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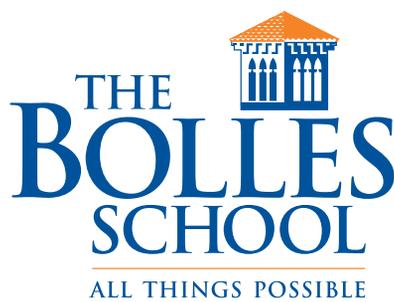
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About this magazine

The First Coast Register is a bimonthly general interest magazine published by The Ponte Vedra Recorder and OPC News, LLC. The magazine can be found throughout the upscale areas of greater Jacksonville. For advertising inquiries, call 904.285.8831.

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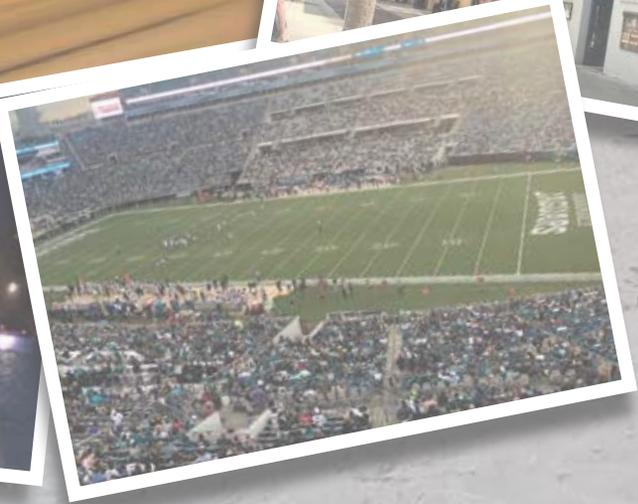
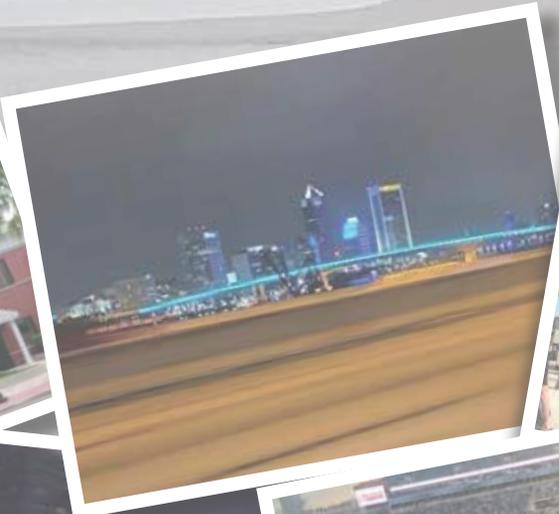
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on the cover



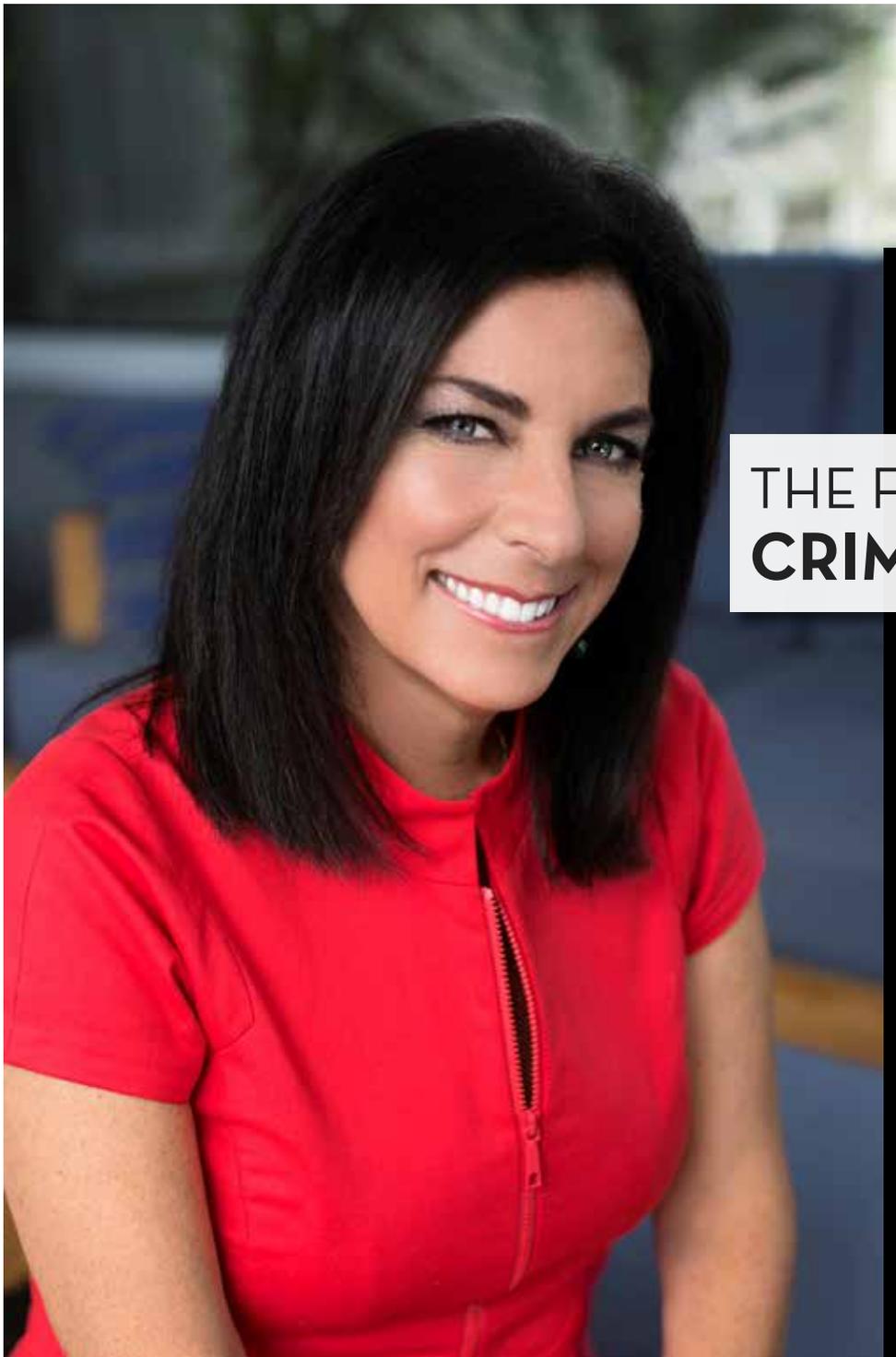
The cover is artwork by Tom Schifanella, "Mary Pickford, 2021," which is part of the Faces of the Alcazar exhibition that opens in October at the Lightner Museum. For more about this show and others, go to page 31

FACES OF *The First Coast*



Faces Of The First Coast is an exclusive feature for First Coast Register readers to get to know prominent business leaders in Northeast Florida's coastal communities. *If you would like to be featured in Faces of the First Coast, please contact us at (904) 285-8831.*

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FACES OF THE
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Janet Johnson is committed to aggressively defending people accused in all criminal matters in state and federal court. In practice since 1994, she is a member of the Florida Bar, The Federal Bar, Colorado Bar, as well as the Florida Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

She has been on the faculty of FACDL “Blood, Breath & Tears” annual DUI seminar. Ms. Johnson has been awarded the AV preeminent rating™ from Martindale-Hubble® and was named a fellow to the prestigious Litigation Counsel of America™, as well as one of the ten best criminal defense attorneys nationally for client satisfaction by the American Institute of Criminal Law Attorneys. She also appears as a legal commentator on CNN and HLN.

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One of Us!

as told to
SHAUN RYAN

SHANNON BLANKINSHIP

As executive director for Riverside Avondale Preservation, Shannon Blankinship is an important advocate for one of Jacksonville's most unique and historic communities.

Tell me about Riverside Avondale Preservation and what it does.

Riverside Avondale Preservation is the lead advocate and facilitator for Riverside Avondale's historic neighborhoods, vibrant local commercial districts, public spaces and welcoming community.

Since 1974, we have worked to:

- Preserve Riverside Avondale's historic fabric and unique character.
- Promote local businesses, arts and culture.
- Advocate with and for the neighborhood.
- Celebrate community.

As executive director, what are some of your responsibilities?

