Hightower Class VIII

Program Namesake Mike Hightower and several board members welcomed Class VIII of the JAX Chamber Hightower Emerging Leaders Fellowship in a March 25 ceremony on the 22nd floor of the VyStar Credit Union Tower. The Hightower Fellowship brings together a class of talented professionals with prominent and influential Jacksonville leaders. Fellows build relationships and learn from Jacksonville leaders who are giving back to the next generation.



The Hightower Emerging Leaders Class VIII

The members of the new class are Leah Adams, PRI Productions; Dane Bennett, Baptist Health; Brian Bush, Tom Bush Family of Dealerships; Lucy Chen, Cathedral Arts Project; Lauren Eakins, Walmart Health; Maya Francis, Blue Zones Project Jacksonville; Michael Haskins, Springfield Preservation and Revitalization Council, Inc.; Andrew Holley, England, Thims & Miller; Darian Jackson, Dapper D's Cigars; Sarah Mannion, King & Mannion, P.A.; Eric Miller, Downtown Vision, Inc.; Derod Moody, VyStar Credit Union; Brittany Norris, City of Jacksonville; David Paulk, Jacksonville Jaguars; Andrea Reyes, Reyes Legal, PLLC; Nemiah Rutledge, Body Paradox.



Edward Burr with Jim Furyk and MG Orender

Wine Event Raises \$175K for Youth Safety

The Monique Burr Foundation for Children's (MBF) annual signature fundraising event, A Night in the Vineyard, presented by MasterCraft Builder Group at SoNapa Grille, raised \$175,000 to support MBR's prevention education programs - personal safety curricula that educate and empower youth, and the adults in their lives, with strategies to recognize, prevent and respond to all forms of child abuse, bullying, exploitation, trafficking, and other types of child victimization.

"The support enables MBF to provide programs that safeguard the promise of childhood and forge a world where every child thrives free of abuse and trauma," said Tanya



Edward and Billie Jo Burr with Adam and Shannon Barringer

Ramos-Puig, MBF CEO. "Together, we can turn the tide against child abuse and work towards the hope of a better future that has inspired MBF for almost three decades."

Guests enjoyed wine tastings, gourmet food by SoNapa Grille, conversations with winemakers and wine aficionados, live and silent auctions, and musical entertainment by the Band Be Easy, Bold City Classics and Colleen Orender.

MBF's programs provide youth with strategies to keep them safe and have reached over 11 million across the globe.



Laura Fellwock with Hailey Waller, Mia Pierce and Bo Powell



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Garden Club of Jacksonville Executive Director Denise Reagan and Board of Trustees President Tiffany Davis



Shalesia White with Marla Randall and Shena White



Aubrey Doski and Stephanie Doski



Rick Pariani and Perry Reynolds

Garden Club Hosts Annual Blooms Galore & More

The St. Johns River was the backdrop for the Garden Club of Jacksonville's annual Blooms Galore & More preview party on Friday, April 5, where more than 80 guests got a sneak peek and first pick of the offerings before the public event the following day.

In total, the Garden Club received more than 2,300 plant donations for the yearly fundraiser event. Garden Club of Jacksonville Executive Director Denise Reagan explained proceeds from the sale will go directly back to support the club.

"We put on low-cost and free programming all year long," said Reagan. "So, every bit of this money helps us do that."

Reagan added that some Garden Club members propagate plants throughout the year to donate to the sale.

"Anybody who's a member of the Garden Club has a soft spot in their heart for green spaces and green things," she said. "We're very gratified and appreciative of all their work."

In addition to the outdoor plant sale, guests were able to peruse booths of more than 30 vendors at the Green Market inside the Garden Club ballroom and courtyard.

This year's Blooms Galore & More was co-chaired by Susan Painter and Cyndy Reynolds.



Jean Moyer at her table of items handwoven with pine needles.



Sherry Mansfield from Datil Do Ya with Michael Riley



JDRF 2024 Walk Corporate Chair and Firehouse Subs President Mike Hancock, second from left, joined fellow speakers Colleen Morris, Jean Robin and Chris Shee at JDRF's Community Leaders Breakfast in February.

JDRF, Firehouse Subs Connect for Type 1 Diabetes

JDRF supporters will pound the pavement during its 2024 Jacksonville One Walk with a little extra power from some familiar Jacksonville names. The Jacksonville-based Firehouse Subs has signed on as presenting sponsor for the 2024 Jacksonville One Walk, held May 4 at the J.B. Coxwell Amphitheatre on the University of North Florida Campus.

Mike Hancock, Firehouse Subs president and One Walk Corporate Chair, is all too familiar with the work done by JDRF. During JDRF's Community Leaders Breakfast in February, he shared his story of being diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes (T1D) at age 23, having first been told he was "too old" for T1D, but later being properly diagnosed.

"I am excited to serve as the Corporate Chair for this year's Jacksonville One Walk," said Hancock. "Firehouse Subs is proud to support our local community here in Jacksonville and join other teams and corporate sponsors to turn Type 1 to Type none. It's because of them, that JDRF is able to continue its mission to cure, prevent and treat T1D. We've never been closer to a cure than now, and I'm excited to celebrate with everyone on Walk day."

T1D is an autoimmune disease in which a person's pancreas stops producing insulin, a hormone that enables people to get energy from food. There is no way to prevent T1D, and presently no way to get rid of it.

The Jacksonville One Walk has a fundraising goal of \$382,000 to power more research, enable more advocacy and fund more support for those living with T1D. To register for the JDRF Jacksonville One Walk, visit walk.jdrf.org.



Blooms Galore & More Chairs Susan Painter, holding a lettuce garden, and Cyndy Reynolds, holding a bromeliad on driftwood, that the Ortega Forest Garden Circle donated to the plant sale.



Ida Vera with Spruce Jax was one of the 30-plus vendors at the Garden Club of Jacksonville's Blooms Galore & More.



Ann Johnson with Jim Torres



Chris Worthington with Donna Thompson and Haley Jones



Lily, Constance and Gretchen Sting

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Nikki Callao, Matt Craddock, Mary Mattscheck and pup Frank doing some early morning gardening at the RAP Community Garden.

Nikki Callao tending to her plot at the RAP Community Garden.

The RAP Community Garden was opened in 2016 and has since become a thriving spot for nature and community.

Eva Schore

Finding Community in the Garden

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

What was once a patch of open, unused grassy land at Azalea Place and Park Street in Riverside has transformed, over the years, into a vibrant space where both nature and community thrive.

The Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) Community Garden has evolved into a hotbed of community support and connection as gardeners come to tend their plots and visitors just come to enjoy the serenity of being surrounded by nature.

Established in 2016, the garden has 32 full plots, which are essentially leased on an annual basis by the half-plot. The plot agreements “expire” every February in anticipation of the new growing season and gardeners can renew or relinquish their plot.

