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The Skunk Ape—Florida's Sasquatch

By Pete Magnani, Publisher

When most people picture Sasquatch, they imagine the Pacific Northwest—mist-covered forests, snowcapped mountains, and alpine rivers. Florida offers a different setting for its legendary wild man: flooded cypress forests, tangled mangroves, sawgrass marshes, and humid nights filled with unfamiliar sounds.

Known as the Skunk Ape, Florida's answer to Bigfoot is said to be a large, hair-covered creature that walks upright and gives off a powerful, unpleasant odor. Although no scientific evidence has established that such an animal exists, reports of mysterious creatures in Florida's wilderness have circulated for generations, evolving into one of the state's most enduring legends.

Folklore in the Florida Wilderness

Some modern retellings connect the Skunk Ape with Esti Capcaki, commonly translated as "tall man" or "hairy man" and attributed to Seminole or Muscogee tradition. Popular versions portray this figure as a powerful inhabitant or guardian of the wilderness. That connection should be treated cautiously. Although Indigenous cultures have rich oral traditions involving the natural and spiritual worlds, historical documentation does not clearly establish Esti Capcaki as an ancient version of today's Skunk Ape. Much of that interpretation comes from modern cryptozoology—the study of animals whose existence has not been scientifically verified.

- Continued on page 6

Anonymous photo sent to the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, December 2000.

Also in this Issue:

From Whig to the White House

Before becoming America's first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln built his political career as the nation's party system underwent dramatic change.

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A Hatchling Hero

Twelve-year-old Gabe Williams helped rescue dozens of sea turtle hatchlings trapped on Clearwater Beach.

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Clearwater Jazz Holiday

The 47th annual concert series returns to Coachman Park in October.

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This newsletter is published by Magriff Productions, LLC, and is mailed to 8,000 residences and businesses in Belleair, Belleair Beach, Belleair Bluffs, Harbor Bluffs, and part of Largo. We are not associated with any city government.

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BELLEAIR AREA NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Inside, you will find articles and local information about the nearby area. We call it a Neighborhood News Magazine because it is about your neighborhood. It is mailed to the entire Belleair Area—a total of about 8,000 households—six times a year.

Do you need another copy of this magazine? You may pick up additional copies at all City Halls, Panera Bread, The UPS Store, and the Belleair Market. Call (813) 239-6862 if you need more than a few.

We hope you enjoyed our newsletter. We want your input. Did you like this issue? What suggestions do you have for future articles? Call or email us with your comments. Follow us on Facebook for ongoing local news.

Thank you for reading,
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CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS & EVENTS

As always, this is subject to change. Please verify dates and times.

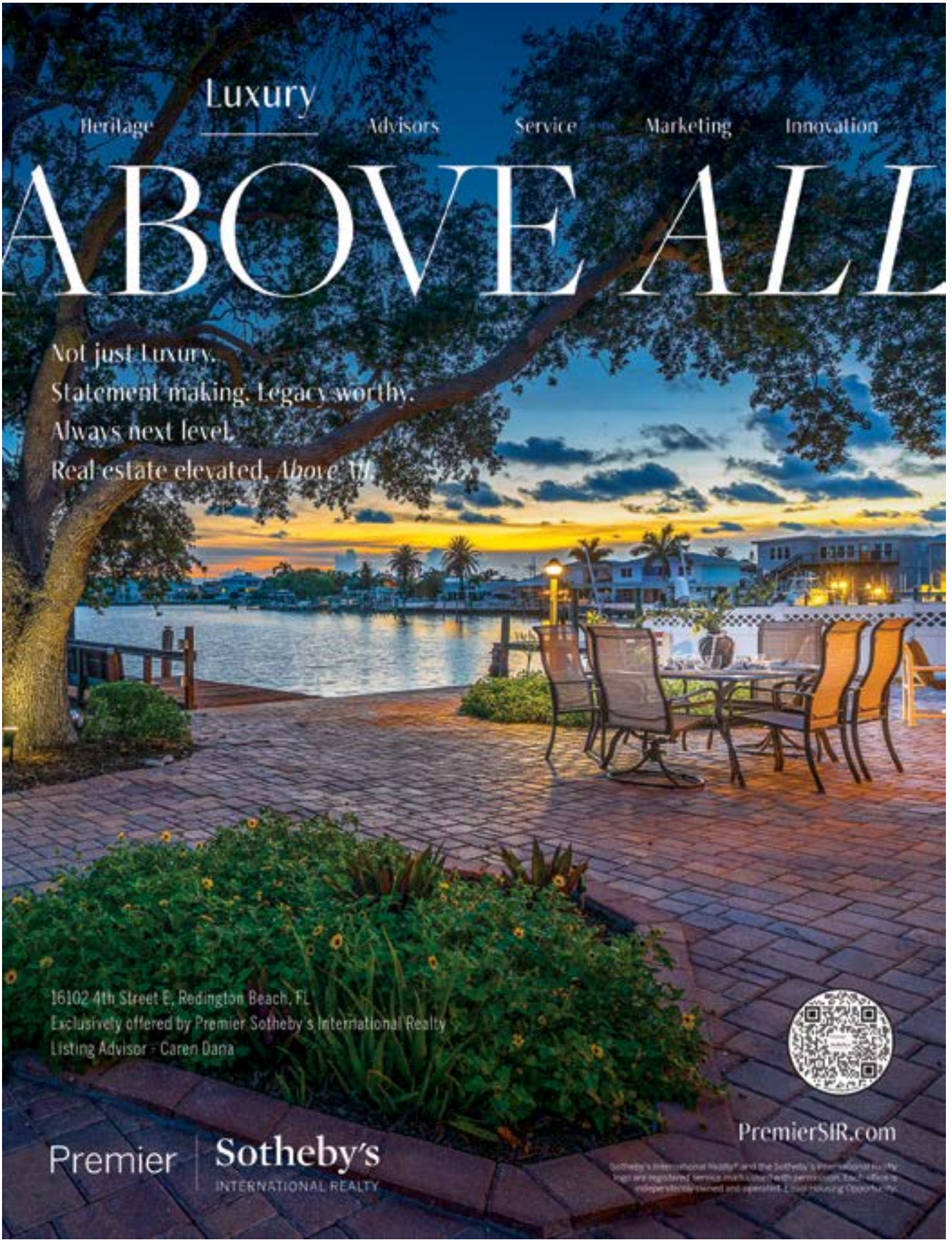
OCTOBER

Lightning Season Opener	1
DK Farms FEARVILLE Begins	2
Largo Vibe Fest: 3-Day Art Festival	2-4
Belleair Beach Beach Cleanup	3
Barks & Brews Barktoberfest	3
Fall Y'all at Coachman Park	3
Lightning Home Opener	3
Clearwater Fall Family Festival	3-5
Deadline to Register to Vote	9
IRB Oktoberfest	10
Rock the Rocks Crabby Bills	10
Columbus Day	12
Stone Crab Season Begins	15
Clearwater Jazz Holiday	15-18
Belleair's Halloween Bash	23
Frenchy's Stone Crab Weekend	23-24
Bluffs Wine Walk	24
Owl-O-Ween Moccasin Lake Park	24
Halloween	31

NOVEMBER

Daylight Savings Ends	1
General Election	3
IRB Rotary Big Game Raffle	6
CASA Scavenger Hunt	7
Rockin' for Heroes VFW Post 10094	7
Dunedin Art Harvest	7-8
SAVOR St. Pete Food & Wine Fest	7-8
The ANNIKA LPGA at Pelican	9-15
O.A.R. at the Sound	12
Rock the Rocks Crabby Bills	14
Belleair Beach Yard Sale	14
IRB Community Garage Sale	14-15
Reggae Sound Splash Fest the Sound	15
Sanding Ovations Treasure Island	19-22
Suncoast Jazz Festival	20-22
Belleair Bluffs Holiday Harvest Market	21
Dunedin Celtic Music & Beer Fest	21
Festival of Trees at the Long Center	21
Achieva Turkey Trot	26

More details for items highlighted in red can be found in the Did You Know?, Bar/Restaurant News, Business Briefs, Community News, or in articles or ads.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Did You Know

REMEMBERING A LEGEND The Indian Rocks Beach fishing community is remembering longtime charter captain and tournament fisherman David Scott "Captain Dave" Mistretta, who died unexpectedly August 12th at age 64.

Mistretta spent more than four decades fishing the Gulf and became a familiar figure throughout Tampa Bay. As owner and captain of Jawstoo Fishing Charters, he introduced thousands of customers to Gulf fishing while building an accomplished tournament career with the Jawstoo Pro Team.

His son and longtime fishing partner, Captain David John Mistretta, will continue operating Jawstoo Fishing Charters and carrying forward the family tradition.

PLAYGROUND UPGRADES Largo Central Park Playground is receiving several exciting upgrades, including new play areas designed for children of different ages. The updated playground will feature sections for children ages 2–5 and 5–12, along with a brand-new area designed for children ages 6 months–2 years. While the playground remains closed during renovations, Largo Central Park's other amenities, trails, and event spaces remain open to the public.

The improvements will enhance one of Largo's most popular family destinations. Largo Central Park welcomes more than one million visitors each year and hosts dozens of major events and celebrations.

The upgraded playground will include a new adventure area with two towers standing more than 20 feet tall, connected by a tunnel for climbing, exploring, and imaginative play. It will also feature Ninja Course 3, inspired by American Ninja Warrior, with 21 obstacles along a 91-foot course, including a rock wall and the fan-favorite warped wall. Additional enhancements include fresh artificial turf with colorful red, green, and blue play zones, two additional playground gates, and a communication board displaying photos, symbols, and illustrations to support individuals with autism spectrum disorder or limited spoken-language abilities. Visit PlayLargo.com for updates.

MOSQUITO ALERT Pinellas County Mosquito Control is expanding efforts to reduce mosquito populations as more than 30 locally acquired cases of dengue fever have been confirmed in the Tampa Bay area. Pinellas County is currently under a mosquito-borne illness alert from the Florida Department of Health.

Dengue can spread when a mosquito bites an infected person and later transmits the virus to others. The mosquitoes that carry dengue are active during the day and can breed in as little as a bottle cap of water. They often lay eggs in buckets, toys, plant saucers, tires, and other household items found on private property.

Mosquito Control will continue daytime backpack fogging, daily surveillance and door-to-door inspections. Residents are encouraged to allow technicians to inspect their properties and eliminate potential breeding sites.

Residents should regularly empty standing water, wear light-colored, long-sleeved clothing and closed-toe shoes outdoors, and use a CDC-recommended insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or oil of lemon eucalyptus.

Anyone who believes they may have a mosquito-borne illness should immediately contact the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County at (727) 824-6932.

and More...

THE ANNIKA RETURNS

Hall of Famer Annika Sörenstam continues to "Lead with Legacy" both on and off the golf course. During her 15-year career, she earned more than 90 victories worldwide, including 72 LPGA Tour wins and 10 major championships. Today, she promotes women's golf worldwide through the ANNIKA Foundation.