RAP has been around for almost 50 years. My job is to continue this legacy and the fantastic traditions we've put in place. We host events like the annual Home Tour and Luminaria. Our home tour has been cancelled the past two years due to Covid, and we have a lot of work to do to bring it back. We launched a new event, the Garden Tour, in 2020, and it was very successful. People love gaining inspiration from the way their neighbors have decided to renovate and improve their homes. These events celebrate that hard work and improve the neighborhood. It is also my job to tell the story of our neighborhood and ensure our history stays alive. Without pride and advocacy in what makes our neighborhood unique, we could lose some of these important elements to growth or to cut costs.

Photos provided by
SHANNON BLANKINSHIP

What do you like most about your new position?

My commute. It sounds silly, but after working to speak for the largest river in the state of Florida for a decade, I appreciate being able to inspect and follow up on the issues we are tracking at a moment's notice. I'm excited to help enhance, promote, and restore our neighborhood and instill a sense of place that I hope my kids will appreciate.

Tell me a little about your background, especially your work with St. Johns Riverkeeper and Resilient Jax.

I came to St. Johns Riverkeeper right out of law school, and I wanted to help

communicate our complicated legal issues into plain language so that our followers, mostly on social media, could understand the importance of our work. I would practice explaining nutrient pollution to groups of 50 on a boat with dolphins jumping behind me. It was a great combination of fun experiences and devastating pollution incidents that caused us all to work harder for the river. Protecting the St. Johns is something I will always do.

At Resilient Jax, I worked hard to build a coalition of diverse interests concerned about climate change. In order to focus on the river, I wanted to ensure we had leadership elevating the



Shannon Blankinship
at Riverside Park

need for energy reform, environmental justice, food insecurity, trees and more. As chair of Resilient Jax, I helped communicate the work being done by the City of Jacksonville with the nonprofit community. Mostly though, I was trying to bring the nonprofit community together around climate change, and resiliency is where we are seeing overwhelming momentum and funding. I am proud of the direction the coalition continues to make.

What do you like most about living in the Riverside and Avondale area?

My favorite thing about living in the urban core is walkability to parks, restaurants, coffee shops, libraries and everything else. If you haven't already, take an Architecture and History Tour of the neighborhood with Go Tuk'n and you will notice important details on the buildings in our neighborhood that make each house unique. No matter how many years you've lived here you will find something special, and learning why, who and when these flourishes were installed



Shannon Blankinship stands in front of the office for Riverside Avondale Preservation, located inside the Buckland House. The house was previously owned by the George Buckland family for nearly 80 years. From 1918 to the 1940s it was The French Primary School, operated by mother-daughter team Grace and Mary Buckland.

is like living in an art museum.

Also, I love the work that we do to promote and strengthen our small businesses. Five Points and Avondale and all of our little merchant areas are full of small businesses that make Jacksonville authentic and unique. We also operate the Riverside Arts Market every Saturday, which builds a storefront for over 100 small businesses including farmers, artists, makers, bakers, performers, musicians and more. I am so proud of the Riverside Arts Market and thrilled to be a part of seeing it expand under the leadership of the senior market manager, John Silveira.

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time I like to take my kids to Summer at the Cummer, the beach, or to the Riverside Arts Market on Saturdays. My favorite meal in town is the Tom Yum Soup from Hawkers, happy hour at Bread & Board, and I love brewery yoga at Fishweir Brewing.

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FUN LEARNING IS DAMENTAL

Local educational toy brand to open retail store in Nocatee in January 2022



photos provided by SAFARI LTD.

Educational toy brand Safari Ltd. is planning to open its first interactive retail store, ToyTopia, in the Nocatee Town Center. The store will offer an immersive, modern shopping experience where children are encouraged to explore and interact with toys off the shelves.

The family-owned creator of Toys That Teach has been making educational figurines for nearly 40 years and recently relocated its headquarters to Jacksonville.

As parents, locals and third-generation business owners, the Pariente family plans to make ToyTopia a place where families can come together, play and take home quality toys.

When the Pariente family moved into the Nocatee community, they decided to create a much-needed local toy store in their new home.

"The goal is to become the 'Cheers' of toy stores for Nocatee," said Christina Pariente, president of Safari Ltd. and mother of three. "Seriously! Toy stores should be fun. We want to be the place families go to relax and let their kids' imaginations run wild — you know, get all that energy out before bedtime!"

ToyTopia will carry the Safari Ltd. signature fan-favorite collections, which are carefully crafted and non-toxic. For years, the company's animal, dinosaur and mythical creature toys have been loved and trusted by parents, educators and creators alike. ToyTopia will also feature other trusted brands and products curated by the Parientes, such as BiOBUDDi plant-based building blocks, Folkmanis plush puppets and other popular, eco-friendly brands for kids of all ages.

The local toy store hopes to become a neighborhood hangout by hosting interactive sessions for kids, parent/child classes and more.



"We truly believe in the value of combining creativity, learning and imaginative play, especially in a world increasingly filled with screens," said Pariente.

The store is scheduled to open in January 2022, but its owners aren't ruling out the possibility of an early opening in time for the holiday season.

ToyTopia will be an extension of Safari Ltd., which has been teaching kids about the natural world and encouraging its conservation through the joy of play. The company's sculptors and artists meticulously research every animal's anatomy — including consulting with paleontologists and zoologists — prior to creating a lifelike model. Each product is then manufactured and delicately hand-painted, meaning no two Safari Ltd. figures are exactly alike.

"We look forward to being a neighborhood hangout where children can unleash their imaginations and create memorable moments in an experimental space," said Pariente. "Nocatee is a perfect community to launch our first retail store, and we can't wait to welcome kids and their families to ToyTopia!"

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WELCOME Back to School!

Help kids follow these safety tips along the way to their first day and beyond!

Teach your child to never talk to strangers. Go over specific scenarios, such as a motorist asking for directions or assistance, or a stranger with a friendly pet, that may trick kids into interacting with a stranger.

Do a practice walk to school or the bus stop with your child on or before the first day of school, choosing a route with the fewest street crossings and avoiding deserted areas. If you can't accompany your child to school or the bus stop, coordinate with a nearby schoolmate so kids can walk together.

Make sure your child knows your cell phone number and place of work, as well as his or her home address. Kids should also have a backup phone number for another trusted adult, and know to call 911 in the event of an emergency.

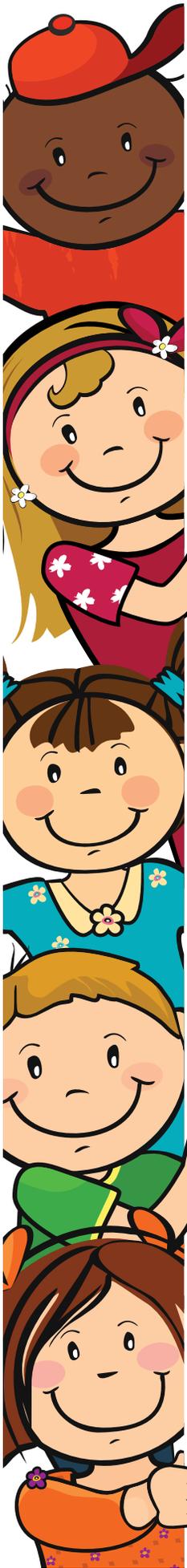
Teach kids what traffic signals and signs mean, and communicate the importance of obeying them. Remind kids to carefully cross streets at crosswalks, looking both ways twice and never entering the street from between parked cars.

Go over school bus rules with kids, reminding them to stay seated throughout the ride. Teach kids to never approach or prepare to exit the bus until it comes to a complete stop, and to only cross at least 10 giant steps in front of the bus when exiting, so the driver can see them.

Make sure your child's backpack weighs no more than 10% of his or her body weight. Select a pack with padded shoulder straps and a hip or chest belt, and make sure your child uses all straps to evenly distribute weight.

Teach kids to remain alert at all times when walking anywhere. It is dangerous for kids to be distracted by headphones or smartphones while walking to school.

Kids riding bikes to school should always wear their helmets, riding single file on the right side of the road. Make sure kids know the hand signals to use when turning, and to walk bikes across crosswalks.





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DA Graduates Pursuing Their Passion



James Boyd (2006) completed his BFA at SUNY Purchase College in 2010 and traveled the world performing with music icons Elton John, Lady Gaga, Mary J. Blige, and Bruce Springsteen. Today, James is an international faculty member of the Manhattan Dance Project, and a full-time faculty member of the Troy University Theatre and Dance Department.