Gardeners must commit to visiting a certain number of times a week to maintain their plots and many come frequently to garden, harvest herbs or vegetables, or simply spend time with their plants and any fellow gardeners who happen to be there.

Some have used their space at the RAP garden for family time and enrichment.

RAP’s recently appointed creative placemaking specialist, Kandice Clark, brings her whole family out to the garden sometimes, a family activity that has become very dear to her, and said the interactions she’s shared with fellow gardeners and other visitors have “meant a lot.” Sometimes it’s first-timers coming to visit the garden, but she said she’s seen regulars there as well who share valuable insight with her as she gardens.

“They know a lot about the plants that are in other people’s plots, they know about the different butterflies and caterpillars that are in the garden,” she said. “It’s been a great experience.”

In her plot, Clark has planted strawberries, okra, tomatoes, peppers and sweet basil alongside zinnias, salvias and pollinators and is always looking to

other plots for new plants she could try to add.

RAP Executive Director Shannon Blankinship said the garden is an “incredible community space.”

“If you visit, if you go in that garden any time of year, it’s thriving,” she said. “I don’t think there are any other community gardens that, for this amount of time, have continued to be so heavily used and maintained.”

That is due, in no small part, to Community Garden Manager Susan Fraser, Blankinship said.

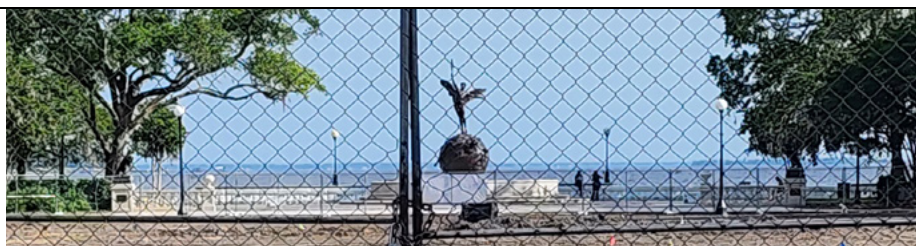
Fraser has been involved with the garden from the very beginning and has been a garden manager for nearly its entire existence. At the garden herself quite frequently, she said everyone knows and recognizes her and she said getting to know the new faces and seeing familiar ones return at orientation every March “is the best part.”

“You literally see people who have come to the neighborhood who are new; we see young people; and then I’ve got older couples who have moved from their home to a condo, and they just can’t live without having a place to put their hand in the dirt,” she said.

She does caution that maintaining a plot does require frequent visits to the garden and a good amount of attention. If a plot is looking untended, she’ll check in with the gardener and if life has gotten in the way of gardening — which, she understands, can happen — she’ll offer them the opportunity to relinquish their space and let someone else take it over.

Fraser said there’s something to learn from planting and nurturing something at the RAP Community Garden and watching it grow.

“I see it as this life lesson in good things require commitment and you’ve got to keep giving your part to get back,” she said.



The oval at Memorial Park has been fenced off as workers prepare to resod the area after the replacement of the park’s failed sprinkler system.



A rendering of the new memorial installation expected to begin this summer.

Updates Underway for Memorial Park Oval

The grass will be greener on the other side of the construction fences once resodding is completed on the Memorial Park oval in Riverside.

The project began last month, and Memorial Park Association Board President Patrick Emmet said the majority is expected to be completed ahead of Memorial Day, with the remainder of the project definitely wrapping by the end of the year.

The sprinkler system for the oval had stopped working properly and that, coupled with all the traffic the oval sees with soccer and other sports players, led to the need to resod. The sprinkler system has already been replaced and now the lawn work is underway.

Yellowstone Landscape is the company contracted for this project. It is overseen by Memorial Park Association, costing an estimated \$90,000, and funded through a combination of dollars from a multi-year donation and the association’s operating budget.

Earlier this year, the park’s balustrade suffered substantial damage from Hurricane Idalia. That project is being overseen by the City of Jacksonville and Emmet said he’s been told it’s still “quite a ways down the road.”

The balustrade repair and the oval resodding aren’t the only two projects Memorial Park will see this year. A new art installation is planned for behind the shed in the park, facing the famed “Spiritualized Life” sculpture by Charles Adrian Pillars. Emmet described it as a “memorial wall, if you will” honoring everyone who has helped — and will help in the future — make the park beautiful.

“It’s a beautiful thing that’s going to be out there,” he said. “It’s going to have a place for people to sit and relax. It’s going to be very pretty.”

Brett Godard of Godard Design Associates is the designer for this second project, with CMS Group as the contractor.

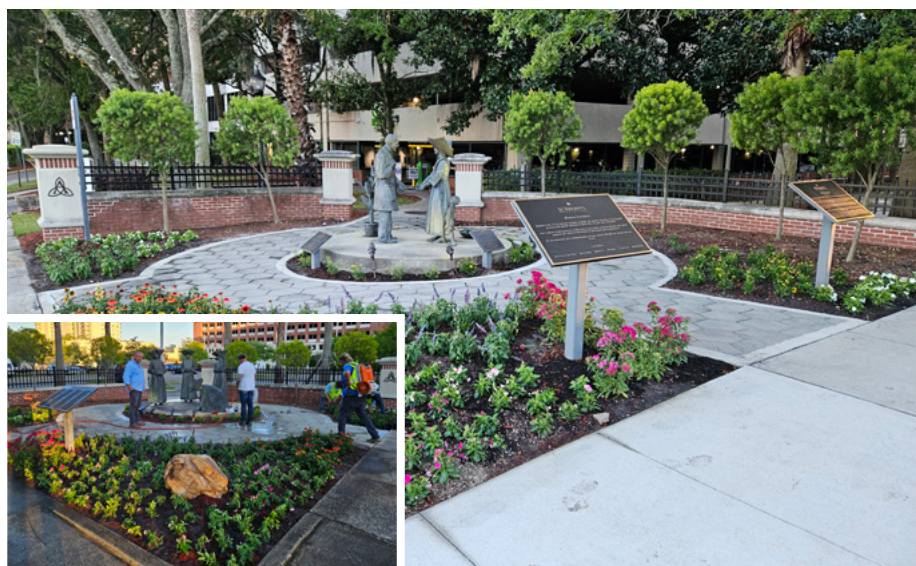
Residents may recognize Godard’s name as the landscape architect responsible for designing the landscape rehabilitation plan for Phase Four of Memorial Park’s Master Plan to “to restore the luster of the park, enhance its appeal to today’s visitors, and pass along intact to future generations the unique beauty and character of this spot.”

The association has spent years working to restore the park to the grandeur of when it was first opened. Now, in its centennial year, Emmet said watching that restoration has been “amazing.”

Work on the memorial was supposed to begin in February but was delayed by the storm.

Emmet said the association hopes to see that project begin this summer.