Her legacy is also celebrated in Tampa Bay through The ANNIKA driven by Gainbridge at Pelican, one of the LPGA Tour's premier events. Presented in collaboration with Gainbridge and Pelican Golf Club in Belleair, the 2026 tournament will be held November 9th–15th.

An elite field of 108 players will compete for a share of the $3.25 million purse. Bradenton native and three-time tournament champion Nelly Korda is set to return, seeking her fourth victory at the event. She will be joined by defending champion Linn Grant, Brooke Henderson, Charley Hull, Hall of Famer Lydia Ko, and other leading professional golfers.

The tournament will benefit the ANNIKA Foundation and several local and regional charitable organizations. Daily and weekly grounds passes and all-inclusive hospitality packages are available, including access to the Lightning Lounge, presented in partnership with the Tampa Bay Lightning. For tickets and complete tournament information, visit TheAnnika.com.

CLEARWATER TURKEY TROT One of Tampa Bay's longest-running Thanksgiving traditions returns Thursday, November 26th, when the City of Clearwater and Achieva Credit Union host the 2026 Achieva Clearwater Turkey Trot at Clearwater High School.

This year's event will feature several improvements, including a streamlined registration platform, additional packet pickup opportunities at Achieva Credit Union locations throughout Pinellas County, and new weekend pickup options. A redesigned Pre-Trot Celebration at BayCare Ballpark will provide more space and shorter lines. Every registered participant will also receive a collectible 2026 Turkey Trot medal.

Participants of all ages and abilities can choose from three races: the Achieva 5K Timed Run at 7 a.m., the FrankCrum Family Fun 5K at 8 a.m., and Abe's Place 1-Mile Drum Run at 9:15 a.m.

The Family Fun 5K and 1-Mile Drum Run offer a relaxed experience, with strollers and well-behaved leashed dogs welcome. The Thanksgiving morning celebration will also include live music, games, food, entertainment, and a spirited costume contest for the whole family.

For more information or to register, visit MyClearwater.com/Events-and-Meetings/Achieva-Clearwater-Turkey-Trot.

OUR NEXT ISSUE IS IN DECEMBER If you need another copy of this magazine, pick one up at all City Halls, Panera Bread, The UPS Store, and Belleair Market. If you need more than a few, call (813) 361-7376.

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Florida Skunk Ape, Continued

Still, the association reveals something important about the legend. Florida's swamps have long inspired reverence, uncertainty, and fear. Before roads, drainage projects, and development transformed much of the peninsula, enormous stretches of the interior remained difficult to explore. Stories about unknown beings naturally flourished in such places.

The Skunk Ape Takes Shape

Long before the Skunk Ape became a household name, Florida newspapers carried stories of mysterious "wild men" roaming the state's forests. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, hunters, turpentine workers, and cattlemen reported large, shaggy figures moving through remote swamps. Most accounts were dismissed as escaped circus animals, bears seen in poor light, or frontier storytelling. Yet they established a tradition that later merged with national fascination following the 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film in California.

By the 1950s and 1960s, Florida newspapers increasingly referred to the creature as the "Skunk Ape," distinguishing it from its western cousin. Residents of the Everglades, Big Cypress, and the Green Swamp swapped stories of nighttime screams, enormous footprints, and an overpowering odor.

Reports became especially common during the 1960s and 1970s, as Florida's population surged and development pushed into rural areas. Newspapers carried accounts of tall, apelike figures near roads, citrus groves, canals, and wooded neighborhoods. Witnesses frequently described dark or reddish-brown hair, unusually long arms, and an ability to disappear quickly into heavy vegetation.

The creature's most memorable characteristic was its smell. Witnesses compared the odor to a skunk, wet animal, rotten eggs, or decaying vegetation. That detail distinguished the Skunk Ape from the better-known Bigfoot and gave Florida's creature a suitably swampy identity.

None of these reports produced scientific evidence. No body, verified biological sample, or conclusive photograph emerged. Nevertheless, the stories attracted the attention of law enforcement officers, newspaper reporters, and state legislators, helping cement the Skunk Ape as an enduring Florida folk legend.

Tallahassee Takes Notice

One of the strangest chapters in the legend is preserved in Florida's official records. In 1978, state Rep. Hugh Paul Nuckolls

Photo: Jack Healy, Skunk Ape Research Headquarters

introduced House Bill 58, sometimes called the "Florida Skunk Ape Protection Act." The proposal sought to protect unspecified "anthropoids or humanoid animals" from capture or harm.

The bill did not pass, and its introduction did not represent official recognition of the creature. Even so, the surviving 24-page legislative file demonstrates how firmly the Skunk Ape had entered Florida popular culture.

The Mystery of the Myakka Photographs

Interest surged again in December 2000, when the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office received an anonymous letter with two color photographs. The writer claimed that a large animal had entered her yard and taken apples from her porch. She believed it might have been an escaped orangutan.

The photographs show a bulky, reddish-haired figure crouching among saw palmettos, its eyes reflecting the camera's flash. They became known as the "Myakka Skunk Ape" photographs, although the photographer's identity and the location were never publicly confirmed.

Believers considered the photographs some of the clearest evidence of the creature's existence. Skeptics suggested that the subject could have been a person wearing a costume, a known primate, or part of a carefully staged hoax. Without the photographer, a physical specimen, or additional verifiable evidence, the images remain intriguing but inconclusive.

A Legend Finds a Home

Today, much of Florida's Skunk Ape culture centers on Ochopee, a tiny community along the Tamiami Trail. There, longtime enthusiast Dave Shealy operates the Skunk Ape Research Headquarters—part roadside attraction, part museum, and part celebration of Everglades folklore. Visitors can examine footprint casts, photographs, and sighting reports while purchasing souvenirs associated with Florida roadside tourism.

Mainstream zoology offers more ordinary explanations. Florida black bears can stand on their hind legs, while darkness and heavy vegetation can distort an animal's size and shape. Escaped exotic primates, hoaxes, and honest misidentifications may also account for some encounters. Most importantly, no verified bones, DNA, hair, or other physical evidence has demonstrated the existence of an unknown giant primate in Florida.

Yet the landscape makes disbelief feel a little less certain. Big Cypress National Preserve alone protects approximately 729,000 acres of rugged freshwater swamp. Nearby lie the Everglades, the Ten Thousand Islands, and vast stretches of mangrove forest, sawgrass marsh, and isolated hardwood hammocks.

It is a landscape filled with hidden waterways, dense vegetation, and places rarely visited by people. Under the right conditions—and perhaps with a little imagination—an ordinary shadow, distant animal, or unexplained sound can become something far more mysterious.

Whether the Skunk Ape is an undiscovered primate, a collection of mistaken identities, or one of Florida's greatest campfire stories, its place in the state's folklore is secure. Few legends capture the imagination like the possibility that something large and mysterious still moves through the cypress shadows of the Everglades.

In a state better known for beaches and theme parks, the Skunk Ape reminds us that Florida also contains one of North America's great remaining wildernesses—a place where mystery still feels possible. Perhaps that is why reports continue to surface: oversized footprints are photographed, strange cries are heard, and campers swear they glimpsed something disappearing into the palmettos before dawn.

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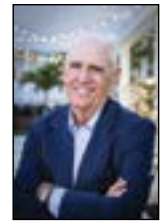
by Ray Ferrara, ProVise Management Group



The One Big Beautiful Bill Act introduced a new savings vehicle for children called a "Trump Account." While the name may draw attention, the real attraction is the opportunity to build significant long-term wealth through disciplined saving and investing.

Trump Accounts can be established for children under age 18. Parents, grandparents, and others may contribute up to $5,000 annually. Employers can contribute up to $2,500 per year on behalf of employees' children. These employer contributions count toward the annual limit, are generally tax-deductible to the company, avoid FICA taxes, and are not taxable income to the employee under federal law.

Perhaps the most appealing feature is the government's contribution. Children born between 1/1/25 and 12/31/28 receive a $1,000 starter deposit from the federal government. Contributions also receive favorable treatment for gift and generation-skipping transfer tax purposes, making them an attractive planning tool for grandparents and other family members.

The account is designed to encourage long-term investing. Funds generally cannot be withdrawn before age 18, except in limited circumstances such as excess contribution corrections, qualified rollovers, certain ABLE account transfers, or upon the beneficiary's death. At age 18, the account transitions into a traditional IRA.

If funded consistently, the growth potential can be substantial. Assuming a $6,000 initial contribution, including the government's $1,000 deposit, followed by annual contributions of $5,000 for the next 17 years, and assuming a hypothetical 7 percent annual return, the account could grow to approximately $173,000 by age 18.

The real opportunity may come after the conversion to a traditional IRA. A young adult in a relatively low tax bracket may gradually convert the account to a Roth IRA, paying little or no tax on portions sheltered by the standard deduction. Even after paying some taxes on larger conversions, the long-term benefits can be dramatic. In one hypothetical example, the account could grow to about $226,000 after completing a series of Roth conversions. Left invested at the same 7 percent return, it could exceed $4 million by age 65.

Of course, life rarely follows a perfect script. Yet even if some of the Roth IRA funds are eventually used for education, a first home, or other major life goals, Trump Accounts can provide young people with an extraordinary financial head start and a powerful foundation for future wealth.

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CLEARWATER JAZZ HOLIDAY CELEBRATES 47 YEARS

Clearwater Jazz Holiday Powered by Duke Energy returns October 15th–18th, celebrating 47 years of live music on the waterfront in downtown Clearwater. The festival will once again feature Tampa Bay Times main stage concerts on the large green in Coachman Park, with two headline performances each night. This year's celebration also includes a free daily festival pre-party featuring live music on two side stages located in Coachman Park's Lower Plaza and Promenade Pier overlooking Clearwater Harbor before the headliners take the main stage each evening.

"We're excited to continue building on the Back to Our Roots format this year. It creates many unique ways for people to experience the festival in one of the most beautiful waterfront settings in the Bay Area," shares Steve Weinberger, Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation CEO. "There's something truly special about live music on Clearwater's waterfront in October."

From the side stages to the main stage, the 2026 lineup continues Clearwater Jazz Holiday's tradition of presenting a fun and musically diverse festival experience with distinct daily themes including Cool Jazz Thursday, Feel the Rhythm Friday, Blues & Brass Saturday, and Roots & Funk Sunday. Festivalgoers can enjoy music from two general admission areas where blankets and lawn chairs are welcome—the ticketed Green experience located behind reserved seating or the free and open Sunset Bluff overlooking the main stage and the waterfront. New for 2026 are stage-front VIP tables for four that include access to the festival's VIP Hospitality Area. Food and beverage vendors will serve festival attendees throughout Coachman Park during all four days of the event.

Reserved ticket options include several tiers of reserved seating as well as new stage-front VIP tables for four with VIP Hospitality Area access. Main Lawn General Admission tickets and free and open viewing areas on the Sunset Bluff provide additional ways to enjoy the festival experience. Single-Day and Discounted Multi-Day Packages are available. Free and open side stage performances take place daily before the main stage concerts begin. Buy tickets and view the full schedule at ClearwaterJazz.com.

Clearwater Jazz Holiday is presented by the Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization which also celebrates the art form of jazz year-round with innovative jazz appreciation and instructional programs, online education resources, exciting performance opportunities, special funding, and creative learning experiences.