Tanase Popa (2002) a University of North Carolina School of the Arts graduate is a producer on iconic television series and films including "Glee", "American Horror Story", "Pose", "Halston" and many others with Ryan Murphy Productions. He has been nominated for five Emmys and is the recipient of an AFI Award and a Peabody Award.



Sarit Sandler (2015) is a nationally recognized filmmaker working with PBS, The Obama Foundation, The Discovery Channel and the TLC Network. Sandler was recently chosen as a 2020 YoungArts Sundance Film Festival Fellow, and completed a documentary filmed in Australia.



JuCoby Johnson (2011) a University of Minnesota graduate and a successful playwright and actor, just accepted the 2021-2022 McKnight Fellow in Playwriting and is an Artistic Associate at The Jungle Theater. His plays include How It's Gon Be (Underdog Theater, 2019), ...but you could've held my hand (Developed at the 2020 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference), Revelations (Playing On Air, 2021) among others. He has been seen onstage at The Guthrie Theater, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, The Jungle Theater, Ten Thousand Things Theatre Company, and many more.

For more information visit DA-arts.org
2445 San Diego Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32207

Did You Know?

Back-to-School Facts & Figures



\$848

expected average back-to-school spending per family in the U.S. for grades K-12. NRF research shows college students and their families plan to spend an average of \$1,200 on college or university items.

As summer winds down and kids across North America get ready to start the new school year, here are some fun facts and numbers to test your knowledge!



APPLES

The tradition of giving apples to teachers originated in 16th century Denmark, where parents would often give teachers baskets of apples to pay for their children's schooling.



51.1 million
students

were enrolled in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools for the 2019/2020 school year

3%

Average amount of decline for enrollment in public schools between the 2019/2020 school year and the 2020/2021 school year.

480,000

yellow school buses transport children to and from school in the U.S. These buses carry 26 million students each day.

City Montessori School

Located in India, the world's largest school teaches 52,000 students in 1,050 classrooms.

1858

the year Hymen L. Lipman patented the first pencil with an attached eraser

The use of this invention in classrooms was at first controversial, as teachers thought the built-in erasers would cause students to be careless and make more mistakes. Before the invention of the rubber eraser, moist balls of bread were used to erase mistakes!

University of Al-Karaouine

Founded in 859 AD in Morocco, it is the oldest existing and continually operating school in the world.

SCHOOL TIME

Test-taking tips

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, test anxiety is a form of performance anxiety that can affect even the most prepared students. The ADAA notes that several factors, including fear of failure and a poor test history, can contribute to test anxiety, the presence of which can make it difficult for students to concentrate and may even cause physical symptoms like headache and nausea. Parents of students who are anxious about upcoming tests can share the following test-taking tips with their children, courtesy of the ADAA.

Prioritize preparation. Test preparation should begin well in advance of the test, as cramming the night before may make students feel unprepared and less confident in their knowledge of the material. In addition,

studying at least a week or two in advance of the test date affords students the opportunity to take practice tests in conditions similar to those in real testing situations. That familiarity can calm any nerves they may typically experience when taking exams.

Develop an effective test-taking strategy. The ADAA recommends students answer the questions they know first before returning to more difficult questions. Doing so may contribute to students' confidence and calm their nerves as they approach the rest of the test. When tests include essay portions, students can outline their essays before they begin to write so they have a clearer idea of what they want to say and how they want to say it.

Get enough sleep and eat healthy before the exam. Stress and anxiety are more difficult



to cope with when the body is tired, so parents should encourage their children to get adequate sleep the night before an exam. In addition, provide healthy foods for kids to eat prior to the exam so they are not lethargic or hungry once the test begins.

Don't be afraid to seek help. Plenty of students experience test anxiety, and many schools offer programs designed to help students overcome test-taking fears. Making use of these programs is a great way for kids to improve their testing performance.



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5 SISTERS SPIRIT VODKA

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TABLE TALK

with LEIGH CORT

The four Culhane sisters came to America from Limerick, Ireland, one by one during an era of opportunity, taking time to visualize and meticulously strategize an authentic Irish pub when they opened their first Culhane's in Jacksonville in 2005. They put their vision to work as Lynda, Michelle, Mary Jane and Áine gathered their courage, pooled their talents and created two acclaimed restaurants that have been a gathering place and destination of great food, great fun and a place called "home" to their patrons and their families.

Over the years, the sisters felt the loving support of their clientele, recognizing their own spirit gave them a sense of connection to the local community. Shortly thereafter, they gained national recognition through Guy Fieri's timely visit to dine at Culhane's, where he met the sisters and featured them on national TV. Everything that the Culhane's created was welcomed in Northeast Florida, especially in 2019



The Culhane sisters: Michelle (from left), Mary Jane, Áine and Lynda.
photos provided by LEIGH CORT

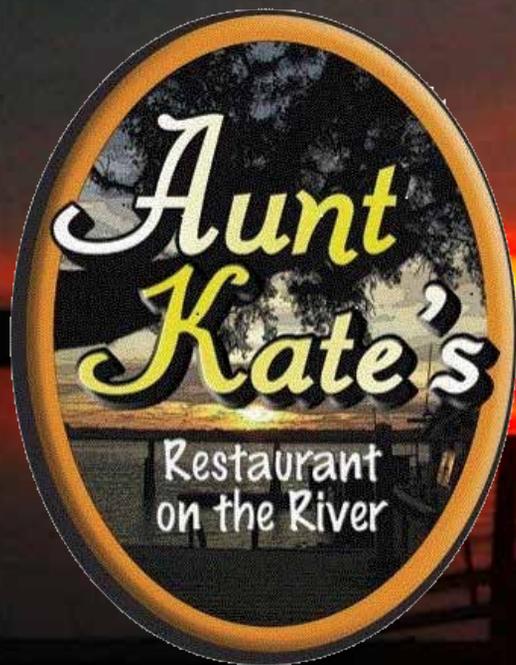
when they decided to explore and launch their own branded vodka with a proprietary recipe and trademark.

Honoring their mother Kitty, who was living on the family farm in Ireland with their fifth sister Sarah, this new project became a passionate mission to honor all of the nurturing women who came before them to become who they are today — strong, resilient, loyal, fun-loving, hard-working and independent.

The first inkling came from Michelle, who led her sisters to imagine their own vodka that would give them an opportuni-

ty to inspire and connect people from around the world. Each time they convened to discuss vodka, it triggered childhood memories — the smell of seaweed, picking periwinkles from the seaweed, the cliffs of Ballybunion at their grandparents' house — a connection to home. The goal became to create new happy memories with an exceptional premium vodka at an affordable price that might even afford the sisters a chance to travel home more often.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■



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They began by surrounding themselves with many amazing mentors who helped them with their vision, and assist them with how to develop a recipe, branding, legal and accounting counsel, production, distribution, marketing and onward. The seaweed recipe took three years to perfect, finally deciding on the name of 5 Sisters Spirit Vodka. At last, the distinctive label, after many artistic and trademark challenges, features an image that pays homage to their ‘Mam’ on the inside of the label and the sisters’ images on the back of the bottle.

Today, the journey is just beginning as this powerhouse of sisterhood and legacy prevail. They know the strength of women is to tackle the big picture plus prioritizing the small details. The Culhanes know women are aided by their intuition and perceptiveness, their keen communication skills and how to help others while working toward the enormous picture of their own. Through their individual talents and skills in Culhane’s restaurants, they respect each other as they all wear different hats in order to navigate the operation of big business, too.

Michelle’s strengths are in the chef’s kitchens, being a tough negotiator while having dynamic relationships with vendors and designing the look of each restaurant. Lynda adeptly handles human resources and how to build an operational team that’s constantly evolving, building relationships with influential peers and



having a sixth sense about entertaining. Áine’s impeccable accounting skills are balanced by her seasoned bartending management experiences as she exudes hard work plus resilience and warmth, full of Irish lilt and banter. Mary Jane is the frontline marketing wizard who interacts with the media, is the first face of external communication and knows how to shape optimal business chemistry.

Together the Culhane Sisters are able to laugh again through their sense of hope, seeing their strengths re-ignite and blossom through this incredible new and challenging adventure. They see 5 Sisters Spirit Vodka as a “soldier moment” reminding each other that they “got your back” as they share their story about family, courage and love.



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Savory & Seasonal Four Bean Chili

As the weather starts to cool, turn to warming soups and stews as nutrient-packed comfort foods you can enjoy all fall. This recipe incorporates root vegetables like onion, garlic and carrots, and can easily invite other favorite veggies into the mix!