Bold Beauty for Ascension Grounds



The grounds of Ascension St. Vincent’s in Riverside received a little sprucing up from Gulfside Landscaping as the crew added new plants to the courtyards that house the hospital’s statues honoring its 1916 founders, the Daughters of Charity.

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The bog before it was cleared of weeds and non-native plants and trees. Volunteers clearing out Boone Park South.



Replanting native plants at Boone Park South.



The new native growth a month after the bog was cleared.

PHOTOS/MARGARET DICKWELL

Eliminating Invasive Plantlife Allows Boone Park South to Flourish

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Friends of Boone Park South is a local neighborhood advocacy group many in the Riverside Avondale area might recognize for their clean-up events and tree renourishment and replacement programs that keep this beloved neighborhood park green and flourishing.

Recently, however, they hit pause on planting trees and started thinking about removing some – specifically, invasive plant species that were encroaching on and choking out the native plants.

“There’s a cypress tree in the park that you couldn’t see because of all the growth around it,” said Friends of Boone Park South Board Member Melanie Dobbins. “I’ve lived in the neighborhood my whole life and never really noticed this tree till one day.”

Dobbins and the rest of the Boone Park South group discussed and researched it, and they realized most of the growth surrounding the cypress tree was from invasive species.

From there, Pamela Telis, leader of the park advocacy group, connected with the Ixia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) for a walk-through of the park, which led to a large-scale plan to remove what they could of the invasive species “not just with hand snippers,” Dobbins said, and a call for help to the community was made.

“Everything just fell beautifully into place,” Dobbins said. “People who had a love of taking care of things in nature, and understanding that the good couldn’t be there if the bad was, helped us remove all the things that shouldn’t be there.”

Telis founded Friends of Boone Park South a decade ago once it became clear to her that the park would find itself with a severe lack of trees once the older, aging trees began to come down without enough new trees getting planted to replace them. According to Telis, the park was losing an estimated five to seven trees per year. Since

the Friends group was founded, it has planted more than 120 new trees at Boone Park South. The Friends group also provides a small stipend to pick up trash several times a week to keep the park clean in between work done by the city.

“The city just doesn’t have the staff to do that level of maintenance and care,” she said.

Following several years of tree planting, the board turned its attention to (invasive) plant removal and, with the aid of FNPS’s Ixia Chapter, serving Clay, Duval and Nassau counties, was able to begin identifying plants for removal.

“Along our western edge, we have a lot of invasive plants and little trees,” Telis said.

The group has hosted multiple volunteer opportunities for people to come help keep the park vibrant and remove the encroaching invasive species. This past February, more than 30 volunteers came out to continue the removal efforts.

Explaining the dangers of invasive plant species, Telis said, “They will take over areas and then outcompete native plants, which all of our birds and pollinators are not adapted to, and they just don’t have the same wildlife benefits as native plants.”

The group has also gone back in and planted native species to replace the invasive ones that had been removed.

Now that the overarching, large-scale removal effort has been completed, Telis said it’s more of a maintenance program, for which the group is still establishing a protocol to incorporate alongside its tree planting efforts and annual tree adopting event.

“The removal of those invasives that we did over the past two years is going to be a benefit to the park for a decade or so,” said Dobbins. “So, we’re not necessarily doing it for the next generation; we’re also doing it for the following generation.”



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THE WAY WE WERE

Eunice Harris

BY JENNIFER JENSEN

Dressed to the nines, adorned with accessories, and hair in a simple updo, Eunice Harris brings a lively personality and positive attitude to every room she enters. Her eyes are bright, and her smile is warm when she meets new and old friends. When meeting Harris, one might be surprised when they learn her age. She turned 102 years old in November.

Regularly joking that she is “there to stay,” Harris is the oldest resident at Starling at San Jose, although some might say she’s by far the most active.

And she doesn’t feel a day over 19. Besides the use of a walker, she is in great health.

“I feel great,” Harris said. “I feel well, and I sleep well.”

A good night’s sleep is something she attributes to her good health and longevity – that, and daily exercise at the facility’s on-site gym.

“I go to the gym every day. I’ve always exercised,” she said. “I have the gym all to myself. I don’t have to worry that I’ll have to wait, because I go and nobody’s there.”

She also doesn’t believe in taking medication. “I don’t take any medication. None,” she said. “It’ll kill you.”

Instead, Harris tries to eat healthy and stay active in whatever outings are planned at Starling: tours, restaurants, theater, the symphony or lunch. She also plays Rummikub every day and bingo a few times a week.

“I can do most anything I want to do,” she said. “There’s a lot of activity here, and you can do as much or as little as you want to. I do not stay in my room.”

Born on her grandparents’ homestead in a small town in Georgia, she lived on a large working dairy farm with her two sisters, Sara and Ardelia. While living in Hazelhurst, Georgia, she met her “good husband” of 64 years, D Quillian Harris Jr., who was in college and in town visiting a friend.

“I was in a drug store, and they passed the drug store,” said Harris. “He said to his brother, ‘There’s your girl.’ And his brother said, ‘No, that’s just a sister.’”

The two went on a date the next night and married a year and a half later.

“He always adored mother, and she adored him,” said Calhoun Harris, Eunice’s son.

The couple had four children – Dr. D Quillian “Duke” Harris, Calhoun Harris, Dorothy Hightower and Dr. W. Lester Harris – as well as seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Along with being a wife and mother, Eunice Harris was also a teacher for more than 30 years, including to all four of her children. When her son Calhoun was one of her students, he kept accidentally calling her “mother,” like at home, after which everyone started calling her “Mother Harris.” To this day, she still has students who



Eunice Harris with her four children: Lester Harris, Duke Harris, Dorothy Hightower and Calhoun Harris.



Eunice Harris with her sister, Sara Ellis James.



Eunice Harris celebrates her 102nd birthday.

send her birthday cards.

“I loved teaching,” she said. “If you didn’t like it, you shouldn’t be there.”

Harris was very active in her community. She was a member of the garden club and was responsible for planting 100 live oaks in her town. All the family were regular churchgoers at McRae United Methodist Church.

“She’s still an inspiration to all of us,”

–Calhoun Harris

“Growing up, we had our certain pew. I call it my pew” Harris said. “Sometimes I wonder who’s sitting there now.”

Harris’ husband passed away in June 2007. She moved to Jacksonville in 2017 – just down the road from her son – after she broke her pelvis and couldn’t live by herself any longer. She accepted the process with grace, just like when the time came to stop driving.

“I drove my car to Calhoun’s house, and I gave him my key, and we never said anything else about it,” she said.

Grace and longevity run in Harris’ family. Her younger sister, Sara, passed away 11 days before her 100th birthday in 2023. Her sister Ardelia lived until 93 before her passing in 2014, and their mother nearly made it to 100 as well – just a few months shy. Harris’ longest-living relative was her great-grandmother who lived to be 109 years old.