DATA CENTERS: OPPORTUNITY, IMPACT, AND FLORIDA'S GROWING DEBATE

Data centers are buildings filled with computer servers. They support cloud storage, streaming services, online shopping, government operations, and artificial intelligence. As people and businesses use more digital services, developers are looking for sites with dependable electricity, land, fast fiber connections, and favorable tax policies. That growth has started a debate across Florida.

Supporters say data centers are an important part of modern life. New facilities can create construction jobs, attract private investment, increase property-tax revenue, and help technology businesses grow. They also provide computing power used by hospitals, schools, companies, and government agencies. Supporters believe communities that welcome data centers could be better prepared for a technology-based economy.

Critics and local officials are concerned about the resources these facilities require. Large data centers can use enormous amounts of electricity, while some cooling systems need large amounts of water. Nearby residents may also worry about noise, diesel backup generators, environmental effects, and expensive utility upgrades. Communities must also decide whether the permanent jobs and tax revenue are worth the land and infrastructure a data center may require.

Florida lawmakers addressed some of these concerns this year. A new state law created requirements for large electricity customers and added water-permitting rules for large-scale data centers. The law calls for utility rates designed to place appropriate infrastructure costs on major power users. It also allows cities and counties to control where data centers may be built through local zoning and long-term development plans. Certain projects seeking large amounts of water must provide more information, and reclaimed water should be used when practical.

The issue has reached Pinellas County, where open land is scarce and homes and businesses are often close together. In Pinellas Park, American Tower proposed replacing a light-industrial building near Bryan Dairy Road with a data-processing facility measuring about 17,000 square feet. The company said the project would be a smaller operation, not an artificial-intelligence center. The application was later withdrawn.

In August 2026, the Pinellas Park City Council approved a one-year pause on new or expanded data centers. During that period, officials plan to study how the facilities could affect utilities, public safety, the environment, and nearby properties. The pause does not mean that future projects will automatically be approved or rejected.

Pinellas County commissioners have also directed staff to prepare a resolution explaining that large, stand-alone data centers are already prohibited in unincorporated areas because county zoning does not list them as an allowed use. That position would not apply inside the county's 24 municipalities, which set their own zoning rules.

For local residents, the debate centers on several questions: Where should data centers be located, who should pay for infrastructure improvements, and what protections should be required?

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I'VE JUST MOVED TO FLORIDA. WILL MY OLD OUT-OF-STATE DOCUMENTS STILL WORK?

By Theodore Schofner, Esq.

Lots of people are moving into Tampa Bay. Many of you are wondering whether your out-of-state will, power of attorney, health care surrogate designation, or trust will still work here. Technically, Florida law will honor a last will and other advance directives that were properly signed and executed in another state. However, that is only a technical answer.

The practical problem occurs when you try to use those out-of-state documents at banks, hospitals, and local government offices. Tellers, nurses, caseworkers, and hospital administrators may be accustomed to seeing Florida documents, and an unfamiliar out-of-state document can create concerns, misunderstandings, headaches, and delays.

More serious problems can occur if an individual no longer has the capacity to execute a new Florida document, such as a power of attorney. In many cases, the client's former out-of-state attorney must be located and contacted to confirm that the document was properly executed, remains valid, and continues to be effective under that state's laws even though the client now lives in Florida and has lost capacity.

Be especially careful with an out-of-state power of attorney. A well-written power of attorney may mean the difference between obtaining benefits such as Medicaid and being unable to obtain them. Many out-of-state powers of attorney lack language allowing the attorney-in-fact or agent to establish a personal services contract, create a Qualified Income Trust, fund an asset protection trust, fund a pooled trust, or purchase an annuity for Medicaid asset protection. Most importantly, an out-of-state power of attorney may not grant the individual "superpowers" necessary to perform certain duties under Florida law.

The same considerations apply to trusts created in other states. It may be important to change a trust's venue and governing law to Florida so its administration can be simplified and handled consistently under Florida law.

What is my recommendation? If you have the time and resources, visit a qualified elder law attorney and obtain new Florida estate planning documents. This can help ensure that everything is properly addressed while reducing stress and misunderstandings when serious health or financial challenges arise.

The same logic applies if you are planning to leave Florida for retirement or to live closer to your children and grandchildren. After arriving in your new state, consider obtaining estate planning documents prepared under that state's laws. These are critical documents that can control your assets, finances, health care, and decision-making. In short, we recommend maintaining estate planning documents prepared for the jurisdiction where you currently live.

You can reach Theodore Schofner, Esq. at the Schofner Law Firm, 2117 Indian Rocks Road S. in Largo, (727) 588-0290.

CAN PROBIOTICS HELP MANAGE BLOOD SUGAR?

Probiotics are commonly promoted for digestive health, but researchers are also examining whether they can help manage blood sugar. Findings are encouraging for adults with prediabetes or Type 2 diabetes, although probiotics cannot replace medication, exercise, or a healthy diet.

Probiotics are live bacteria or yeasts found in fermented foods and dietary supplements. They may influence the collection of microorganisms in the digestive tract, known as the gut microbiome. The microbiome may affect blood sugar by influencing inflammation, insulin sensitivity, the intestinal barrier, and how the body processes nutrients.

Recent reviews of clinical trials suggest that probiotic or synbiotic supplements may produce modest improvements in blood sugar. Synbiotics combine probiotics with prebiotics, which are fibers that feed beneficial intestinal bacteria.

A 2025 review of 48 studies found small improvements among people with prediabetes or Type 2 diabetes. On average, fasting blood sugar dropped by about seven points, while A1c—a measure of average blood sugar over two to three months—fell by about one-third of a percentage point. Other research found slightly greater improvements, but the overall evidence remains limited.

Results vary because researchers have tested different types and amounts of probiotics for different periods. Products containing Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium are among the most widely studied. Supplements containing several strains may provide greater benefits than single-strain products. However, researchers have not identified the best probiotic, dosage, or treatment period for managing blood sugar.

Probiotic products are not interchangeable. A benefit associated with one formulation does not mean every product labeled "probiotic" will produce the same result. Consumers should look for labels that identify individual strains and list the number of live organisms expected through the expiration date. Independent quality verification, such as a USP seal, may offer additional reassurance.

Food sources include yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, and other fermented products, although not every fermented food contains live probiotic cultures. People with diabetes should check nutrition labels because flavored yogurts, sweetened drinks, and similar products may contain considerable added sugar.

Probiotics usually cause only mild, temporary gas or bloating in healthy adults. People who are severely ill, immunocompromised, hospitalized, or using a central venous catheter should consult a physician before taking them.

For most people, probiotics are best viewed as a possible addition to established care—not a primary treatment. Prescribed medication, a high-fiber diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep, weight management, and appropriate medical care remain the foundations of blood sugar control. Because responses vary, tracking glucose readings can help patients discuss any noticeable changes with their physician or diabetes care team.

Editor's note: This article is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Consult your healthcare provider before beginning a supplement or changing your diabetes treatment.

LITHIUM BATTERY SAFETY BEFORE AND AFTER THE STORM

By Chief Ken Grimes, PSFRD

Ask someone to picture a firefighter at work, and they will likely imagine a house fire, a vehicle crash, or a hurricane rescue. While those emergencies remain central to our work, your special fire district is equally committed to preparing for next-generation hazards. One of the fastest-growing challenges in today's fire service stems from an everyday household technology: lithium-ion batteries.

A generation ago, most homes contained only a few rechargeable batteries. Today, they power cordless drills, lawn equipment, golf carts, e-bikes, smartphones, tablets, flashlights, and portable power stations. These devices have transformed how we live and work, offering exceptional convenience and safety under normal conditions. However, when damaged, lithium-ion batteries present a fire hazard unlike traditional household threats.

Unlike ordinary fires, a damaged lithium-ion battery can enter thermal runaway—a rapid chain reaction that produces intense heat, toxic smoke, and flammable gases. These fires burn exceptionally hot and can reignite hours after appearing to be extinguished. Fire departments across the nation are responding to these incidents with increasing frequency, prompting continuous investment in specialized equipment, tactics, and response procedures.

On Florida's barrier islands, hurricane season adds a critical layer of risk. Batteries exposed to floodwaters—particularly saltwater—may show no immediate signs of damage and may even continue to operate. Unfortunately, internal corrosion can trigger a catastrophic failure hours or days later as residents clean up, charge tools, or restore power.

Fortunately, proactive measures can significantly reduce these risks. To prepare ahead of a storm, fully charge essential devices before the weather degrades, then store all batteries, cordless tools, and equipment in a cool, dry space above potential flood levels. Be sure to unplug devices as soon as they reach full charge, and move larger battery-powered equipment—such as e-bikes, golf carts, and lawn tools—completely out of areas vulnerable to storm surge.

Following a storm, never attempt to recharge or plug in any battery that was submerged in water or physically damaged. Carefully inspect your devices and watch for warning signs of failure, including swelling, leakage, excessive heat, hissing or popping sounds, unusual odors, or smoke. If a battery displays any of these symptoms and it is safe to handle, immediately move it outdoors away from structures and flammables, and contact your local solid waste or recycling agency for proper hazardous waste disposal rather than placing it in household trash.

The most effective fire is the one that never happens. Public education and prevention remain vital to our mission. As technology evolves, so do the risks to our community, requiring modern response equipment, continuous firefighter training, and active public awareness.

Your special fire district exists to deliver that high standard of readiness. Whether responding to a structure fire, performing a storm rescue, or helping residents navigate modern hazards, our focus remains steadfast: protecting lives, property, and the community we are privileged to serve.

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Bar & Restaurant News

TAVERN IN THE BLUFFS NOW OPEN Congratulations to the Pappas family and team on the opening of Tavern in the Bluffs, located at 2890 West Bay Drive (previously occupied by Cody's Roadhouse). This is the sister restaurant to Backwaters on Sand Key and Backwaters North Redington Beach.

Tavern in the Bluffs is a new neighborhood bar and grill offering elevated comfort food, handcrafted drinks, and a lively atmosphere with live sports on its screens. From quick lunches to happy hour and late-night outings, they serve fresh, flavorful dishes in a welcoming setting. Guests can enjoy classic bar favorites and satisfying meals perfect for any occasion.

The Tavern opens at 11 a.m. daily, closing at 11 p.m. Sunday–Thursday and 2 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Follow them on Facebook to view upcoming events and specials.

FORE! FOR FALL AT BOGEY'S TAVERN Golf legends, Prohibition-era speakeasies, and Northeastern hospitality come together at Bogey's Tavern, a newly opened restaurant created by husband-and-wife team Pam Dufour and Mike D'Ottavio.

Located at 300 East Bay Drive, across from Largo Central Park, the 3,700-square-foot tavern can accommodate approximately 140 guests with indoor and outdoor dining. It also features a full-liquor bar and a private party room.

Bogey's regularly offers live acoustic music, Sunday brunch, and happy-hour specials. Its menu draws inspiration from traditional New England and Mid-Atlantic cuisine, with selections such as New England clam chowder, baked Atlantic cod, mussels, and Rhode Island calamari. Guests will also find familiar pub favorites and a rotating selection of specials.