Four Bean Chili

Makes 8 to 10 servings

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 medium carrots, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 can (28 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 1 can (15 ounces) tomato sauce
- 1 can (15 ounces) small white beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) light kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) dark kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup vegetable broth
- 1 can (4 ounces) diced mild green chiles
- 1 ounce unsweetened baking chocolate, chopped
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar.

Heat oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onions, carrots and bell pepper; cook and stir 10 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Add garlic, tomato paste, brown sugar, chili powder, cumin, oregano and salt; cook and stir 1 minute. Stir in tomatoes, tomato sauce, beans, broth, chiles, and chocolate; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium; simmer 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in vinegar.

Chili is even better served with cornbread. Make batter while the vegetables are cooking in step one and bake it while the chili is simmering.

Cornbread

Makes 12 servings

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|----|---|
| 3 | tablespoons boiling water | 2 | teaspoons baking powder |
| 1 | tablespoon ground flaxseed | 1 | teaspoon salt |
| 1¼ | cups all-purpose flour | 1¼ | cups plain unsweetened almond or soy milk |
| ¾ | cup yellow cornmeal | ¼ | cup vegetable oil |
| 1/3 | cup sugar | | |

Preheat oven to 400 F. Spray 8-inch square baking dish or pan with nonstick cooking spray. Combine boiling water and flaxseed in small bowl; let stand until cool.

Combine flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, and salt in large bowl; mix well. Whisk almond milk and oil in medium bowl until well blended. Add to flour mixture with flaxseed mixture; stir just until dry ingredients are moistened. Pour batter into prepared baking dish.

Bake 25 minutes or until top is browned and toothpick inserted into center comes out clean.

Recipe From "Vegan Cooking for Beginners"
(Publications International, Ltd.) by the PIL editors



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Raising the bar for sustainable

Bridal Wear

by PATRICIA DAVIS

Over the past few years, bridal wear has been trending in a new direction and the change could not have come at a more appropriate time. So, what's going on with wedding dresses and the fashion shift? It's sustainability, natural, organic and pure fabrics. The designs are leaner, cleaner and modern. There's still lace, tulle and lots of fabric, but the dress style itself is more minimal.

At a time in our lives when climate change and environmental factors are having the most impact on our lives, brides are rethinking their wedding plans and setting new criteria in all the areas of their wedding. Many brides are seeking dresses made using better quality fabrics with features and benefits aligned with their beliefs, climate realities and wedding theme. One of the main concerns I hear as a custom wedding dressmaker is the concern that the garment may be too hot and uncomfortable. Brides are asking for fabrics that are more natural, cool, breathable and gorgeous. No matter the time of year, they are concerned with sweating, the weight of the dress and irritation from fabrics rubbing against their skin causing rashes.

There also seems to be a trend of more brides wanting to be able to preserve or pass down their wedding dress in recent years. I, for one, hope the days of disposable wedding dresses are over and some sort of tradition or appreciation for such an important life event is gaining more recognition, as it should.

Why sustainable, natural and organic bridal attire is important

Over 85% of the wedding dresses in the United States are imported from China. The fabrics are cheap and mainly consist of

polyester, rayon, acetate and a host of blended synthetic fibers. These types of fabrics are constructed using an array of toxic chemicals and can include up to 1,200 different types. Many of these chemicals are actually listed as hazardous by the EPA and can range from being contributed to causing cancer, damaging the immune system, disrupting the endocrine system, dermatitis, skin irritant, eczema, psoriasis and so much more. Being a textile expert and dressmaker for over 48 years I've witness what the creation of fast fashion has leashed on our society from a health and environmental perspective. Some of the main chemicals used to create synthetic fabric include dioxins, benzene, acetic acid, formaldehyde, caustic soda, sulfuric acid, chromium trioxide, ammonium dichromate, nonylphenol and carbon disulfide. Without getting too deep into each chemical, dioxin was the main ingredient used to create Agent Orange, it's a highly toxic and persistent organic pollutant linked to cancers, diabetes, birth defects and other disabilities. Today's brides are smart, educated and resourceful, knowing facts such as these play a key role in the decisions they make about their wedding and lives. Knowing that there are delicious and abundant alternatives to these silent killers is not only refreshing but highly welcoming.

The textile industry is experiencing a revival for high quality fabrics, not just state side but around the world countries and cultures are reviving hand loomed fabrics and organic fibers using silk, organic cotton, cotton, linen and hemp. Brides are taking advantage by seeking companies that specialize in these fabrics. For the most part, over the past few years it's almost been impossible to

find more than a couple of styles of a silk wedding gown and none made of high quality linen, pima cotton or hemp. The tides are changing. Due to a more globalized market some small companies are taking advantage of the opportunity to source dresses made using these higher end fabrics. They are doing the research and connecting through Fair Trade initiatives, coops and a host of organizations promoting cleaner fabrics and sustainable fashion. Custom sewing and design businesses have also played a key role in bringing these fabrics back to life. Brides are doing some really cool and highly personal things for their dresses. More are becoming interested in actually, designing and custom sewing their gowns because they realize they have the ability to choose the fabric they want; create the style they want and incorporate some unexpected details into the design. For instance, having one dress but creating two styles by removing the skirt to reveal pants underneath or removing the tulle overlay to reveal a short mini dress.



photos provided by
PATRICIA DAVIS

sun screen by blocking UV rays from the sun. It's the strongest natural fibre, mold resistant, hypoallergenic, water resistant and antimicrobial. It's the world's greatest carbon equalizer helping to fight against climate change.

- Linen fabric has the ability to heal wounds, improve blood microcirculation, it's hygroscopic-conducts moisture well, breathes, antibacterial and hypoallergenic. It neutralizes the smell of sweat, reduces the risk of fungal diseases, static resistant will not electrify. The fibre is strong and durable, but most important — it's beautiful!

Smaller bridal salons are beginning to offer more personalized services and prompt response to bride's needs by doing a better job of order turnaround status, delivery and alterations. All of which are music to a bride's ear. If you're seeking to be more sustainable the option of shopping consignment and Goodwill exist, but keep in mind that the styles tend to be more traditional, however the fabrics are usually better to include high end laces, silks and tulle.

What are the benefits of wearing organic and natural fabrics?

What an odd question to ask. Did you know that there is a slew of benefits to wearing organic and natural fabric? Here are a few:

- Silk fabric can slow down the aging process, improve sleep, it's hypoallergenic and anti-fungal. It can regulate body temperature. But best of all it's gorgeous and luxurious-period.
- Organic cotton uses zero toxic pesticides or herbicides to grow, that's excellent for your health and great for the planet. Major features are it's breathable and biodegradable. It's non-irritating on the skin because there's no formaldehyde present and has properties ranging from super soft to cool and crisp. It has the ability to control moisture, insulate, provide comfort and it is also hypoallergenic.
- Hemp is the only fabric that offers UV protection. It acts like

The events of this past year allowed

many of us to examine how we live, what our priorities are and the experiences we'd like to have in the future. Seeing people implement these thoughts and actions into their lives in ways as simple as planning their wedding is encouraging.

First Coast brides of Jacksonville and the surrounding areas are encouraged to do their homework. There are some wonderful alternatives available in your city. Some friendly advice is to start early, do your research and don't settle when it comes to your dress. The real truth is, "Your dress is... all about you," and our wish is that you find the dress of your dreams.

Patricia Davis is a wedding gown designer and dressmaker and owner of Tag Custom Bridal. For more information on Tag Custom Bridal, go to www.tagcustombridal.com/shop.

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Wedding Expert FAQs



Tips for choosing a wedding reception menu



The Dress

When choosing a wedding-dress style, petite brides often opt for sheaths and structured trumpet fits. For tall, straight body types, there are plenty of ways to add the illusion of curves, including full skirts, geometric details or peplum styles. Empire waistlines are a flattering choice for plus sizes. Arranging a fitting appointment at a bridal salon will give you the time and professional input to ensure you choose a style you'll love.

The Tux

Grooms should begin selecting a suit or tuxedo two to three months prior to the wedding date. Color and style preferences can vary greatly according to the ceremony venue and reception theme, be it a traditional church wedding, destination beach wedding or rustic outdoor affair. An experienced stylist at a formalwear or menswear shop can help you navigate these decisions and select appropriate fabrics for the season.