For this long life, Harris considers herself to be incredibly blessed.

“Everything has been pretty much smooth,” she said. “I make it sound like it was just perfect, but I guess there were all these challenges, such as deaths in the family. But even then, we can’t change those things, and you make the most out of it. I really have had a good life. Still am, thank goodness.”

“She’s still an inspiration to all of us,” said her son. “And she runs circles around everybody in this building.”

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Inside, Outside, All Around the Town



Lisa Lofton, Cookie Davis, Peggy Harrell Jennings



Stephen Dunn, President of FCPAP, with artist Randy Pitts



Woodworker Don Penny

BY PEGGY HARRELL JENNINGS

Inside

Jacksonville Artists' Guild members brought the outdoors inside at the recent reception for "My Town" at Happy Medium Books Café on Park Street. Lisa Lofton, Peggy Harrell Jennings and Leila Griffith's exhibit drew a cheerful crowd of friends, neighbors and art enthusiasts. Award-winning artist Ann Manry Kenyon was on hand to sign her beautiful book of portraits. The exhibit is up through May 26.

with relief that they were not required to grind and mix their paints with linseed oil before storing them in a pig's bladder sealed with string, as was the practice up until 1840. Thankfully, American artist John G. Rand came up with premixed tube paints, and the French developed the box or field easel, a portable easel with a built-in paint box.



Phyllis Appelby



Happy Medium Books store owner Dana Shuttles with Ann Manry Kenyon



Stephen Dunn, Trish Dougherty, Emily Mitchell, Burkelee Stokes and Doug Johnson



Gail Beveridge and Leslie Kruzicki painting on the front porch of the RAP Art House.



Lori Ann Sweet and Dana Doody



Jeanette Dennis



Dr. Jack Crump and Cheryl Phipps adopt a painting from the RAP Art House.



Gary McCulla with Stellers Gallery Director Claudia Burgi

Outside

More than 40 artists from the First Coast Plein Air Painters (FCPAP) were off the beaten path at the April 13 Brush with Nature event benefiting the Jacksonville Arboretum.

Although loaded down with brushes, paints, stools, easels, bug spray and other tools of the craft, the artists surely sighed

En plein air, the French term for "in the open air," grew in popularity with the invention of these convenient tools for painting outside. English artist John Constable gave the movement a kick start, then the French - most notably Monet, Renoir, Pissarro and other impressionists - embraced firsthand observations of natural light and the beauty of nature, and the plein air movement grew.

FCPAP is an organized, enthusiastic

community of artists who meet at CoRK Arts District the second Tuesday of each month, with "paint-outs" throughout Northeast Florida and South Georgia at least twice a month.

"By painting outside, our group enjoys camaraderie. We motivate and learn from each other, promote art, and explore nature in different parts of the community," said Jeannette Dennis.

The Brush with Nature event included an exhibit, activities for children, six different art demonstrations for the public and a quick-draw (2 hours) competition for the artists. The crowd enjoyed glorious weather as they meandered the paths, interacted with the artists and listened to music from Darren Ronan.

Learn more about FCPAP on Facebook



Chloe Wood with Missy Riley

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All Around the Town

Jacksonville Artists' Guild members participated in the RAP Art House during the 50th Anniversary of the Riverside Avondale Preservation Home Tour with 109 images plus clay, wood and jewelry, which drew more than 1,000 visitors to view the 42-artist exhibit. Art aficionados perused



Martha Brane with one of her paintings

the exhibit, added to their collections, chatted with demonstrating artists and admired the fabulous architecture of the 1918 home on Barrs Street.

Meanwhile, Shoppes of Avondale's Stellers Gallery hosted a reception for 11 artists from the South including Venetia resident Chloe Wood who was on hand to greet viewers and discuss her work. Martha Brane's bluebirds of happiness motif gave a whimsical touch to the interesting variety of work displayed, and Christy Kinard's glorious flowers were showstoppers.

French painter Pierre Bonnard once said, "Art will never be able to exist without nature." These artists' works reflect that sentiment.

The Beat Goes On:

DATE - May 1-June - Dawn Montgomery exhibit at Bold Bean Coffee Roasters, 869 Stockton St.

May 4 - Under the Oaks music jam, Mandarin Museum at Walter Jones Historic Park, 2-4 p.m.

May 4 - Ortega Village Arts Market, Cortez Park, 2922 Corinthian Ave., 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

May 4 and May 18 - Murray Hill Pop Up at Axe Champs on Edgewood Avenue, mhpopup.com

May 4-5 - Stars of Stage and Screen, 5 p.m., Saturday at St. Paul's by the Sea Episcopal Church, Sunday at Jacksonville Jewish Center, civicorchestrajax.org

May 8 - Escape to Margaritaville, Alhambra Dinner Theatre, alhambrajax.com

May 11 - RAP Garden Tour, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tour starts at the Garden Club, 1005 Riverside Ave., gardenclubjax.org/events

May 11 - Spring Uncorked, sip-and-stroll event with guided painting sessions, vendors and music, 4-7 p.m., jacksonvilleartboretum.org

May 13 - Presentation by artist Gail Beveridge, Lakeshore Woman's Club, 2352 Lakeshore Blvd. Register at jacksonvilleartistsguild.org.

May 20-July 26 - Songs of Summer exhibit from Jacksonville Artists' Guild at Main Library. Reception at Art Walk June 5.

Do you know of an upcoming event or accolade that helps pump the rhythmic Artbeat of Jacksonville? Send the announcement to us at editor@residentnews.net for consideration in *The Beat Goes On*.

Marsha Hatcher: On a Mission

BY GUEST CONTRIBUTOR
NANCY FELTON

Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church is featuring award-winning visual artist Marsha Hatcher in an exhibit entitled "On a Mission" May 1-July 31, 2024. A public reception honoring the artist will be held on Thursday, May 23 at 5 p.m. in the narthex gallery.

As a young child in South Georgia, Marsha Hatcher knew she was an artist. Experimenting with color while painting and drawing was her greatest joy. Only gradually did she understand that her artistic ability was an exceptional gift from God that could bless others. The introverted young artist began enriching lives around her, and she has continued sharing her gift by creating art in Jacksonville for the past 35 years.



Marsha Hatcher

During her husband's military career, Hatcher visited distant places. Much of her art captures the people and places she encountered along the way with a palpable vibrancy. Through paint on canvas or wood or stone, she draws the viewer into the soul of her subject. Hatcher's art is an extension of her identity as a black American woman of faith. Much as Asian and Latin American artists have depicted biblical characters in contextual form, Hatcher's paintings referencing scriptural texts use contextualized figures to relate to children of the African diaspora. She is committed to creating works that not only inspire viewers but also challenge them to think critically about the world around them.