For operating hours and the complete menu, visit BogeysTavernLargo.com. For additional information, follow Bogey's Tavern on Facebook or call (727) 314-4000.

BON APPÉTIT CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN DUNEDIN Bon Appétit Restaurant & Marina Bar at 148 Marina Plaza in Dunedin is celebrating 50 years of operation on October 17th, with festivities running throughout the month of October. The milestone honors five decades of fine dining, community gatherings, and iconic sunsets over St. Joseph's Sound.

Founded in 1976 by Peter Kreuziger and Chef Karl Riedl, the waterfront establishment quickly became a local landmark for family celebrations, holidays, and milestones. In November 2022, The Original Crabby Bill's Family Brands acquired the restaurant, maintaining its longstanding traditions while guiding the venue into its next chapter.

"One of the best parts of celebrating 50 years is hearing people tell us what Bon Appétit has meant to them," said Matthew Loder Sr. "Everyone seems to have a story. Those stories are part of Bon Appétit's history too."

As part of the month-long celebration, Bon Appétit is inviting longtime guests, employees, and community members to submit their favorite memories, photos, and stories from over the years. For more information or to view the menu, visit BonAppetitRestaurant.com.

Bar & Restaurant News

TWO CLAWS UP! Stone crab season is back, running from October 15th through May 1st, and Frenchy's Original Café is ready to celebrate. The 45-year-old Clearwater Beach staple, located at 41 Baymont Street, will host its 42nd annual Stone Crab Weekend Block Party on October 23rd and 24th.

The free-to-attend two-day celebration will run from noon–10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, offering fresh stone crab, live music, and plenty of coastal fun. Food, drinks, and merchandise will be available for purchase.

Parking is available nearby at North Beach Parking Plaza, which offers more than 600 spaces. Visitors may also use public street parking and metered lots near the festival. Taxis, ride-sharing services, and public transportation are additional options.

Those who want to escape the beach crowds without missing the celebration can head north to Frenchy's Stone Crab & Seafood Market, located at 501 Causeway Boulevard on the Dunedin Causeway. The market will host its "Backlot Bash" during the same dates and hours. Parking will be available at Frenchy's Outpost Bar & Grill and Causeway Plaza across the street.

This year's festivities will also recognize a special milestone: America's 250th anniversary. Fresh stone crab, live music, and 42 years of tradition will come together for one unforgettable weekend. Visit StoneCrabWeekend.com for more information.

CLOSED, BUT NOT FOR GOOD Monstah Lobstah & JD's Back Porch, located at 125 Gulf Boulevard in Indian Rocks Beach, closed last month as its owners prepare to rebuild the property from the ground up.

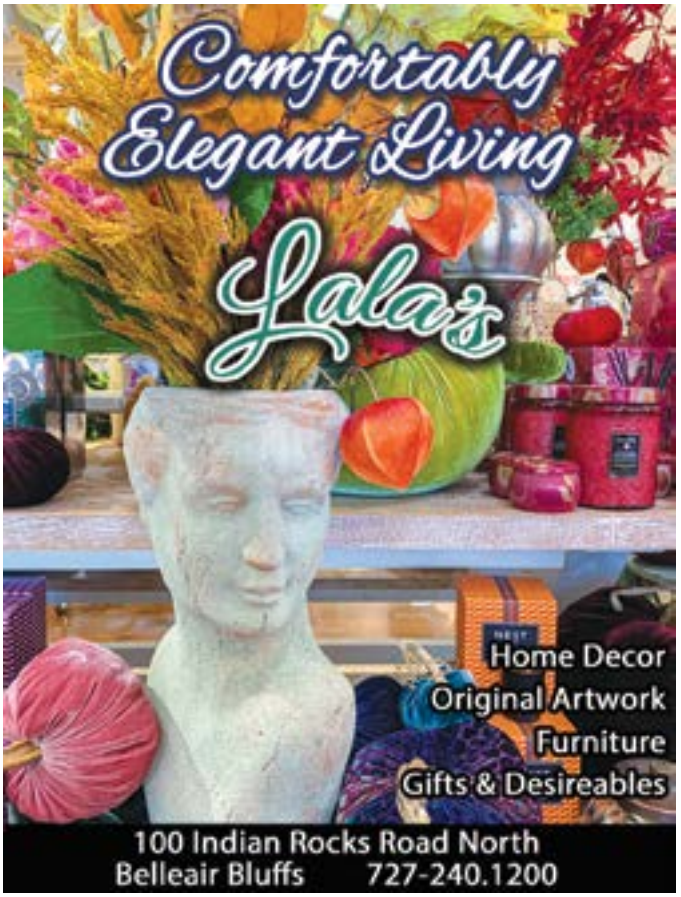
Like many businesses along Florida's Gulf Coast, the building sustained significant damage during the 2024 hurricane season. After extensive evaluations and discussions with contractors and architects, the owners concluded that additional repairs would only continue a cycle of temporary fixes without addressing the property's underlying problems.

The new Monstah Lobstah will be a multilevel restaurant designed specifically for a coastal environment. The building will include stairs and an elevator.

The rooftop will become JD's Rooftop Bar, bringing back many of the features guests loved about JD's, including live music, dancing, and piano nights. With 360-degree views of the beach and Intracoastal Waterway, the rooftop will also display historic photographs, preserved pieces from the original JD's, and a few surprises celebrating the property's history.

During construction, guests are invited to visit the company's sister restaurants: The Original Crabby Bill's, Guilty Sea Sports Pub, Jake's Coastal Cantina, and Pipo N Betty's Bakery. Follow Monstah Lobstah on Facebook for construction updates.

RESTAURANT NEWS WANTED If your restaurant has news or an upcoming event we can include in this News Magazine, please email Lora@MagriffProductions.com or call (813) 361-7376.



THE HIDDEN HITS: WHAT CTE RESEARCH MEANS FOR ATHLETES AND FAMILIES

By Pete Magnani, Publisher

Football fields and hockey rinks have long been places where young athletes learn teamwork, discipline, and resilience. But growing evidence about chronic traumatic encephalopathy, better known as CTE, is changing how leagues, coaches, and parents think about the repeated hits that come with collision sports.

CTE is a progressive brain disease associated with long-term exposure to repeated head impacts. Those impacts include diagnosed concussions, but also smaller blows that may produce no immediate symptoms. Over time, abnormal deposits of a protein called tau can damage brain tissue. Researchers have linked CTE pathology with problems involving memory, thinking, mood, and behavior, although those symptoms can have many other causes. At present, CTE can be definitively diagnosed only after death through examination of brain tissue.

A study published in *The BMJ* in August provides one of the clearest estimates yet of the disease among former National Football League players. Researchers identified 878 former NFL players who died from 2016 through 2021. Of the 235 whose brains were donated for study, 215—more than 91 percent—had CTE.

That does not mean 91 percent of all NFL players develop the disease. Families who suspect neurological problems may be more likely to donate a loved one's brain, creating what researchers call selection bias. To address that limitation, the study calculated a conservative minimum: even if none of the players whose brains were not studied had CTE, at least 24.5 percent of all former NFL players who died during those six years had the disease. The true rate could be considerably higher. Severe, Stage IV CTE was also associated with an increased risk of dementia among the brain donors.

Football is not alone. CTE has been identified in participants in boxing, rugby, soccer, and other activities involving repeated impacts. A 2024 JAMA Network Open study examined the brains of 77 deceased male ice hockey players, from youth competitors to professionals. Researchers found CTE in 42 of them, including 27 of 28 former professional players. After accounting for factors such as age, position, other contact sports, and reported concussions, the odds of CTE increased with each additional year of hockey played.

Those numbers also require caution. The hockey sample was small, limited to male brain donors and was not representative of everyone who plays the sport. The study cannot tell a family the absolute risk facing one particular child. Still, its dose-response pattern—more years of exposure associated with more disease—reinforces the central concern: *cumulative contact matters*.

That message is especially important in youth sports, where exposure to routine impacts can begin years before college or professional play. CDC research involving players ages 6 to 14 found that tackle football athletes sustained 15 times as many head impacts and 23 times as many high-magnitude impacts as flag football players during practices and games. The point is not that every hit causes lasting harm, or that every contact-sport athlete will develop CTE. Scientists still do not know why some exposed athletes develop the disease and others do not. The practical goal is to reduce avoidable impacts while preserving the benefits of sports participation.

Football programs are responding by offering flag football at younger ages, limiting full-contact practice, teaching age-appropriate tackling that keeps the head out of contact, and enforcing penalties for targeting or leading with the helmet. The NFL has also changed kickoff rules, penalized improper use of the helmet, tested helmets, and added unaffiliated medical personnel to help identify possible concussions. No helmet, however, can prevent the brain from moving inside the skull, so equipment should be viewed as one layer of protection rather than a guarantee.

Hockey has taken similar steps. USA Hockey delayed legal body checking until age 13 and strengthened penalties for head contact. At the professional level, the NHL uses in-arena and central concussion spotters who can require a player to be removed for evaluation after visible signs of a possible brain injury. Reducing checking, fighting, and dangerous contact—and teaching players to respect rather than exploit vulnerable positions—can decrease exposure at every level.

Florida law adds another layer of protection for organized youth teams. Programs must educate coaches, athletes, and parents about concussion risks, obtain annual informed consent, immediately remove a player suspected of a concussion, and require written medical clearance before that athlete returns. The Florida High School Athletic Association also requires annual concussion education for student-athletes and coaches.

Parents should ask whether a league limits contact in practice, trains coaches in concussion recognition, enforces head-contact rules, and follows a gradual return-to-play protocol. Warning signs after a hit can include headache, dizziness, confusion, balance problems, nausea, sensitivity to light or noise, and unusual behavior. A suspected concussion should never be treated as something to "shake off," and an athlete should not return the same day.

Sports will always carry risk, but tradition does not require ignoring new evidence. The most responsible path is neither panic nor complacency. It is to reduce unnecessary blows, recognize injuries quickly, and put a young athlete's long-term brain health ahead of the next play, shift, or game.

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She has been published in peer-reviewed journals, presented at national meetings, and was recognized in Newsweek's "America's Best Medical Dermatologists" in 2022. She is excited to join Dr. Nayyar and the team at Dermaclinique, where she looks forward to providing compassionate, high-quality dermatologic care to the community.

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CLEARWATER BOY SAVES TURTLES

By Pete Magnani, Publisher

Jessica and Gabe Williams

Twelve-year-old Gabriel "Gabe" Williams expected to spend his summer exploring the beach and building sandcastles near his family's condominium at the Regatta Beach Club on North Clearwater Beach. Instead, his curiosity helped save dozens of sea turtle hatchlings.

On July 20th, Gabe discovered hatchlings trapped inside a storm drain near the Clearwater property's Sunset Pier. The drain, approximately three feet below the surrounding pavers, had become a dangerous trap for the tiny turtles, which had likely emerged from nearby nests and become disoriented while attempting to reach the Gulf.

Gabe and his mother, Jessica Williams, immediately recognized that the hatchlings needed help. Their efforts drew the attention of resident Ruth Tsarnas, who also works with Clearwater Marine Aquarium's Sea Turtle Stranding Team. Aquarium staff coordinated a professional response, and about 40 hatchlings were released safely back into the Gulf.