The Photos

There are a variety of photography styles you can choose for your wedding. Traditional and classical photography focus more on composed portrait-style images, whereas photojournalistic images take a more candid and spontaneous approach. When interviewing photographers, consider if their style is the look you prefer for your wedding photos.

The Flowers

Some of this year's trends include wreaths and hoops, living walls, woodland themes and dark tones like burgundy and plum. Many florists offer sustainably sourced "green" arrangements, or you can opt for beautiful and reusable faux flower designs. A consultation with a floral shop's wedding coordinator will help ensure you explore all of your options.

Weddings are memorable for a host of reasons. While couples remember their weddings because they mark the day they officially tied the knot, guests may remember weddings for other reasons, including the food served at the reception.

- **Don't zero in on specialties.** While couples might be tempted by specialty dishes when choosing their wedding menus, couples who are hosting dozens, if not hundreds, of guests should keep things simple.
 - **Consider potential allergies.** In regard to entrées, make sure guests with food allergies can choose something that won't make them sick. According to Food Allergy Research & Education, an organization devoted to improving the quality of life of individuals with food allergies, some common foods cause the majority of allergic reactions. Peanuts, soy, sesame, and shellfish are among the most common food allergies. Couples can even ask guests to inform them of any food allergies.
 - **Don't hesitate to offer a favorite food.** While specialty entrées might not be a great choice, especially at large receptions where lots of mouths must be fed, a couple who has a favorite food that's symbolic of their relationship should not hesitate to offer it during the cocktail hour.
 - **Offer an elaborate dessert.** The last bite guests will take is dessert, so couples who want their guests to go home raving about the food may want to offer something special after the entrées have been taken away. Some guests may not indulge, but those who do might end their nights thinking about the delicious dessert they enjoyed as the festivities drew to a close.
- Choosing a wedding menu should be fun. Menus should reflect not only couples' tastes but also include some popular foods so no one goes home hungry.

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Fall FASHION

Fashion trends to watch: Late 90s comeback and more

Keeping up on the latest fashion trends often means having a foot firmly planted in the past. Experts say fashion is cyclical, which means there's a good chance that if you hold on to items long enough, they'll become popular once again.

New York-based celebrity stylist Samantha Brown says it's common for trends to follow a 20-year cycle for reappearance. That means that the looks that were popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s are now poised for a comeback.

In addition to Y2K-esque influences, current fashion trends are focused on easy-to-wear items that will continue to help people be comfortable during Zoom meetings, but also ensure they look put together when they venture outside into a post-pandemic world.

Here's a look at some of what's trending.

- **Ripped jeans:** Distressed jeans have now paved the way for big 1990s rips in lighter-washed denims, which have made a return in a big way. And while you're updating your jeans, be sure to pick high-waisted, wider-legged "mom" jeans, as they're more popular than skinny options.

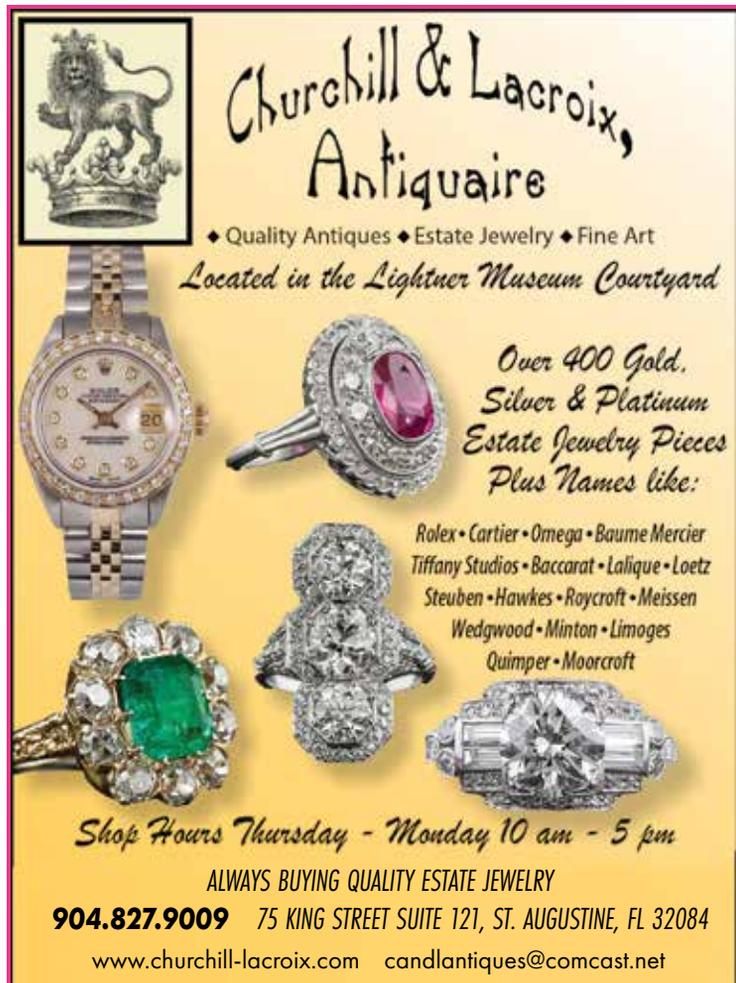
- **Chokers:** Chokers were one of the quintessential accessories of the 1990s. Tight around the neck, these necklaces can be made from stretchy fabrics, leather cords or even beads. They're at home at a music festival or a night out on the town.

- **Patchwork prints:** Patchwork offers a more delicate take on the flannel of early 1990s grunge attire. Style experts say it provides a romantic touch, but is still casual and edgy.

- **Sporty and hip-hop trends:** Sporty Spice and Gwen Stefani could often be seen in sports bras and athletic pants, and that look is returning. Athletic-inspired hoodies, brands, track pants, and footwear are casual and comfortable. Overalls are another effortless and laid back style to make a resurgence.

- **Sweatpants:** Perhaps fueled by a year of spending time indoors learning virtually and working from home, sweatpants and leggings emerged as go-to staples for daily dressing and were dubbed "couch clothing." When heading out now, trade in muted gray or black for candy-colored joggers.

- **Bulky footwear:** If you are a guy or gal who never left home without your trusty Doc Martens in the past, dust off those boots and other clunky shoes for the ultimate comeback. Top Trends Guide says 1990s shoes, such as square toe heels, combat boots, platforms and thick-soled sneakers, are trendy once again.



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United Way 'shakes, not stirs' things up at James Bond-themed

Givers Gala

by JENNIFER LOGUE

The dress code was black tie, the martinis were shaken (not stirred) and the atmosphere was pure James Bond at the United Way of St. Johns County's recent 004th Givers Gala.

Held May 7 at the Casa Monica Hotel in St. Augustine, the annual benefit presented by The Hutson Companies featured a number of modifications to encourage social distancing while still enabling guests to get in the spirit of 007. In addition to "Casino Royale"-type table games, a martini luge and spy "clues," the gala featured cocktails, gourmet delights, entertainment and both live and silent auctions to support the organization's work in the community.

"James Bond has his Moneypenny and Q, but we have each of you," United Way Campaign Chairman Dick Williams told attendees and sponsors, who together helped raise approximately \$100,000 for the organization's mission. "And for that, I can't thank you enough."

While the theme was all James Bond, United Way-SJC Board Chair Beverly Slough emphasized the goal of the event was to raise funds to support those in need, particularly after the economic hardships many experienced as a result of the pandemic.



ABOVE: Cody Hutson, Emily Parker, Kendall Herrin, David Hutson, Brooke Hutson, Kristen Hutson, Trevor Hutson, Tanya Hutson and Travis Hutson. The Hutson Companies was presenting the gala.



LEFT: Guests enjoy the Casino Royale gaming tables.

Photos by WAYNE FUSCO



United Way CEO Melissa Nelson, Campaign Chair Dick Williams and Board Chair Beverly Slough.
Photo by Jennifer Logue



St. Johns County Clerk of Court Brandon Patty, state Rep. Cyndi Stephenson and state Sen. Travis Hutson attend the May 7 fundraiser in St. Augustine.
Photo by Jennifer Logue



James Bond' rappels down the side of the Casa Monica at the United Way's 007-themed gala.
Photo by Jennifer Logue



Raintree Restaurant owners Lorna MacDonald and Chris Catabene
Photo by WAYNE FUSCO



All-American Air owners Christine and Steve Chapman
Photo by WAYNE FUSCO

"I must stress that we are here because our community needs us," Slough said. "Not only has this year been catastrophic for individuals and families, but also for our partner nonprofits that count on our financial support."