Hatcher has twice been a recipient of an Art Ventures Grant from the Community Foundation of Northeast Florida. Her work has been exhibited at MOCA and the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens. She is a founding member of The Art Center Cooperative, Inc. and the Jacksonville Cultural Development Corporation, and her work can be viewed at msehat2.faso.com.



All That I Have: All That I Have by Marsha Hatcher

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The extended holiday 2023 visit by our tortoiseshell grandkitten, Bean & Cheese Taco (also known as Bean, Kibbles, The Kibs and Kibby), reminded me how terrible it is I've left neighborhood cats off my Resident Community gratitude list for so long. It's time to change that. This month, I am grateful for the feline friends in our midst – the Jellicle ones that keep rodents at bay and bring purrrrrfect joy into our lives.

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While Kibby was staying with us in December and January, she used our backyard trees and fencing like the expert-level parkour training center it was always meant to be. I've always thought our big oak tree in the center of the yard was beautiful, but Kibby helped me see it was actually another kitty-ecosystem out there. Each morning, I'd let her outside to charge up the tree like a coked-out Braveheart and pounce from limb to limb with crazed confidence. When that got boring, Kibbles moved to the fence tops and the neighbor's bamboo. She loved it. And I loved it when I could get her back inside safe and sound, because – what was I going to tell her adoring, world-traveling mother if I couldn't?

On one occasion, Bean explored "the other side of the fence" and met Romeo, the Barakats' nomad feline. Tails puffed, they greeted each other with long stares and throaty concerns.

Romeo makes lots of friends in our little corner of the neighborhood. He's a frequent guest at Granada Park, where he welcomes children and their parents. He also has been known to come inside homes to share his hospitality. One evening, I had some guests over for a presentation and Romeo let himself in for a listen, too. He checked everything out quietly, then left when nothing much interested him.

Romeo reminds me of our old cat, Charley. She's now buried under a tree in our side yard. You can see the little wooden cross coming out of the weeds if you look – and make snarky comments to yourself about how weedy and gross our beds are – hard enough on a stroll down Granada Boulevard. Charley was neither defined nor confined during her 10 years with us in Granada. She lived her days at the park and her evenings inside, where she enjoyed scaring young visitors with surprise hind-leg-paws-up attacks from under the entry table. She killed stuff, too.

We never had rodents when Charley was on the scene. An accomplished huntress she was. One night, I discovered a wet hamster carcass in front of our bedroom door (long, gross story). Thinking it was dog poop, I bunched up some toilet paper and picked it up to throw it outside before I realized it was one of the kids' hamsters – and threw it out into the corner of the yard anyway. The next morning, Charley had hunted up that hamster and proudly delivered its pitiful little remains to the backdoor mat. Dead or alive, no rodent was taking up residence in our backyard when Charley was around.

There are so many Charley stories, and so little time to unpack them all. She, like many cats in our community, has been the subject of "lost cat" flyers nailed to park trees, though most felines around here find their way back home eventually. They have starring roles to play in our little neck of the woods. They are legendary, star-quality beasts. The Stapleton's cat, Blaze, even has followers on the Gram. He lives at the beach now, sadly.

Of course, the same is true for cats all over town and on both sides of the river. Felines are the crazy characters that keep us all entertained whether we're in the 32207 or 32210. My husband, David, and his siblings grew up in Ortega with a cat named Woemmage (Meow backwards, because that's the way he spoke), aka Rad(ical) Cat. That poor cat went through the wringer. Various car and driveway incidents rendered him tail-less and with a malformed skull and eventually a urinary tract condition made things, well, messy. In the last months of his 20-year existence, Woemmage's claws got very long and klickity-klackity, and when I met him at my brother-in-law's house on Pine Street in the late-1990s, he just klickity-clackitied around on the hardwood floors, weomming and missing the litter box. Not the fairytale ending for such a neighborhood luminary! In

his heyday, however, he was quite the celebrity, prowling around his Yacht Club Road tree kingdom. At one point, there was talk of getting Wommage stuffed in a tree-leaping position, but I don't think those plans ever materialized. Thankfully, because I guarantee you it would be featured prominently in my brother-in-law's house – or ours, geez.

Our friends, the Aucters, have cats aplenty – and they always have funny stories about their kitties' misdeeds and acts of bravery. Though, their brood stays close to home, where they have been extraordinary emotional support animals to the fine young people who have grown up there.

I'm grateful our communities appreciate the feline friendliness so many cat neighbors have demonstrated over the years. Can you imagine a neighborhood without them? We'd be overrun with mice and rats and pretentious dogs. It would be so boring and poo-bah and pest-ridden. Blech! So let's put our paws and toe-beans together for the Jellicle kitties who add a lot more "Memory" to our neighborhoods because "Because Jellicles are and Jellicles do, Jellicles do and Jellicles would, Jellicles would and Jellicles can, Jellicles can and Jellicles do."

Susanna Barton does not like it when cats leave morsels in the yard because it contributes to her anxiety-ridden canine's chronic halitosis. 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 mygrandplans.com.



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Jacksonville University at 90: Welcoming a Future Decades in the Making

Nearly 90 years to its founding on April 16, 1934, Jacksonville University leaders, students, alumni, faculty, staff and community partners celebrated on the banks of the St. Johns River. It was fitting that Charter Day 2024 was marked by acts of service from hundreds of university volunteers across more than 35 northeast Florida non-profit organizations.

After all, building a better tomorrow — for students and our community — is what Jacksonville University does. As the University enters its ninth decade, a groundswell of fresh progress emanates from the Arlington campus.

In the last two years alone, Jacksonville University has realized several noteworthy achievements:

- Active and ongoing development supporting **Renew Arlington** alongside the City of Jacksonville, community organizations, citizens and other interested stakeholders working collectively for the betterment of Arlington.
- Launched the **Jacksonville University College of Law** and received provisional accreditation while expanding its Downtown presence through a 50,000-square-foot buildout in the historic Atlantic Bank Building.
- Established the city's **first-ever four-year medical school** which will welcome its inaugural class by 2026.
- Forged an **exclusive partnership with OCEARCH** offering students unprecedented opportunities for experiential learning and high-caliber research while affirming Jacksonville University's environmental stewardship through the Marine Science Research Institute. In addition, OCEARCH and Jacksonville University break ground this year on OCEARCH global headquarters in Mayport.
- Developed the **STEAM Institute** — a first-of-its-kind in the U.S. — 30,000 sq. ft. facility dedicated to interdisciplinary studies including animation, computing sciences, cybersecurity, data science, engineering, film, fintech, game design, geographic information systems, robotics, sustainability and visual design.
- The largest fundraising campaign in school history. **FUTURE. MADE. will raise \$175 million** to prepare students and our community to tackle the greatest challenges facing our world: climate change, cybersecurity, access to quality healthcare services, the value of artistic expression in an AI world, a shortage of nurses and pilots, a growing mental health crisis, and respectful, civil discourse that promotes a stronger democracy.