Clearwater Marine Aquarium patrols approximately 21 miles of northern Pinellas County shoreline. Teams of trained staff members, interns, and volunteers reach the beach before sunrise seven days a week to look for turtle tracks and evidence of nesting activity. Once a nest is located, it is marked and monitored until the eggs hatch. Team members later examine the nest and record its contents to help determine hatching success. The information collected is reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Pinellas County.

The aquarium also operates a marine animal hospital that rescues, rehabilitates, and releases sick or injured sea turtles. Its veterinary team treats turtles suffering from entanglements, boat strikes, disease, and other potentially life-threatening conditions. Whenever possible, rehabilitated turtles are returned to their natural habitat.

Sea turtles have lived in the world's oceans for more than 100 million years, but their survival remains uncertain. All five species found in Florida are classified as threatened or endangered. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission estimates that only about one out of every 1,000 hatchlings survives to adulthood.

Nesting season officially runs from May 1st–October 31st. Hatchlings typically emerge at night and instinctively move toward the brightest horizon, which under natural conditions is the reflection of the moon and stars over the water. Artificial lighting can draw them inland and into streets, parking lots, and drainage systems.

Residents and visitors can help by turning off lights visible from the beach, closing curtains after dark, removing beach furniture and trash, filling holes, and knocking down sandcastles before leaving. Sea turtles and hatchlings should never be handled without authorization. Anyone finding a stranded, injured, or disoriented turtle should call Clearwater Marine Aquarium at (727) 441-1790 or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at (888) 404-3922. For more information, visit CMAquarium.org.

A LINE IN THE SAND: BELLEAIR SHORE'S BEACH BOUNDARY DEBATE

A legal dispute over an erosion control line in Belleair Shore has drawn attention from Belleair Beach residents, Pinellas County officials, and beachfront property owners. The outcome could affect property boundaries, public use of dry sand, and future beach renourishment.

An erosion control line, or ECL, is a fixed boundary established by the state before beach restoration or renourishment. Under Florida law, land seaward of the line is state-owned, while land landward of it belongs to private upland owners. It generally replaces the naturally shifting mean high-water line as the boundary between public and private property.

The disputed ECL was recorded in 1997 as part of the Sand Key Phase IV beach restoration project. Belleair Shore petitioned the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in 2026 to cancel the portion within the town. The town maintains the line was improperly applied because Belleair Shore did not participate in the project and has not allowed publicly funded sand to be placed directly along its beachfront.

Supporters describe the matter as a private-property rights issue. They argue that retaining the ECL prevents beachfront deeds from extending toward the Gulf as sand naturally accumulates. More than 70 percent of the affected beachfront footage supported the request. Officials say cancellation would correct an error made nearly three decades ago.

Opponents, including some Belleair Beach residents and several local governments, view the issue differently. They contend that Belleair Shore has benefited indirectly because sand placed on nearby beaches migrates along the shoreline. They also worry that removing the line could expand private claims over portions of the dry-sand beach, potentially affecting space available for public walking and recreation.

Opponents also argue that eliminating one section of a larger ECL could complicate future planning, increase costs, and affect eligibility for government-supported renourishment. Supporters counter that Belleair Shore has historically remained outside those projects and should not surrender property rights for benefits it did not request.

On June 23rd, the Department of Environmental Protection denied the petition, finding that the original restoration project was completed within the time required by law, that only a portion of the larger ECL could not be canceled independently, and that Belleair Shore had received sand migrating from adjacent project areas.

Belleair Shore subsequently challenged the decision through Florida's administrative process. If the matter proceeds to a formal hearing, an administrative law judge will consider evidence, witness testimony, and legal arguments from the town, DEP, and any parties permitted to intervene. The judge will issue a recommended order, after which the DEP will enter a final agency decision. An affected party may then seek review by the Florida District Court of Appeal. Unless a later ruling changes the outcome, the ECL will remain in place.

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PINELLAS RECOVERS

By Commissioner Brian Scott

As I stood beside Melissa Arledge in front of her rebuilt home in Largo, I was reminded why Pinellas Recovers matters so deeply. Two years after Hurricane Milton nearly destroyed her property, Melissa is finally home again—and her joy reflects the resilience we see throughout Pinellas County.

Through our federally funded Pinellas Recovers programs, more than 1,000 households have already been approved for assistance, and dozens of new homes are now under construction. Melissa's home is the first fully reconstructed residence completed, marking an important step in our long-term recovery.

Rebuilding isn't easy, and the process takes time. Our *People First* programs continue to offer critical support—from major home repairs and full replacements to reimbursement options and opportunities for landlords to restore damaged units at affordable rates.

We're committed to helping residents across Pinellas County return to safe, stable housing and to restoring the communities impacted by the storms. Seeing families like Melissa's begin a new chapter reminds us why this work is so important—and why we'll keep pushing forward until recovery reaches every household that needs it. If your family experienced damage from the 2024 hurricanes, please call (727) 606-3307 or visit Recover.Pinellas.gov for program-related information.

PEACE MEMORIAL MUSIC SERIES CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

Peace Memorial Church's Music Series will celebrate its 20th anniversary during the 2026–2027 season, marking two decades of bringing high-quality, accessible performances to downtown Clearwater.

Under the longtime volunteer leadership of series chair Beth Daniels, a Clearwater attorney and arts advocate, the program has grown into one of the region's most respected concert series. Each season, Peace Memorial's historic sanctuary hosts six to seven programs featuring local and nationally recognized musicians.

Daniels has also served on the Clearwater Arts Alliance Board and The Florida Orchestra board, extending her commitment to community-focused arts programming throughout the region.

The anniversary season will continue that tradition with classical, jazz, chamber, brass, pipe organ, and vocal performances. Over the years, audiences have also enjoyed big bands, renowned soloists, silent films with live accompaniment, and programs incorporating video and other visual elements.

Concerts are offered on a donations-only basis, making live music available to people of all income levels. Community members are invited to help continue that mission by mailing donations to the church and designating them for the music series.

For information about upcoming concerts, anniversary events, or opportunities to support the Peace Memorial Music Series, visit PeaceMemorialPresbyterian.org. Readers may also contact Music Director Tim Belk at (800) 479-8846 or Concert Series Chair Beth Daniels at (727) 461-1818.

PINELLAS SCAM ALERT: KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

By Lora Magnani, Publisher

Florida living means sunshine, beaches, and vibrant communities, but the state also faces a serious fraud problem. According to the Federal Trade Commission's 2024 Consumer Sentinel Network Data Book, Florida had the nation's highest per-capita rates of reported fraud and identity theft. Here in Pinellas County, law enforcement and consumer protection officials continue to warn residents about increasingly convincing schemes designed to steal money and personal information.

One of the most prevalent schemes involves scammers impersonating law enforcement officers. The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office confirmed in March that residents had received calls from criminals using the name of a real high-ranking Sheriff's Office official. The callers claimed their targets had outstanding warrants, unpaid citations, or penalties for missing jury duty. They then demanded immediate payment through Zelle, Cash App, Venmo, or gift cards.

Scammers can manipulate caller ID so that a call appears to come from the Sheriff's Office. They may also provide a real deputy's name, a fabricated badge number, or convincing personal details. None of that proves the call is legitimate. The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office will never call someone and demand money to resolve a warrant, citation, or missed jury summons. Anyone receiving such a call should hang up and contact the Sheriff's Office directly at (727) 582-6200.

Fraudsters are also impersonating utility companies and county agencies. Utility scammers typically threaten to disconnect electricity, water, cable, or another service unless the customer makes an immediate payment. Residents should never use a payment link or telephone number supplied in an unexpected message. Instead, contact the company through the number printed on a bill or listed on its official website.

In July, Pinellas County Animal Services and the Office of Consumer Protection warned residents about a caller posing as an animal control officer. The scammer claimed the victim's pet was undergoing surgery and demanded immediate payment over the telephone. Caller ID could even display what appeared to be an official county number. Pinellas County Animal Services does not provide veterinary services to the public, making such a request a clear warning sign.

Other scammers pose as representatives of Medicare, insurance companies, government benefits programs, banks, or credit card issuers. Their goal is often to obtain Social Security numbers, Medicare numbers, birth dates, account information, passwords, or verification codes. Once criminals obtain this information, they may open fraudulent accounts, apply for loans, change insurance coverage, or gain access to existing bank accounts.

Artificial intelligence is making impersonation scams more convincing. Criminals can copy a person's voice from a video or audio clip posted online, then use the imitation to create an emergency. Hearing a familiar voice is no longer proof that the caller is genuine. If someone claiming to be a relative requests money, hang up and call that person directly at a known number. Avoid saying the relative's name first, because doing so may give the scammer useful information. A family code word can provide another safeguard, but residents should still verify every unexpected request before sending money or sharing information.

Grandparent and family-emergency scams remain another serious threat, particularly for older residents. A caller may pretend to be a grandchild who has been arrested, injured in an accident, or stranded while traveling. Another scammer may then join the call while posing as an attorney, police officer, or medical professional. Victims are pressured to send money immediately and told not to contact other family members.

If such a call arrives, hang up and contact the relative directly using a telephone number you already know. Speaking with another family member can also quickly expose the deception. Families may want to establish a private code word that can be used to confirm someone's identity during a genuine emergency.

Home repair and contractor scams are a concern for Pinellas County homeowners, particularly after hurricanes or flooding. Fraudulent operators may arrive without being invited, claim to have leftover materials, exaggerate damage, or demand a deposit before disappearing. Others may begin work without permits, insurance, or the licenses required for the job, leaving homeowners responsible for unfinished repairs, code violations, or damage.

Before signing a contract, verify the contractor's license through the Pinellas County Construction Licensing Board or the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation. Ask for proof of general liability and workers' compensation insurance, check the company's complaint history, and obtain multiple written estimates. A legitimate contractor should provide an agreement describing the work, materials, total price, payment schedule, and expected completion date.

Avoid paying the full amount in advance and never allow anyone to pressure you into making an immediate decision. Payments should correspond with completed stages of work. Homeowners should also confirm that required permits have been obtained and request releases of lien from contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers before making final payment. Anyone suspecting unlicensed contracting can contact the Pinellas County Construction Licensing Board at (727) 582-6767. Consumer complaints may be reported to Pinellas County Consumer Protection.

The best defense is to slow down. Scammers rely on fear, secrecy, and urgency to prevent people from thinking clearly. Never provide personal or financial information to an unexpected caller, and never send gift cards, cryptocurrency, wire transfers, cash, or payments through mobile apps in response to threats or pressure.

Residents can also place a free credit freeze with Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. A freeze makes it more difficult for an identity thief to open new accounts, although it does not prevent fraudulent activity involving existing accounts.

Anyone who suspects fraud should contact the bank, credit card company, or payment service involved as quickly as possible. Suspected scams may be reported to Pinellas County Consumer Protection at (727) 464-6200, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office non-emergency line at (727) 582-6200, or the Federal Trade Commission at ReportFraud.ftc.gov. Identity theft victims can report the crime and receive a personalized recovery plan at IdentityTheft.gov.