United Way-SJC CEO and President Melissa Nelson agreed. "Life is just messy," she said. "In real life, we aren't given a prewritten script with a Hollywood ending. We all need a safety net."

Nelson shared several stories of local individuals and families aided by United Way-SJC in the past year — among them, a young couple whose baby was born with serious heart complications after the couple had both lost their jobs in the restaurant industry due to COVID-19. The organization also worked closely with several area nonprofits to renovate a dilapidated home that will now provide safe housing for homeless veterans.

"Lately, I've wondered what it would be like to have M's support network, Q's gadgets and technology, the resolve of the double-O (agents) and a license to get away with anything," Nelson said. "But I believe with your support, this can be a reality. Together, we are the force that keeps those in our midst safe from what lurks in the shadows."

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“ I’M STOKED, BECAUSE I KNOW IT’S GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL, AND WE ARE GOING TO BE ABLE TO HELP PEOPLE. ”

The Foar From Home team is comprised of Cameron Hansen (from left), Billy Cimino, Hupp Huppmann and Paul Lore. The veterans are planning to row a boat across the Atlantic Ocean. photos by SHAUN RYAN

Four veterans to ROW across Atlantic

by SHAUN RYAN

This December, four Amelia Island veterans representing different branches of the armed forces will begin an adventure that few have undertaken.

They will row their 28-by-5-foot boat, “Courageous,” across the Atlantic Ocean.

Paul Lore (USMC, 1980-88), Billy Cimino (U.S. Army, 1984-92), Cameron Hansen (U.S. Air Force, 1993-97) and Hupp Huppmann (U.S. Navy, 1984-2004) will set out from the Canary Islands on Dec. 12. They expect to arrive in Antigua about 50 days later.

The team is one of 39 in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, many of which are rowing to raise money for a good cause. The local men — who call themselves “Foar From Home,” a play on the words four, oar and far — are hoping to raise \$500,000 to prevent veteran suicide.

“If you never remember the names of the individual rowers or the name of the team, just remember why we’re doing it,” said Hansen.

The funds raised will go to two nonprofits — K9s for Warriors and the Cross The Line Foundation. The former pairs service dogs with veterans having service-connected post-traumatic stress, trau-



This map shows the route for the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge. Rowers will leave the Canary Islands and row 3,000 miles to Antigua.

matic brain injury or military sexual trauma. Through the latter, the men hope to set up a scholarship endowment to provide veterans with vocational training.

The cause is an important one. It is estimated that an average 6,000 veterans end their own lives each year.

The local team has garnered support from several businesses, organizations and individuals and has already raised \$388,000. Now, they are looking for people who would like to sponsor each of the 3,000 miles they will be rowing.

A one-mile sponsorship is \$100. Volunteers on land will email or text donors when the team reaches their sponsored mile.

“Our slogan is: It takes an island to cross the ocean,” said Lore. “Whether you’re in California or Montana or Florida or Amelia Island or you’re in New York, you’re on our island.”

The team has been working hard to prepare for this rigorous journey and they remain confident.

“I have no doubt that the four of us will be 100% successful,” said Hansen.

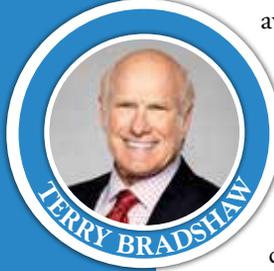
To contribute to their effort or just to learn more, go to foarfromhome.com.

Florida Forum

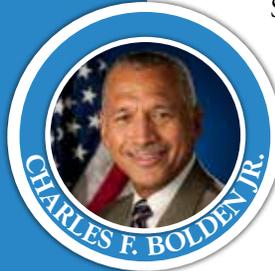
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The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital released the schedule for the 2021 Florida Forum Speaker Series.

The speakers are Grammy award-winning singer/songwriter Tim McGraw on Sept. 22, four-time Super Bowl champion and broadcaster Terry Bradshaw on Oct. 26 and Maj. Gen. Charles F. Bolden, Jr., a retired Marine officer, astronaut and former NASA Administrator, on Nov. 17. The series will take place at the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts.

Presented by The Women's Board, the Florida Forum raises awareness and funds for Wolfson Children's Hospital of Jacksonville, supporting its mission to provide the highest quality of advanced pediatric healthcare regardless of ability to pay. The series is made possible by long-time partners and sponsors Wells Fargo Florida Blue and Landstar. This year's moderators are Shannon Miller, Jeff Lageman and Jennifer Candelino. Serving as 2021 co-chairs of the Speaker Series are Jan Kirby and France Hutto. Since 1992, the Florida Forum has hosted renowned speakers from around the world offering profound insights and discussions on a broad range of issues. In addition to enriching Jacksonville's intellectual and cultural life, the Florida Forum has contributed more than \$9.2 million to Wolfson Children's Hospital of Jacksonville.

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Fall Arts PREVIEW

Fall offers plenty of artistic options on the First Coast. From Mother Nature's artwork of the changing leaves to the various events, such as, theater, museum exhibits, music and much more. There is something for everyone no matter where their creative side may lie.

compiled by ANTHONY RICHARDS

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Aug. 20: Steve Earle and The Dukers

Sept. 10: Whitney Cummings

Sept. 17: Wynonna Judd

Sept. 19: KT Tunstall

Sept. 26: Lindsey Buckingham

Sept. 30: Mitchell Tenpenny

Oct. 1: The Old 97's

Oct. 2: Forever Motown

Oct. 6: Edwin McCain

Oct. 8: Pablo Cruise

Oct. 10: Acoustic Alchemy

Oct. 12: Justin Hayward

Oct. 14: Chris Hillman

Oct. 16: Bahamas

Oct. 17: Zoso – Led Zeppelin Tribute Band

Oct. 24: The Fixx and The English Beat

Oct. 26: Thundercat

Oct. 31: The Psychedelic Furs

Nov. 4: Galactic

Nov. 7: Baylen Lavine

Nov. 12: Stephen Lynch

Nov. 13: Robert Cray Band

Nov. 14: Steep Canyon Rangers

Nov. 17: Bruce Hornsby

Nov. 19: Todd Barry

Nov. 20: Kathleen Madigan

Nov. 21: John Mayall

Dec. 1: The Wood Brothers

Dec. 2: The Outlaws

Dec. 4: Under The Streetlamp

Dec. 8: A Peter White Christmas

Dec. 9-10: The Fab Four – The Ultimate Tribute

Dec. 11: Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder

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Aug. 22: for King & Country

Aug. 31: Incubus

Sept. 4: Cody Johnson with special guest Ian Munsick

Sept. 7: Glass Animals – “Dreamland Tour”

Sept. 11: Sing Out Loud: Mayday Parade

Sept. 12: Sing Out Loud: Yola with special guest Patty Griffin

Sept. 16: Rebelution Good Vibes Summer Tour 2021

Sept. 18: Sing Out Loud: Parquet Courts with special guest dehd & flip-turn

Sept. 25: Sing Out Loud: TLC's Celebration of CRAZY SEXY COOL with Bone Thugs-N-Harmony

Sept. 26: Sing Out Loud: St. Augustine Record Fair featuring Bears & Lions

Sept. 30: The Revivalists

Oct. 1: The Killers

Oct. 3: Flogging Molly with special guests Streetlight Manifesto, Me First And The Gimme Gimmes, and Thick

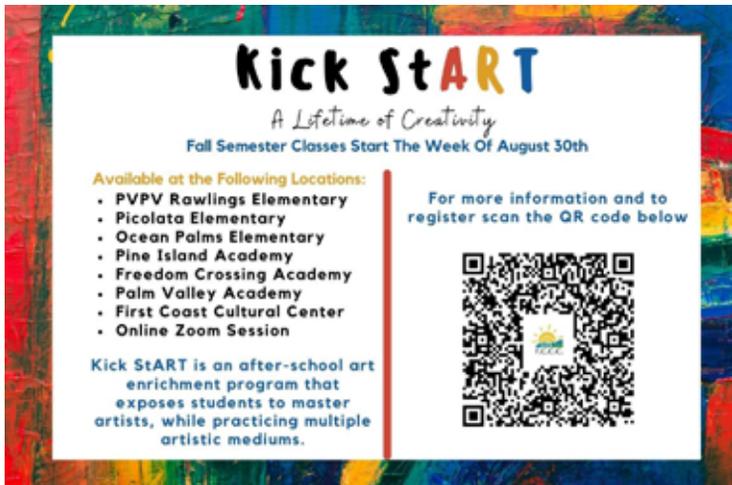
Oct. 8: Shinedown

Oct. 9: John Legend “Bigger Love Tour” with special guest Kirby

Oct. 14: Earth, Wind & Fire

Oct. 15: Thievery Corporation “The Outernational Tour”