“ Jacksonville University has been a beacon of knowledge, innovation and philanthropy, serving as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of its students, the Arlington community, the City of Jacksonville, and the world. ”

– The Honorable Mayor Donna Deegan
Charter Day Proclamation, April 16, 2024

Across the U.S., many higher education institutions face compounding challenges such as cost, inequities, and accountability. Jacksonville University is agile, eluding these trends: doubling down to ensure the quality of its academic and immersive learning experiences while growing strategic partnerships that create a pipeline of opportunities for graduates and employers alike.

In our region, that includes aligning students' interests with the market needs of leading industries — healthcare, business and technology. The university leadership engages in routine conversations with its corporate partners including Baptist Health, Brooks Rehabilitation, Florida Blue, Mayo Clinic, Black Knight, and FIS among others, to maintain a proactive stance and forge new paths for the University's growth.



Student volunteers at Tree Hill during Charter Day 2024.



The Honorable Mayor Donna Deegan with President Tim Cost celebrating 2024 Charter Day.



President Tim Cost, Doug Baer and Michael Mayo announce Jacksonville University's four-year medical college.

“Collaboration is key to our approach,” notes University President Tim Cost. “We actively engage with various boards, advisers, and industry leaders to stay informed about market trends and to ensure our programs remain relevant and responsive. This collaboration extends to regional organizations like the Civic Council and Chamber of Commerce, and JAXUSA where we play an active role in economic development discussions and initiatives.”

Furthermore, the university prioritizes students' needs and aspirations. Students can customize their education with the Pathways of Distinction (POD) program, allowing them to create a unique degree path with real-world application based on their specific interests by blending various majors and minors.

Why is this important? Our city will achieve more than we ever imagined possible as we develop and retain high-quality market-ready talent, attract and support the growth of industry-leading businesses, invest in a thriving culture that celebrates and serves our community, and consciously create global citizens and stewards of our future.

For 90 years, Jacksonville University has maintained a reputation of excellence and expanded the legacy of the leadership it produces and retains to the benefit of our community. According to President Tim Cost — they're just getting started.

Indeed, the future is made by those who invest in it.

You can learn more about Jacksonville University's vision for the future at ju.edu/futuremade

LOCAL FOLKS



Rayne, Stella, Jessica Meyer and Sonya Hanlin at Niagara Falls.



Rayne and Stella with their mom, Sonya, at Florida Caverns State Park.



Sonya Hanlin at the Grand Canyon.



Sonya Hanlin with her microgreens.

Sonya Hanlin

BY JENNIFER JENSEN

Yoga therapy is not only Sonya Hanlin's passion and career, but also what she attributes to shaping her into who she is.

"I really credit the practice of yoga therapy as to what helped me evolve into the person that I get to be today, which is a much more stable and present and available adult," she said. "It's one of the most natural things I've ever done. It's always felt comfortable."

A mother to, Rayne, 16, and Stella, 9, Hanlin was born and raised in Jacksonville and found yoga about 13 years ago after leaving a store manager position at Gate gas station. She didn't realize how much stress the job was causing and how much it was masking her mental health imbalances.

"When I left, I sort of crashed and became really deep into depression and my anxiety was really bad," Hanlin said. "My mental health was really struggling in that period of my life."

Someone suggested she try a yoga class, and she ended up falling in love with it. She joined Soluna Yoga Spa's Energy Exchange team. While in this program, one could exchange a small amount of work before and after class for a free class.

"It really helped me get deep into the practice of yoga, because I was able to attend more classes," Hanlin said. "It wasn't long until I really started to notice just profound shifts in myself and my mind, my emotions."

She then found the practice of yoga therapy, her now-specialty. While training for yoga therapy at the Amrit

Yoga Institute, she was also growing her role at Soluna Yoga Spa, eventually becoming the studio manager. Soon, clients and students started asking Hanlin when she was going to start teaching classes, which she has now been doing for six years. Then, in 2023, Hanlin won Folio Weekly's best yoga instructor.

"I didn't expect to be a teacher, but it just was the natural progression at Soluna to go from being a student to being a teacher," she said.



Sonya Hanlin teaches a workshop at Soluna Yoga Spa.

Yoga therapy is a type of body psychology, Hanlin said. The theory of body psychology is that inside of the body, people store incomplete experiences. Maybe these situations were too stressful or too traumatic to handle.

"The philosophy is that we store stress trauma emotions inside of the body, and the longer that we store those things, the more we become out of balance in our physical, mental and emotional aspects of life," Hanlin said.

Yoga therapy helps facilitate the process of feeling those experiences, allowing those experiences to have their say and their expression.

"That's really where I found a lot of profound healing and just the ability to connect to a part of myself that I didn't know was inside of me," she said. "That enabled a lot of personal empowerment, strength and confidence."

Hanlin also owns a microgreens business called Be Well Greens Company, which she bought in 2021 with her partner, Jessica Meyer, who had farmed in the past. They grow different types of microgreens, pea shoots and sunflower shoots, and sell the products at two different farmer's markets.

"To be in a farmer's market setting and to be able to connect with people on a personal level about their nutrition, their health, where their food comes from, is so important and so fun," Hanlin said. "A lot of people have such a disconnect from their food."

Prior to Be Well Greens Company, she co-owned a produce company with Meyer. At the time, their entire front yard was devoted to growing greens.

"We essentially called it the yard market," Hanlin said. "And we sold greens to people who passed by or wanted to talk about food."

Be Well Greens Company has been well received, and many people in active chemotherapy treatments are buying their products because of their cancer-fighting properties.

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- Referrals to community providers
- Brief treatment options

Conditions We Assess

The PATH program offers online support for many conditions and problems, including:

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- Anxiety
- Bed-wetting/soiling accidents
- Behavior problems
- Mood issues
- Bullying
- Depression
- Divorce/separation
- Impulsivity
- Obsessive compulsive behaviors
- Oppositional behaviors
- Risk-taking behaviors (e.g., sexting, substance use, excessive use of social media/gaming)
- Sadness
- Extreme shyness or selective mutism
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Patient Story

"There is no way we would have made it without this program. It saved our lives," says one Jacksonville mom. PATH helped this family work through a stressful life event that was causing mental health symptoms in the children. "Everything we were experiencing is no longer there, and that's due to the Nemours Children's PATH Program."

How It Works

Request an appointment by calling **904.697.3600, option 2**. You may also schedule through the **Nemours app** or scan the **QR code** below. Appointments are scheduled within a week, Monday-Saturday with early morning and evening times offered. Same-day appointments may be available. The parent or guardian and child must be present for the first appointment. A visit can cost as little as \$0 or a copay, depending upon your insurance. Ask your insurance about coverage for telehealth.