Staying informed, verifying unexpected requests, and checking on vulnerable relatives and neighbors can help prevent these criminals from succeeding.

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Business Briefs

BOULEVARD DENTAL WELCOMES NEW PRACTITIONER Boulevard Dental Belleair, located at 1016 Ponce de Leon Blvd., has welcomed Dr. Matthew Dockus to its growing practice.

A St. Petersburg native, Dr. Dockus earned degrees in microbiology and biomedical sciences from the University of South Florida before completing his Doctor of Dental Medicine degree at Nova Southeastern University in 2015.

Dr. Dockus provides comprehensive dental care for adults and children, including root canals, oral surgery, and dental implant placement. He emphasizes strong patient relationships, individualized treatment plans, and evidence-based dentistry supported by continuing education and active professional memberships.

Dr. Dockus is now accepting new patients at Boulevard Dental Belleair. Visit BoulevardDentalBelleair.com for more information or to request an appointment.

MEDSPA EXPANDS IN BELLEAIR Olive & Honey MedSpa has expanded into a larger location at 1016 Ponce de Leon Boulevard in Belleair.

Founder Jeannine Bernstein-Cagle, DNP(c), MSN, RN, CCRN, created the practice as a welcoming destination where healthcare, aesthetics, wellness, and prevention come together through clinically guided care. A fourth-generation Clearwater resident, she brings more than two decades of experience in oral surgery, critical care, nursing education, clinical operations, and executive leadership.

The expanded space features additional private treatment rooms and more room for personalized healthcare, aesthetic, and wellness services. Bernstein-Cagle's advanced aesthetic training emphasizes facial anatomy, patient safety, precise treatment planning, and natural-looking results.

Olive & Honey also provides responsible medical management of GLP-1 therapy through individualized screening, ongoing monitoring, nutrition guidance, and support for sustainable health improvements.

The practice's name reflects the olive's associations with longevity and protection and honey's connections to nourishment and restoration.

Olive & Honey will celebrate its expanded space in November, with the date and details to be announced. For more information about the medspa and its services, visit OliveandHoneyMedspa.com.

THIRD LOCATION FOR BELLEAIR COFFEE

Congratulations to Belleair Coffee Company and owners Chris Whelan and his wife, Cammie Griffin, on celebrating a decade of business at their 100 Indian Rocks Road location. The couple opened Belleair Coffee Company and Taphouse at 1158 7th St NW in Largo last year and are now working on a third location at 1211 4th Street North in the Old Northeast neighborhood of St. Petersburg.

It will serve house-roasted specialty coffee, baked goods, breakfast and lunch items, beer, and wine. The new cafe will host live music on weekends, open mic nights, trivia, and coffee education events.

For more information about events and specials, call (727) 501-1010 or follow them on Facebook.

Business Briefs

IRB CHAIRS CELEBRATES TEN YEARS

For the past 10 years, IRB Chairs has been helping locals and visitors make the most of their time along the beautiful shores of Indian Rocks Beach. What Mike and Teresa Fowler began as a beach chair and umbrella rental business has grown into a trusted local company with 12 employees, a strong relationship with the City of Indian Rocks Beach, and a reputation for exceptional service reflected in its 5-star Google rating. As IRB Chairs celebrates its 10th anniversary, the company continues to make enjoying a day at the beach easier, more comfortable, and more convenient.

Planning your perfect beach day has never been simpler. IRB Chairs offers convenient online booking, allowing customers to reserve beach chairs, umbrellas, and cabanas before they even arrive. Beyond beach rentals, IRB Chairs is also proud to support community events and local initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to being more than just a beach rental company. IRB Chairs also provides a daily beach report on Facebook, keeping followers up to date on beach conditions and helping them plan the perfect day by the water.

After a decade of serving Indian Rocks Beach, IRB Chairs looks forward to continuing its mission: making beach days easy, comfortable, and memorable for residents and visitors alike. Ready to plan your perfect beach day? Visit IRBChairs.com to reserve your chairs, umbrellas, or cabana, and follow IRB Chairs on Facebook for the daily beach report.

NEW APPAREL STORES IN COZY DUNEDIN Black & Glen is an elevated menswear boutique created for the modern man who values quality, fit, and effortless sophistication. The shop blends timeless British style with contemporary Florida ease, offering curated apparel and accessories built to last. Founded by Neil Brown and Tina Taylor—partners in life and adventure—Black & Glen reflects their shared love of travel, craftsmanship, and superior design. Neil, a Scottish-born Army veteran with a long career at Deloitte, and Tina, a successful HR entrepreneur with a keen eye for detail, set out to bring thoughtful, well-made menswear to Dunedin, creating a space where every man can dress with confidence, personality, and polish.

After Black & Glen Men's opened at 735 Broadway in Downtown Dunedin, customer demand quickly grew for a women's line. Neil and Tina took the leap and opened Black & Glen Women's just four doors down at 719 Broadway, bringing the same commitment to quality, craftsmanship, and personal service that made the original a local favorite. The new shop features thoughtfully curated contemporary and resort-inspired brands, offering versatile pieces that transition seamlessly from day to evening alongside personal styling guidance designed to help women feel comfortable and confident in what they wear.

Visit BlackandGlen.com for more information.

BUSINESS NEWS WANTED If you have news for this magazine, email Pete@MagriffProductions.com or call (813) 239-6862.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND HIS THREE PARTIES

By Bob Griffin, Contributing Historian

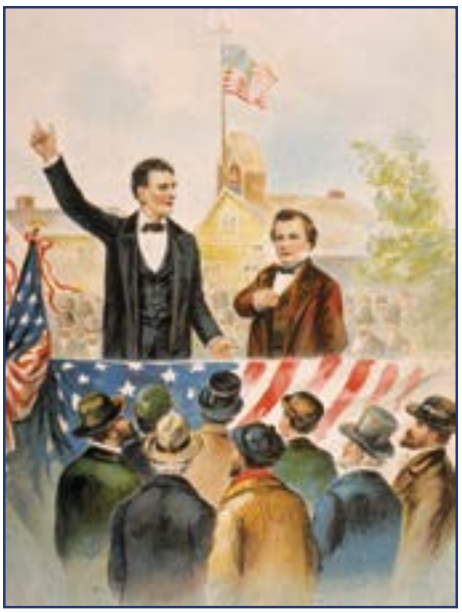
With the 2026 midterm elections approaching, it is timely to examine how American political parties have changed. Florida's major parties are Republican and Democratic. No party affiliation (NPA) is distinct from membership in the minor Independent Party of Florida. Florida also recognizes minor parties, including the America First Party, Ecology Party, Green Party, Independent Party, Libertarian Party, and We the People Florida.

Abraham Lincoln is remembered as the first Republican president, but his career began elsewhere. He supported the National Republicans, served as a Whig, helped establish the Republican Party in Illinois, and sought reelection under the temporary National Union banner.

Early Steps and Local Defeat

In 1832, 23-year-old store clerk Abraham Lincoln announced his candidacy for the Illinois General Assembly. Party labels carried less weight in that race, although Lincoln supported National Republican policies associated with Henry Clay. His campaign was interrupted when he volunteered for the Black Hawk War. Elected captain of his militia company, Lincoln later recalled the honor with pride, although his unit never saw combat.

After returning, Lincoln resumed campaigning. He finished eighth among 13 candidates, with the top four winning seats. Although he performedwell in his New Salem precinct, he lacked sufficient support throughout Sangamon County. It was his first electoral defeat.



Abraham Lincoln (left) and U.S. Sen. Stephen A. Douglas in debate, 1858.
Kean Collection/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

The Whig Party

Lincoln tried again in 1834, aligning with the emerging Whig Party. He won a seat in the Illinois House and was reelected in 1836, 1838, and 1840. During four terms, Lincoln became a Whig minority leader and supported roads, canals, and railroads. He also helped move Illinois' capital from Vandalia to Springfield.

In 1846, Lincoln was elected to the U.S. House as a Whig, representing Illinois' 7th Congressional District. His single term proved politically challenging. Lincoln opposed President James K. Polk's handling of the Mexican-American War and introduced his "Spot Resolutions," asking where Mexican forces had allegedly shed American blood. His position drew criticism. Lincoln did not seek reelection in 1848, honoring an informal Whig arrangement rotating the nomination among party leaders. He returned to Springfield and resumed practicing law.

The 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act ended Lincoln's political hiatus. It allowed territorial residents to decide whether to permit slavery, effectively repealing a Missouri Compromise restriction. Opposing slavery's westward expansion, Lincoln returned to politics. He won election to the Illinois House in 1854 but resigned before taking his seat to pursue the U.S. Senate.

At the time, state legislatures—not voters—selected U.S. senators. In February 1855, Lincoln led several rounds of voting but lacked a majority. When divisions among anti-slavery lawmakers threatened to elect another candidate, Lincoln asked supporters to back anti-slavery Democrat Lyman Trumbull, who won.

The Republican Party

As the Whig Party collapsed over slavery, Lincoln joined the new Republican Party. In 1856, he finished second in informal balloting for its vice-presidential nomination, which went to William L. Dayton. Two years later, Illinois Republicans selected Lincoln to challenge Democratic Senator Stephen A. Douglas. Their campaign produced seven debates focused largely on slavery's expansion into western territories.

Voters elected state legislators, who selected the senator. Republican legislative candidates received strong statewide support, but district boundaries and results favored Douglas' allies. The Illinois General Assembly reelected Douglas 54–46. Although Lincoln lost, the debates made him a nationally recognized Republican leader.

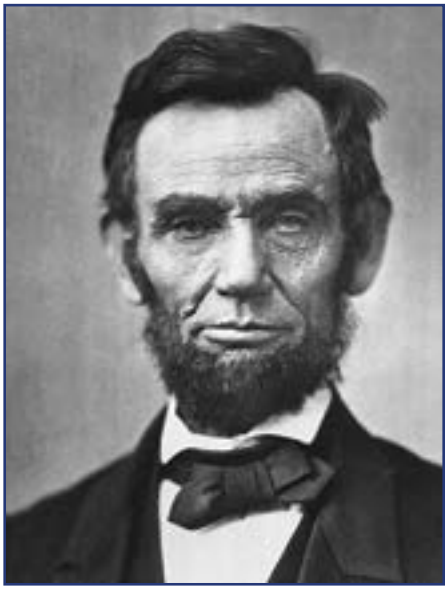


Photo by Alexander Gardner
November 8th, 1863

In May 1860, the Republican National Convention met in Chicago. Lincoln emerged as an acceptable alternative to front-runner William H. Seward and secured the nomination on the third ballot. That November, Lincoln faced three major opponents in a nation divided over slavery. He became the first Republican president, winning 180 of 303 electoral votes despite receiving 39.8 percent of the popular vote.

The National Union Party

Four years later, Republicans joined pro-Union Democrats under the temporary National Union Party banner. Lincoln sought reelection with Tennessee Democrat Andrew Johnson as his running mate. Facing Democratic nominee George B. McClellan, a former Union general, Lincoln won approximately 55 percent of the popular vote and 212 electoral votes.