Oct. 16: Brantley Gilbert



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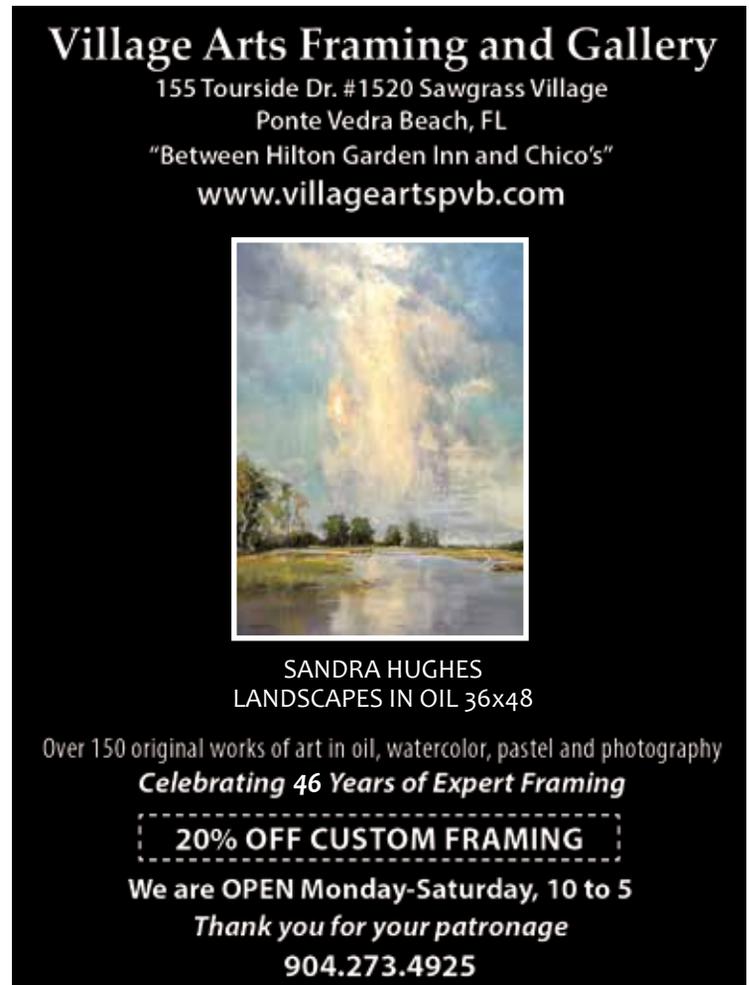
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Oct. 17: Modest Mouse with special guest Empath
Oct. 19: EcoCinema: "Blue"
Oct. 20: Pat Benatar & Neil Giraldo with special guest John Waite
Oct. 21: Casting Crows with special guest Matthew West
Oct. 24: The Expendables & Ballyhoo! With special guest Tunnel Vision
Oct. 26: LANY "gg bb xx Tour"
Oct. 30: Buddy Guy and Kenny Wayne Shepherd Band
Nov. 6: A Day to Remember
Nov. 8: EcoCinema: "Sinking Cities" and "The Oldest City Underwater"
Nov. 11: Justin Moore & Tracy Lawrence
Nov. 19: Brett Young "Weekends Tour"
Dec. 10: Joe Bonamassa
Dec. 11-12: Old Dominion "Band Behind the Curtain Tour"

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Sept. 17 to Oct. 3: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

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www.floridatheatre.com

Aug. 20: BAT – The Music of Meatloaf
Aug. 23: One Night of Queen – Gary Mullen and The Works
Aug. 27: Gary Allan
Aug. 28: Randy Rainbow
Aug. 29: Il Divo
Sept. 11: The Alan Parsons Live Project
Sept. 16: Boney James
Sept. 23: Squeeze
Sept. 25: Kenny G
Sept. 26: Geoff Tate
Sept. 30: Tom Segura
Oct. 1: Little River Band
Oct. 2: Crowder
Oct. 3: Leonid & Friends – A Tribute to Chicago
Oct. 6: Summerland Tour: Everclear, Living Colour, Hoobastank & Wheatus
Oct. 7: Benise
Oct. 9: Nate Bargatze

Oct. 10: Jim Jefferies
Oct. 16: The Monkees
Oct. 21: Masterchef Junior Live!
Oct. 22: Taylor Tomlinson
Oct. 28: Bert Kreischer
Nov. 4: Keb Mo
Nov. 5: Jeanne Robertson
Nov. 7: Brian Culbertson
Nov. 9: Stacey Abrams
Nov. 11: Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives
Nov. 12: Piff the Magic Dragon
Nov. 13: Straight No Chaser
Nov. 14: ZZ Top
Nov. 16: Gipsy Kings
Nov. 17: America – The Band
Nov. 18: Neil deGrasse Tyson
Nov. 19: Brothers Again – Tribute to The Allman Brothers Band
Nov. 21: Champions of Magic
Nov. 30: Black Violin
Dec. 1: Friends The Musical Parody
Dec. 2: Dave Koz
Dec. 3: Whose Live Anyway?
Dec. 4: The Temptations & The Four Tops
Dec. 5: Andrew Schulz
Dec. 12: The Hip Hop Nutcracker
Dec. 17: Sinbad
Dec. 18: Lewis Black
Dec. 26: Adam Trent

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300 Water St. #200
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www.jaxsymphony.org

Sept. 24: Mozart's Romantic Side: Piano Concerto No. 20
Oct. 8: Wicked & More: The Music of Stephen Schwartz
Oct. 10: Spooktacular
Oct. 22: Bach to America
Nov. 5: Patriotic Pops
Nov. 12: Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony
Nov. 19: A Journey Through Beethoven – Coffee
Dec. 3: Mozart's Dream: Piano Concerto No. 21
Dec. 9-10: Holiday Pops
Dec. 17-19: First Coast Nutcracker
Dec. 18-19: Handel's Messiah
Dec. 31: New Year's Eve: Rhapsody in Blue Eyes

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Sept. 11: Voctave
Oct. 2: Peacherine Ragtime Society Orchestra
Dec. 15: Holiday Pops with Gainesville Orchestra

First Coast Cultural Center

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www.firstcoastculturalcenter.org

Aug. 12-27: Young Murals
Nov. 12-13: Holiday Shoppes at March Landing Country Club

Museum of Contemporary Art

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July 9-Jan. 2, 2022: Doug Eng: Structure of Nature | Nature of Structure

June 25-March 6, 2022: Left Side Right Side

Aug. 13-Feb. 13, 2022: Techno-Intimacy

Aug. 27-Jan. 16, 2022: Damian Ortega

Sept. 11-Jan. 2, 2022: Art With a Heart: Behind the Mask

The Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens

829 Riverside Avenue
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 (904) 356-6857
www.cummermuseum.org

Sept. 9: Lecture with Ashley Woodson Bailey

Sept. 11: Art Connection Activity Saturday

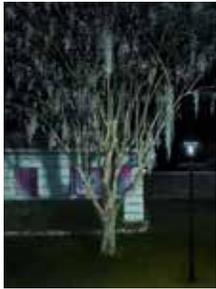
Sept. 22-23: Hamilton: How the Musical Remixes American History

Nov. 18: The Art of Nature: A Glamping Dinner Party

Exhibitions highlight American art from Lightner Museum, the staff of Flagler's Alcazar Hotel and contemporary suburban paintings

The Lightner Museum will welcome visitors this fall with several new exhibitions highlighting a diverse range of art, including a reinstallation of late-19th and early 20th Century American paintings and sculpture from the museum's permanent collection, a photography exhibition by Tom Schifanella focused on the historic motion picture magazine fragments left behind by staff at the Alcazar Hotel, and a presentation of the work of contemporary painter, Ericka Sobrack.

Ericka Sobrack: Suburban Echoes



Sept. 3 – Oct. 18
The final Lightner Local exhibition of 2021 presents, Ericka Sobrack: Suburban Echoes. Sobrack's small-scale landscape paintings focus on domestic scenes of suburban America. Shrouded in darkness,

the paintings deconstruct familiar environments, creating dream-like settings that amplify feelings of anticipation, angst, and trepidation.