Nemours KidsHealth

For more resources, visit **KidsHealth.org** from Nemours KidsHealth — a pioneer and leader in pediatric health content, trusted by millions worldwide for more than 25 years to help keep families healthy.

RESIDENTS Junior



Davis Johnson

Johnson Named to Florida Dairy Farmers Academic All-State Team

Bishop Kenny senior Davis Johnson was named to the 30th Annual Florida Dairy Farmers Academic All-State Team by the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA). This is a recognition program that honors 24 graduating student-athletes, 12 girls and 12 boys, who excel in both athletics and academics. The honorees will be awarded a total of \$50,000 in scholarships.

Johnson, who runs cross country and track, was a member of the FHSAA 2023 State Championship Team. She maintains a 4.0 GPA and ranks third in her senior class of 314 students. She is a National Merit Semifinalist Scholar and a member of the English, Mu Alpha Theta, Rho Kappa, Science, Spanish, and National Honor Societies. She is the secretary of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and is involved with the Campus Ministry and Spanish Clubs.

Davis will attend Emory University and plans to continue her athletic career at the next level.



Will Law volunteers at the Black Hammock Island trailhead through Timucuan Parks Foundation's Spring Self-Guided Volunteer Cleanup Program.

Timucuan Parks Foundation Offers Self-Guided Volunteer Options

Timucuan Parks Foundation (TPF) is offering students and others community service hours through participation in its Spring Self-Guided Volunteer Cleanup Program. From now through the end of June, students and community members can pick up litter at Jacksonville's wilderness parks and preserves to earn two hours of community service per event.

To participate, visit timucuanparks.org/parks to choose one of the Jacksonville-area parks for cleanup. Parks not listed on the site are also eligible. Participants are required to pick up litter for 1½ or more hours, and the work must be documented through photographs. For the registration form, full list of instructions and link to submit volunteer hours, visit timucuanparks.org/self-guided. Earned community service hours will be confirmed through email.

The Spring 2024 program runs from April 1 through June 30.



Madeline Ferretti of Green Cove Springs stands next to her Essential Cupboards/Blessings Box project, which yielded her a 2024 Girl Scout Gold Award.

Girls Scouts Honored with Gold Awards

Girl Scouts of Gateway Council recognized 13 members of the 2024 Girl Scout Gold Award class who earned the highest award in Girl Scouting, the Gold Award, on Sunday, April 21 at the Florida State University Alumni Center Ballroom.

The 2024 honorees identified issues in their communities, took action, and found or created solutions to earn their awards, addressing real-life problems such as environmental sustainability, racial justice, mental and physical well-being, and gender inequality in STEM.

The Council's 2024 Gold Award Girl Scouts are Laney Clark of Cantonment, Ryan Clark of Cantonment, Kristen Cooper of Gainesville, Kendal Coreil of Panama City Beach, Kyra Creech of Palm Coast, Augustina DeLapp of Gulf Breeze, Madeline Ferretti of Green Cove Springs, Claire Fisher of Gainesville, Ann Harbert of Saint Johns, Anna Lucas of Ponte Vedra Beach, Abigail Minchin of Gulf Breeze, Paloma Rambana of Tallahassee and Sierra Steffen of Gainesville.

"I am honored to be working with such an amazing group of individuals who truly live out our mission and inspire others each and every day. Working with these 13 Gold Award Girl Scouts has been one of the highlights of my year, and I know they will continue shine bright wherever life takes them," said Gaby Fraxedas, Girl Experience Manager.

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Nature Week

WEEK 4: June 24th - 28th
Mythical Creatures Week

WEEK 5: July 1st - July 5th
Pirate, Prince and Princess

WEEK 6: July 8th - 12th
Lego Legends

WEEK 7: July 15th - 19th
Jump Ropes and Hula Hoops

WEEK 8: July 22nd - 26th
Super Mario Week

WEEK 9: July 29th - Aug 2nd
Crazy Sports Week

WEEK 10: Aug 5th - 9th
Ooey Goopy Science Week

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The inaugural Bolles Middle School tennis team.

Middle School Serves Up Tennis Team

The Bolles School is serving up a new level for the 2024 tennis program with the addition of an inaugural middle school team. Led by Coach Francesca Fusinato, who also serves as the varsity girls' coach, the 2024 coed team included 12 players. The season produced a 3-1 record, highlighted by an 8-0 win over Episcopal in the program's first-ever match.

"Our first season as a Bolles middle school tennis team was a true success," Fusinato said. "The passion, dedication and commitment they brought to the program was outstanding during both practices and matches. Their sense of belonging to this team fueled each practice with positivity and great work ethic."

Bolles now offers tennis from the PreK to upper school levels.



Students from Episcopal School of Jacksonville outside of Hope's Closet Thrift, one of their service day recipients.

Developing "Doers of Good"

Episcopal School of Jacksonville (ESJ) marked its annual Celebrating Service Day, April 11, with service projects across all three campuses.

The Munneryn Campus students packed food for Hunger Fight, assisted at Hope's Closet, Sanctuary on 8th, the Kate Amato Foundation, Hope Haven and the American Cancer Society, as well as hosted students from North Florida School of Special Education for a field day and games.

St. Mark's Campus students served those within walking distance of the school, including the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office Ortega Stop Station, ESJ Security, St. Mark's Episcopal Church and Angels for Allison. Students wrote and illustrated letters of encouragement to homebound church parishioners, police officers and grieving families, and gave out personalized crafts and crosses.

The Beaches Campus collaborated with Pablo Towers in Jacksonville Beach to donate puzzle books to the residents and bring entertainment from the school's second graders.

"Each year, on Celebrating Service Day, we take the opportunity to remember and put into practice ESJ's founders' goal of forming 'doers of good,'" said Andy Farmer, ESJ Associate Chaplain.



William Holland

Bittner, Holland Earn All-State, Scholarships



Hannah Bittner

Hannah Bittner and William Holland, both seniors at Episcopal School of Jacksonville, were selected to the Florida Dairy Farmers Academic All-State Team and will each receive a \$1,700 scholarship. Bittner plays varsity basketball and varsity lacrosse. Holland plays varsity football, varsity baseball and has been a member of the basketball team.

To be eligible for this award, students must be a graduating senior with a minimum 3.5 unweighted grade point average and earned a minimum of two varsity letters in at least two different sports during their junior and senior years. The 2024 Florida Dairy Farmers Academic All-State Team selection committee evaluated scholarship nominees based on their athletic participation, academic record, extracurricular activities, community service and essay.

Students Embark on Overnight Adventure



Fifth graders ready themselves for a ropes challenge course through Pathfinder Outdoor Education.

Bolles Grade 5 students from the Lower School Whitehurst and Ponte Vedra Beach Campuses traveled to Starke, Florida, April 4-5 for an overnight field trip with Pathfinder Outdoor Education. This organization's mission is to deliver fun, challenging adventures that help people learn about themselves, others and the environment. The students participated in a challenge course, climbed trees and rock walls and hiked through the wilderness before roasting s'mores over the campfire.