Lincoln's journey—from National Republican supporter to Whig, Republican, and National Union candidate—reflected the political changes of his lifetime. John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln at Ford's Theatre on April 14th, 1865, six weeks after his second term began. Lincoln died the following morning, April 15th.

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City of Belleair Bluffs – 2747 Sunset Blvd., Belleair Bluffs, FL | 727-584-2151
Join Our Email List: Stay informed about City news, events, meetings, and important updates. Visit **belleairbluffs.org**, select the **"How Do I?"** tab, and click **"Join City Email List"** to sign up.

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MAYOR'S CORNER

We encourage residents and local business owners to attend a City Commission meeting, stay informed, and share questions or concerns. The City is also continuing to schedule and complete road improvement projects throughout the community. We look forward to celebrating the holiday season with our residents at our annual Tree Lighting on December 4.
If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at **727-458-2148**.

Mayor Chris Arbutine Sr.

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MUNICIPAL ELECTION – March 9, 2027

There is one Mayoral seat and two Commission seats available for election, each for a two-year term. The qualifying period is November 2 through November 16.

For more information or to inquire about the election process, please contact City Clerk Alexis Silcox at (727) 584-2151 ext. 102 or email asilcox@belleairbluffs-fl.gov.

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RESIDENT BENEFITS & AMENITIES

Largo Recreation Programs

Belleair Bluffs' residents are eligible to participate in **City of Largo recreation programs at residential rates**. Stop by City Hall to pick up a Largo Recreation Playbook and discover the many programs available.
Residents are also encouraged to enjoy the City's **outdoor exercise area** and **Little Library** located at City Hall.

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PUBLIC MEETING INFORMATION

City Commission meetings are generally held once a month on Monday evenings at the **Belleair Bluffs Community Center**. Please check the website calendar for meeting dates and times.

Upcoming Fall/Winter meeting dates:

- November 16, 2026
- December 14, 2026
- January 11, 2027
- February 8, 2027

Residents are welcome to attend meetings to stay informed about City business and community issues.

ANNUAL TREE LIGHTING and BOOK DRIVE ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2026

The annual holiday tree lighting program and the arrival of SANTA on the firetruck will take place at City Hall beginning at 6:00pm. As always, there will be plenty of treats, hot chocolate, facepainting, petting zoo, hayride, and fun for all!

We kindly ask guests to bring Children's books for our library. Anyone that brings a children's book donation will receive the City's Annual tree ornament.

SANTA DELIVERS GIFTS TO CHILDREN OF BELLEAIR BLUFFS ON DECEMBER 23!

Starting at 4:00pm until completed
First 20 residents!
Bring ONE SMALL gift for each child (must be easily loaded on the fire truck)

- Put delivery address and phone number on the package
- Put your child's name and age on the package.
- Under 12 years of age, also put the parent's name on the package
- BRING THE GIFT to City Hall – 2747 Sunset Blvd. between 9:00am and 4:00pm on **DECEMBER 7th through DECEMBER 18th (Last day to drop off gifts)**

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PROPERTY TAXES AND CITY SERVICES

Property taxes help fund the essential services residents rely on every day, including fire and emergency response, law enforcement, waste collection, road maintenance, and other community services. Unlike many other taxes, ad valorem property tax dollars remain within the community, allowing residents to have a direct voice in how these funds are used.

For the sixteenth consecutive year, the City of Belleair Bluffs has maintained a millage rate of 5.3500. This rate helps ensure the City has sufficient funding to provide the services and maintain the infrastructure our residents and businesses depend on.

Residents are encouraged to stay informed about the City's financial operations by reviewing the annual budget, audit reports, and Finance Review Committee reports available on the City's Finance Department webpage at belleairbluffs.org.

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NEWS FROM THE PUBLIC WORKS

Why Is Stormwater Important? *National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System*

If stormwater only contained rain, our jobs would be simple. But stormwater contains more. Much more! Pollutants such as oils, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, lawn clippings, paints and other household chemicals, chlorine and even soil are picked up and carried along by stormwater as it travels across lawns and other surfaces, down roadside curbs, into storm drains, and ultimately into larger water bodies such as McKay Creek and the Intracoastal Waterway that leads directly to the Gulf of Mexico. It is illegal to discharge chlorinated pool water into the curb lines and roadways.

What can you do?

- Please be sure to call Belleair Bluffs City Hall at 727-584-2151 if you notice anyone performing illicit discharge activities.
- Properly dispose of hazardous materials. Please visit our website at www.belleairbluffs.org to keep up with dates and locations of mobile collection events by the Pinellas County Household Electronics and Chemical Collection Center.
- Prevent illicit discharges (items other than rain) by containing soil piles on construction sites and de-chlorinating swimming pool water before draining.

EVEN AFTER SUMMER, KEEP KIDS OUT OF HOT CARS

From the Desk of Sheriff Bob Gualtieri

You see it in the headlines every year—a child has died after being left in a hot car. And you think, how could that possibly happen? Who could forget a precious child in the car on a hot day? According to the National Safety Council, 31 children died of vehicular heatstroke in 2025. Since 1998, more than 120 children in Florida have died after being left in a hot car. Only Texas has more child heatstroke deaths in vehicles. Every single one of those deaths could have been prevented.

The inside of a vehicle heats up much faster than you may realize. According to No Heat Stroke, an organization dedicated to preventing heat-related deaths in cars, when the outside temperature is 90 degrees, the internal temperature can climb to 133 degrees within an hour. But the danger doesn't end when temperatures start to drop a little as fall approaches. Even balmy fall temperatures are enough to heat up a car to dangerous levels. In 80-degree weather, the interior can rise to 123 degrees in an hour. When it is a cool and pleasant 70 degrees outside, a car parked in the sun can heat up to 113 degrees.

Heatstroke can begin when core body temperature reaches 104 degrees. Death can occur when it reaches 107 degrees. Because of their smaller size and greater surface-to-mass ratio, children's bodies can heat up three to five times faster than an adult's.

It isn't enough to leave the windows cracked. That little bit of air circulation does almost nothing to counteract the effects of the sun heating up the car. Parking in the shade might make it a little cooler, but dropping the internal temperature from the 130s to the 120s isn't going to prevent loss of life. Some people think it will be okay if they're just running inside for a few minutes, but the temperature can go from warm to deadly fast. There is no such thing as a safe amount of time to leave a child in a hot car.

Sometimes relatives or babysitters leave kids in the car deliberately because they don't realize how dangerous it is. Other times, people actually forget to take their child out of the car. They may be distracted, exhausted, or think that another caregiver has already taken them out. A baby may be quietly sleeping and overlooked while getting other children out of the car.

Always check the back of your vehicle. When you put a child in the back seat, find a way to remind yourself that they are there. Put something in the back seat that you'll need at your destination.

Some vehicle heatstroke deaths occur when children gain access to a vehicle themselves and become trapped without their parents knowing. Make sure your vehicle is locked, and don't let children have access to the keys. Teach them that the car is not a place to play. As soon as they are old enough, teach them how to open the back doors, and that they can climb to the front and open the front doors if the back doors have a child safety lock. Make sure they know to blow the horn if they get trapped. If a child is ever missing, check the pool first, then the car.

Pets are also extremely vulnerable to vehicular heatstroke, and many people think that it is safe to leave an animal in a car for a brief period. In reality, thousands of pets die each year from being left in hot cars.

If you see a child or animal left alone in a hot vehicle, call 911 immediately.

Community News

BELLEAIR GARDEN CLUB

Submitted by Carol Mears

The Belleair Garden Club is welcoming fall with a lively lineup of programs, workshops, and community events, with opportunities to learn, create, connect, and enjoy the season. All are open to the public.

The Belleair Garden Club offers monthly workshops throughout the season, featuring hands-on and educational topics inspired by gardening, nature, and the outdoors. Advance registration is required.

The upcoming season begins Wednesday, October 7th, at 12:30 p.m. with Native Plants Made Easy, an informative and practical program designed to take some of the guesswork out of choosing native plants for Florida landscapes. The program will explore approachable ways to incorporate Florida native plants into home gardens and landscapes, including plant selection, placement, and the creation of attractive gardens that support local wildlife and pollinators.

Presented by the Belleair Garden Club in partnership with Candles for Caterpillars, the Holiday Harvest Market in the Bluffs is a festive community market featuring local artisans, handcrafted goods, unique gifts, seasonal décor, garden finds, specialty foods, live music, and hands-on activities for all ages. The curated market celebrates creativity, community, and the spirit of the season while supporting two local nonprofits and encouraging visitors to shop locally. The market will be held Saturday, November 21st, from 10 a.m.–2 p.m. at Belleair Bluffs City Hall, along Lentz Street, and in the adjoining park.

Whether you're an experienced gardener or simply looking to connect with others who enjoy nature, learn new skills, or give back through community service, the Belleair Garden Club welcomes you. Membership is open to everyone, and guests are always encouraged to attend a meeting, workshop, or event to discover what the club has to offer. Visit BelleairGardenClub.com for information about the club, its events, and its programs.

The Belleair Garden Club is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to gardening, conservation, education, and community involvement. The clubhouse is located at 903 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Belleair, FL 33756. To learn more about upcoming events, membership, volunteer opportunities, and clubhouse rentals, visit BelleairGardenClub.com.

BELLEAIR BEACH LADIES LUNCHEON CLUB (BBLC)

With plans in place for the upcoming year, BBLC looks forward to a new season filled with great food, friends, and programs. This year's charity is The Kind Mouse, which helps ensure children have food throughout the school year and during school breaks. We look forward to working with this charitable organization.

Don't let the name fool you—not only Belleair Beach residents but also those from all surrounding areas are welcome. There is a $25 annual membership fee. Each luncheon costs $37 and includes bread, salad, a hearty meal, dessert, and a glass of wine. With one exception, we meet at local restaurants on the second Tuesday of each month from October through May and enjoy a different program at every gathering. The group is a wonderful mix of ladies who enjoy sharing a lovely lunch together.

For more information or to join, contact Treasurer Deborah Hendricks at (727) 453-2193 or DSBrown55@yahoo.com.

Community News

SHEPHERD'S VILLAGE

Submitted by Sherry Chandler

For 35 years, Shepherd's Village has helped single moms and their children face the future with confidence. Our founder, Dr. Phyllis Alderman, had a heart for single moms and a whole lot of faith. The first Shepherd's Village began in Clearwater after the equity in an apartment building was famously signed over on a napkin. But the story didn't end there.

When it was time to find a safer home for the mothers and children, Phyllis took another big step of faith. Shepherd's Village purchased its Belleair Bluffs property with just $60 in the bank, allowing the resident families to move from Clearwater.

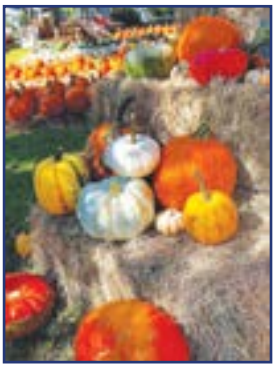
On Sunday, October 25th, we're hosting a Village Party to celebrate our founder, thank the Village of supporters who helped us reach this milestone, raise a glass to 35 years, and show off a building that recently received a fabulous facelift.