Created to showcase the extraordinary talents of artists who live in the Northeast and Central Florida regions, Lightner Local is supported by the Benjamin and Jean Troemel Arts Foundation.

Tom Schifanella: Faces of the Alcazar Oct. 29 – March 7, 2022



Faces of the Alcazar presents a compelling glimpse of life behind-the-scenes at Henry Flagler's Alcazar Hotel. Through large-format photographic prints, the exhibition documents fragmentary clippings from early-20th century motion picture magazines pasted to the walls of the Alcazar staff quarters by the immigrant

staff who lived and worked at the hotel. The crumbling magazine remnants remain a haunting visual record of the dreams and aspirations of the forgotten individuals who served the wealthy visitors wintering in St. Augustine at the dawn of the 20th century.

Picturing a Nation: American Art from the Lightner Museum

Oct. 29 – Sept. 30, 2022



Picturing a Nation is a major reinstallation of American paintings and sculpture from the Lightner Museum's permanent collection. From America's great vistas and natural wonders, to intimate scenes of St. Augustine, Picturing a Nation presents a vibrant vision of America on a local and national scale through late-19th and early 20th century American art.

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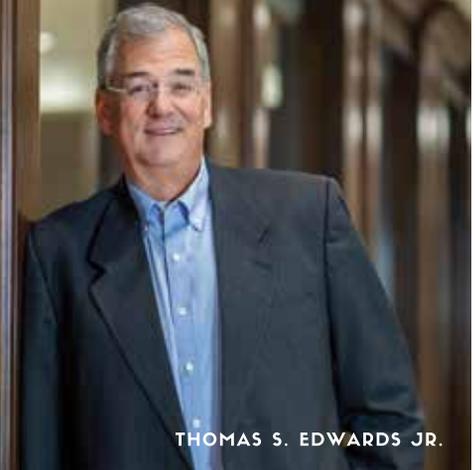
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Dallas Primavera shares how he sees the world with his artwork

story and photos by ANTHONY RICHARDS

Dallas Primavera has always found painting to be the best way to express himself and in many ways, he seeks to go beyond the artwork itself and find the deeper connection between his work and the person viewing it.

He often attempts to capture life in his paintings, but not just the positive or the negative, but all aspects of it.

Bright colors with a dark story is the best way to describe Primavera's paintings.

"The happy and the sad, the dark and the bright, the whole Yin and Yang of life is what I like to incorporate," Primavera said.

According to Primavera, his approach to painting has a lot to do with his experiences and the way he sees life.

"I've had really high highs and low lows my whole life," Primavera said. "Somehow I've always been able to see the best parts of life and the worst parts of life. Art is a good outlet for me where it all comes together."

Over the years, one of the most popular questions Primavera has been asked is "what does the painting mean?"

However, he answers their question with one of his own, "what does it mean to you?"

"I feel like people don't think enough anymore," Primavera said. "I've always seen color as a language that I can speak better than I can with my mouth. If I wasn't an artist, I would have gone into color therapy."

Color therapy is an alternative method used to help treat physical or mental health.

"On the back of all my paintings I always write journal entries to document where I was in my life when I painted the piece, so I developed a system to put one of those entries on the front in color."

He places a key, like that on a map, in the corner of each of his paintings with various colored dots each representing a letter in the alphabet.

"When you look at the dots in the painting, you can decipher what I'm saying to you," Primavera said. "I'm going to make you think but have fun while doing it. It's



▲ A painting by Jacksonville artist Dallas Primavera.

The dark and bright sides of life are expressed in Primavera's artwork. ▶



▲ Primavera's artwork is on display at Green Room Brewery in Jacksonville Beach.

A key is in the corner of each of his paintings with each colored dot representing a letter in the alphabet that the viewer uses to decipher a message placed within the painting. ▶



how I feel art and I'm able to share that experience."

The vibrant colors he uses in his paintings is one thing that have always been a staple of his paintings and something people really seem to enjoy based on feedback he has received over the years.

"It started in third grade when we got a new principal at our school (in New Jersey) who was really into the arts," Primavera said. "Every Friday afternoon, somebody from every class got picked to go for two hours to the art room and I got chosen."

Although the seed was planted during those Fridays in the middle school art room, it was not until high school that he began to realize his talent.

"When I was a freshman in high school, I got a telemarketing job and I was really good at it," Primavera said. "I would work for about 45 minutes and get about five or six appointments and then keep them in the corner and hand one in every hour, but in the meantime, I would sit and draw in my cubicle."

One day his mom got a glimpse of one of his drawings and thought it looked pretty good, so she gave him a picture of a house to draw.

"My mom's friend was a realtor and every time she sold a house, they would give a framed sketch of the house to whoever bought



Dallas Primavera is known for using an array of vibrant colors in his paintings.

it," Primavera said. "Two days later she came back with a check for \$300. That was when I first realized that I could make money off it."

Although Primavera's paintings seem complex, art has always been the thing in his life where he feels the most comfortable.

"I knew I had a talent because it wasn't even hard," Primavera said. "It's the easiest thing that I had ever done in my life. Nothing else is like that. It's almost as if you're possessed and the art just takes over."

Primavera followed his passion and graduated through Florida State University with a studio arts degree in Valencia, Spain. While living in Europe for two and a half years he fell in love with a Swedish girl, who became his wife, and they now have a son.

His roommate in Spain was living in Miami when he came back to the United States, so he moved down there before eventually coming to Jacksonville, which he has called home for the past 11 years.

Primavera holds art showcases throughout the state, but his work is always on display at Green Room Brewing on Third Street North in Jacksonville Beach.

"I've had my work on these walls since they've opened," Primavera said. "It's almost like my gallery."

For more about his artwork visit www.artbydallas.com.



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photo by SHAUN RYAN

Much-anticipated SMART BUILDING opens in Nocatee

by SHAUN RYAN



Entrepreneur Raghu Misra speaks during grand opening festivities for the link on Wednesday, July 14.
photo by SUSAN GRIFFIN

It's been called the next step in the evolution of working. During a three-day grand opening celebration in July, the public had an opportunity to see firsthand a new smart building, which will give entrepreneurs a place to do business while balancing career, family and recreation: the link.

Located at 425 Town Plaza Ave. in Nocatee Town Center, the link is a \$7 million, 22,500-square-foot co-working space, multi-use innovation incubator and membership-based venue. It is the brainchild of "serial entrepreneur" Raghu Misra, who wanted to give people a place to "learn, play, think, do."

The link offers a variety of office-space solutions, as well as other features, such as audio and podcast recording studios, free highspeed WiFi and the Costa Coffee Smart Café.

But the link is more than a place to work.



PAM Jam coordinator Loretta M. Leto (right) reads a poem by Susan Calfee while artist Marlene Scheer shows the art she paired with the poem at the link's "Grand Opening of the Arts."
photo by SHAUN RYAN

There is a significant emphasis on lifestyle, as well, with recreational and educational activities for adults, children and families. A partnership with the recently rebranded First Coast Cultural Center, is providing top quality art for the link, as well as camps and courses. In addition, the link offers members a variety of classes in martial arts and more.

One of the most popular amenities for those attending the grand opening festivities was the Flagler Health+ Immersive Studio, a meeting room with walls that form a 360-degree environment putting people inside videos and images from all over the world.

The link uses artificial intelligence software to keep members safe and healthy. Through a variety of devices, security violations

can easily be detected, and practices — such as contract tracing — help reduce the risk of any spread of infections.

At the same time, a partnership with Flagler Health+ will bring wellness programming and other services to the facility.

The link is also a marvel in energy conservation. Technology is holding the building's energy use to as near net-zero as possible. Sensors control the indoor temperature and air quality, and low-voltage lighting automatically varies the brightness according to the ambient light coming through the windows.

The grand opening celebration included a pair of ribbon-cutting ceremonies, a full day of arts and performance and an evening of presentations on entrepreneurship and innovation.

To learn more, go to thelink.zone.

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NEW START TO NEW SEASON

The Jaguars open the season against AFC rival Houston at 1 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 12. After finishing last season with a 1-15 record, Jaguars fans have a reason to be optimistic heading into this season with No. 1 draft pick, quarterback Trevor Lawrence, and new head coach Urban Meyer.



photos by NANCY BEECHER

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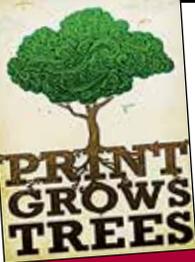


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