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In Loving Memory

DR. GEORGE SEDDING TROTTER

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It's not often that someone lives a life so well and long to find themselves recognized as a legend. Still, Dr. George Trotter had that privilege, and those who knew him would agree that the "Energizer Bunny" was a dynamo of fun-filled activity. Many can attest to his humor, warmth, wit, joie de vivre and loving personality: his patients – many of whom spanned 50 years – his friends, tennis buddies, ballet besties, his loving family, and his devoted wife of 65 years, Ann, to whom he referred to jokingly as Saint Ann for "putting up with him."

Every phone conversation ended with an abrupt "Love ya, bye." (Perhaps even while you were still speaking...) His cheery whistle and "be of good cheer" admonitions will be missed by all who knew him, as well as his oft-outrageous antics and fashion flair. As a former Best Dressed Man in Jacksonville award winner, he was usually spotted with an ascot and matching hanky tucked cavalierly into his jacket pocket.

Dr. Trotter loved the limelight and gave his all to everything he did, including the legendary Trotter family Halloween parties. His dance performances – from classical pas de deux to Captain Hook in "Peter Pan" – as Vincent van Gogh, a dandy in "Bus Stop Boogie," a king or a giant rabbit were endless, and he would don a costume at the drop of a hat (and he had many!)

Dr. Trotter's medical practice of

60-plus years was old-fashioned doctoring at its best. He loved his patients and treated everyone like family. His generosity knew no bounds, and his loving concern did not stay at the office when the day was over; Dapper "Ole Doc Trotter" would happily arrive for a house call with his expert care, humorous banter and antique physician bag in tow.

A native of Jacksonville, Dr. Trotter was born at St. Vincent's Hospital in Riverside, where he later did his medical residency in 1959. He attended St. Paul's Catholic School and was active at St. Matthews Catholic Church. He traveled the world, showed interest in those around him, was enthusiastic, hardworking, dedicated to excellence, and a true gentleman.

A friend remarked, "George lived life to the fullest. He set the bar for all of us for how to live our lives."

Dr. Trotter adored his wife and children George, Junior, Kathleen (Dr. Eduardo Balbona,) John (Kris Fallin,) Susan (Michael Perkey,) Mary Ann (Douglas Moran), and nine grandchildren, and he was proud of their many accomplishments. His influence in the community is long-reaching and multifaceted: Duval County Medical Society, The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Northeast Florida Aids Society, the American Cancer Society and other medical-related boards of directors. He also founded We Care Jax, which

annually gives the George S. Trotter, M.D. Founder's awards for medical professionals, philanthropy and service. He has planted the seeds for many organizations that continue to bring blessings to many people.

His passion for the arts and dance helped establish the Community Nutcracker Ballet in 1992 and the "Dancing Doctor" performed many roles in the Nutcracker, while also serving as president and CEO from 2005-2012, during which he helped move the organization forward and raise funds for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Vision is Priceless, Dreams Come True, and others. He performed the role of Herr Drosselmeyer for so many years that the role became synonymous with his name. A lifelong athlete who enjoyed snow skiing, swimming, basketball, and tennis, he began ballet classes in his 40s. He then performed with the Jacksonville Concert Ballet in classical and comedic roles. His repertoire even included hilarious skits at Ye Mystic Reveller's Ball.

Dr. Trotter was dedicated to walking the walk of his Christian faith by helping the less fortunate and sowing kindness to all. He was beloved by a multitude of people, and his friends and family have wonderful memories to carry them onward. We can all rest assured that Ole Doc Trotter is setting things straight in heaven and "dancing before the Lord with all his might."



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by Elaine Ehlichman

In our December article, we wrote about grief during the holiday season, and with Mother's Day coming up this month, we wanted to revisit some of the different ways you can handle your grief while also honoring Mom. We have compiled a list of ideas and activities to bring you comfort and help you approach this holiday in a way that feels right for you.

Honor Mom with her favorite things.

Participating in small acts is a great way to honor your mother while still being mindful of your grief. Gestures like planting her favorite flower, cooking one of her treasured meals, listening to an album she adored, or watching a favorite family movie are all wonderful and gentle ways to remember your mother.

Write a letter.

When someone we love is no longer present, multitudes of ways exist for us to continue feeling connected to that person. Writing a letter is just one of those ways, and it is a beautiful chance for you to tell your mother everything that has been happening in your life. From exciting job news to the new bakery you visited last week, you can share any details that come to mind.

Take inspired action.

If your mother supported a charity or organization, spending the day volunteering there can be both a tribute and a significant act of kindness. If your mother wasn't involved with a specific group, try bringing to mind her interests and hobbies. For

example, did she love animals or enjoy the beach? Volunteering at an animal shelter or signing up to remove trash at the beach are both ways you can turn her passions into memorial gestures. Alternatively, if the thought of volunteering is overwhelming, many organizations also accept various kinds of donations.

Spend time at your mother's gravesite or memorial location.

Whether your mother is buried or had her ashes placed at a cemetery or other memorial site, many people find visiting their loved ones on holidays and other special occasions to be healing. If the idea of writing a letter didn't resonate with you, perhaps an in-person catch-up will. Many individuals find comfort in talking aloud to their loved ones, updating them on their lives and asking for guidance. Feel free to bring a blanket and a snack if you intend to stay for a while. If you are visiting a cemetery, bringing flowers to decorate Mom's gravesite is another way to honor her and surround her with some extra beauty on this day.

Get together with family and friends to share stories.

Spending time with others who knew your mother is a moving way to celebrate her memory. Taking turns sharing heartwarming stories allows everyone to come together and remember their favorite moments. Additionally, try transforming this get-together into a potluck, where each person brings a dish that reminds them of Mom. It can be a meal she used to make or something she simply would have enjoyed.

Hold a memorial service.

Holding a service to remember Mom on Mother's Day is another impactful way to honor her. Lighting memorial candles, creating a memory board with photos and inspiring quotes, or inviting family and friends to participate in sharing kind words are all great options. Inviting a leader from your religious or cultural affiliation to attend the service may also be helpful and reassuring.

Find a distraction.

Sometimes, engaging in activities that bring attention to a loss might be too painful, or it might be too soon to participate without feeling overwhelmed. If this is the case, keep in mind that these feelings are normal, and it is perfectly okay to direct your attention elsewhere. The grieving process looks different for everyone, so remember to give yourself the time and space you need to heal. Ensure you take care of yourself during this time.

We hope these ideas for Mother's Day are helpful for anyone experiencing grief during this holiday. You can also apply these suggestions to other occasions, so feel free to keep them within reach whenever you may need them. As always, we here at Hardage-Giddens are available to provide grief resources and support for you at any time.

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