If you drive past 3025 Los Altos Avenue in Belleair Bluffs from 4 to 6 p.m. on October 25th, give us a honk! One honk says, "Happy 35th!" Two honks say, "Looking good, Shepherd's Village!" Honk three times, and we'll assume you're just excited.

If honking isn't quite enough, consider donating $60 at ShepherdsVillage.com/donate. We've seen what God can do with $60. Give in honor of the faith-filled step that helped bring Shepherd's Village—and its families—home to Belleair Bluffs.

Because 35 years later, one thing hasn't changed: It really does take a Village.

CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

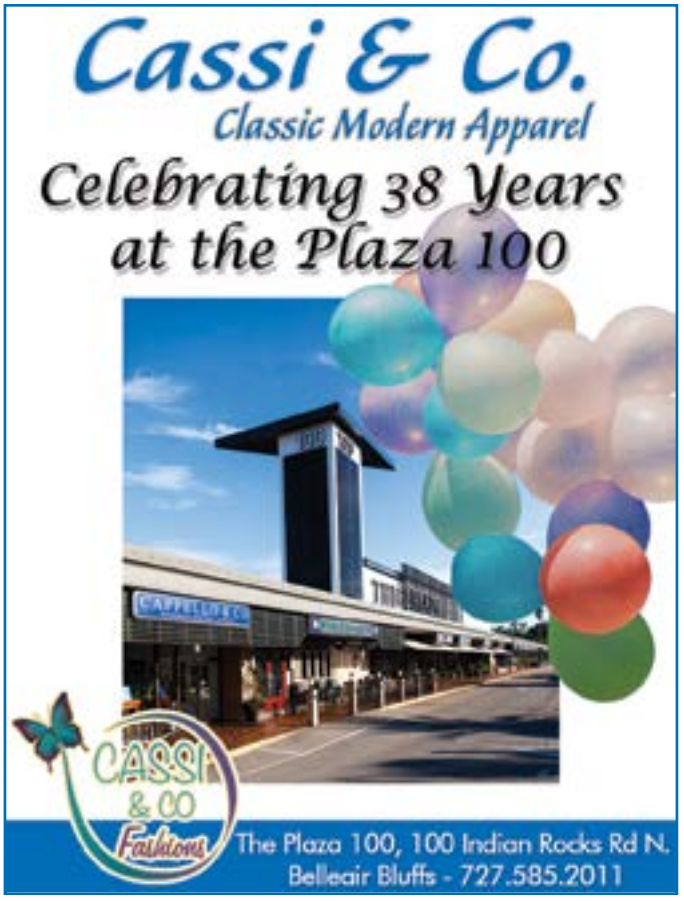


Celebrate the arrival of autumn as the Church of Ascension brings back one of the community's newest seasonal traditions. The church, located at 701 Orange Avenue in Clearwater, will host its 2nd Annual Pumpkin Patch from September 30th through October 28th.

This monthlong community event is open to the public and features a wide selection of unique pumpkins and gourds for sale. From classic jack-o'-lantern pumpkins perfect for carving to whimsical heirloom varieties and colorful gourds, visitors of all ages are invited to explore the patch and find the perfect piece of fall décor.

The Pumpkin Patch will be open Wednesdays and Fridays from 2–6 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m.–4 p.m., and Sundays from 9 a.m.–3 p.m. It will be located at the Church of the Ascension, 701 Orange Avenue, Clearwater.

Admission to the Pumpkin Patch is free, and proceeds from pumpkin and gourd sales directly support the church's community outreach programs and ministries. Gather your family, bring your camera, and enjoy a festive autumn experience in the heart of Clearwater. For more information, visit ChurchofAscension.org.



WHY FALL IS THE BEST TIME TO LANDSCAPE IN BELLEAIR

By Randy Lee, Landscape Designer

Fall in Belleair may not bring colorful leaves or chilly mornings, but October does bring something valuable for homeowners: a break from the intense heat and humidity of summer. That makes fall one of the best times to evaluate, refresh, and improve your landscape.

Cooler Weather Is Better for New Plantings

October's milder temperatures give newly planted trees, shrubs, and other plants a chance to establish healthy root systems before Florida's summer heat returns. Fall is an ideal time to add new plants, create planting beds or make larger landscape improvements. Beautiful flowers can also be planted prior to the holidays.

Give Your Landscape a Post-Summer Refresh

After months of heat, heavy rain, and tropical weather, your landscape may need some attention. Overgrown plants, damaged trees, tired planting beds, and inefficient irrigation are all worth evaluating before the dry season arrives. Then, you can decide whether a refresh or a full-scale renovation is needed.

Check Your Irrigation

As rainfall becomes less consistent, your irrigation system becomes increasingly important. Fall is a good time to check for broken heads, uneven coverage, and areas that may be receiving too much or too little water. A properly designed irrigation system helps keep your landscape healthy while using water efficiently. We are also currently under water restrictions.

Prepare for Outdoor Living

Cooler temperatures also mean more time spent outdoors. Whether you are entertaining around the pool, enjoying your outdoor kitchen, or simply relaxing in your backyard, fall is the perfect time to enhance the spaces surrounding your home. New plantings, landscape lighting, outdoor speakers, privacy screening, and updated beds can make a significant difference in how your outdoor spaces look and function. Everyone wants to look great for the upcoming holidays.

Plan Now for the Landscape You Want Tomorrow

A beautiful landscape takes time to mature. Trees grow, shrubs fill in and planting beds become more established. Starting your project in the fall gives your landscape time to develop before the next summer season. It all starts with a 2D or 3D design.

Fall Landscape Checklist

- Prepare for dry season
- Water restrictions are in effect
- Fertilizer can be used as of October 1st
- Resod when weather cools off
- Chill out on maintenance and pruning
- Prepare a new landscape design

Landscapes By Randy Lee, Inc. is a full-service landscape design company here to help you with all of your landscape needs. Call us directly at (727) 421-2715 or visit us online at LandscapesbyRL.com.

THE FINAL ESCAPE: THE CONFEDERACY'S LAST WAR SECRETARY AND HIS FLIGHT THROUGH FLORIDA

By Pete Magnani, Publisher

On May 30th, 1865, as the Civil War drew to its bitter conclusion, one of the Confederacy's highest-ranking leaders navigated the waters of Florida's Indian River Lagoon, hoping to evade capture and escape the United States. His remarkable journey would become one of the most dramatic escape stories of the Civil War.

John Cabell Breckinridge had already lived an extraordinary life before arriving in Florida. Born in Kentucky in 1821, he entered public office in 1849. During his two terms in Congress, Breckinridge aligned with moderate Southern Democrats, favoring states' rights while advocating to keep the Union together. Presidential nominee James Buchanan named Breckinridge as his running mate in 1856. On March 4th, 1857, Breckinridge was sworn in as the 14th Vice President of the United States—the youngest person ever elected to the office.

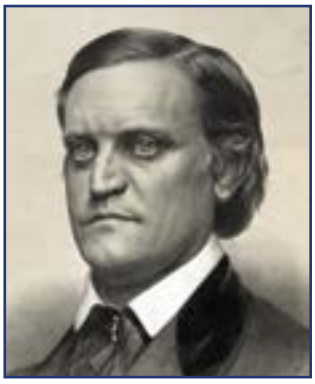
As Vice President, Breckinridge presided over an increasingly divided Senate. While he personally supported the rights of slaveholders, he frequently attempted to mediate growing sectional tensions between Northern and Southern senators. However, his relationship with President Buchanan soured over policy differences and patronage disputes. Breckinridge ran for President on the Southern Democratic ticket and lost to Abraham Lincoln by 108 electoral votes.

Following the loss, Breckinridge took a seat in the U.S. Senate representing Kentucky in March 1861. As the Civil War broke out, he urged compromise and argued against Northern military intervention in the seceding states. Although Breckinridge sympathized with the South, he initially hoped Kentucky could remain neutral in the conflict. In August 1861, he delivered one of his final Senate speeches urging reconciliation and warning against a devastating war.

Kentucky's position became increasingly complicated as the state attempted to remain in the Union while divided between Unionists and Confederate sympathizers. In September 1861, the Kentucky legislature voted to support the Union cause, and federal forces sought to arrest Breckinridge for treason. He fled south, joined the Confederate Army, and was formally expelled from the U.S. Senate on December 4th, 1861.

The expulsion was one of the most dramatic moments of the Civil War's early political crisis and marked a dramatic fall from grace. Only months earlier, Breckinridge had been one of the nation's most prominent political figures—a former vice president and presidential candidate. By the end of 1861, he was officially branded a traitor by the Senate and was serving as a Confederate general. He would later rise to the rank of major general and, in February 1865, become Confederate Secretary of War, placing him among the final leaders of the collapsing Confederacy.

By the spring of 1865, the Confederacy had collapsed. Richmond had fallen, General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox, and Confederate armies across the South were laying down their arms. Unlike some Confederate leaders who still hoped to continue the struggle, Breckinridge recognized that the Confederacy had been defeated and urged President Jefferson Davis to disband the government and spare the South further suffering. Davis refused, and the Confederate government continued its desperate flight southward until Davis was captured in Georgia on May 10th. Realizing imprisonment was now almost certain, Breckinridge resolved to flee the country.



Traveling in disguise with a small group of loyal companions, Breckinridge crossed into Florida in mid-May. The same rugged landscape that had frustrated Union military operations throughout the war now offered one final avenue of escape.

Near Gainesville, Breckinridge received critical assistance from Colonel John Jackson Dickison, Florida's famed cavalry commander known as the "Swamp Fox of the Confederacy." Dickison supplied the fugitives with a small lifeboat captured from the Union gunboat USS Columbine. Although Breckinridge questioned whether the tiny craft could survive the open ocean, it represented his only hope of freedom.

On May 26th, the small party launched down the St. Johns River toward Florida's east coast. The voyage quickly became an ordeal. Torrential rains soaked the men and ruined much of their food and gunpowder. Mosquitoes descended in overwhelming numbers, and the travelers survived on fish, cornmeal mush, turtle eggs, sweet potatoes, wild limes, and whatever game they could find.

By May 30th, the fugitives reached Carlisle's Landing on the Indian River Lagoon near present-day Titusville. Breckinridge was astonished to discover that the "Indian River" was not a river at all but an immense coastal lagoon stretching more than 150 miles behind Florida's barrier islands. As the group paddled south, they traveled through what are now Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, and Palm Beach counties—then an isolated wilderness patrolled by scattered Union guard posts and naval vessels.

One night, they silently slipped past a Union guard station near Fort Pierce, muffling their oars as they glided through darkness. Near Jupiter, local Confederate sympathizers helped the party obtain a larger vessel better suited for the open-water voyage to Cuba, replacing the tiny lifeboat that had carried them down Florida's coast. After dragging the vessel across the narrow barrier island and entering the Atlantic Ocean, they encountered rough seas that repeatedly forced them south instead of east toward the Bahamas.

Even then, the dangers continued. Food and fresh water dwindled, violent storms threatened to swamp the vessel, and the exhausted travelers faced constant uncertainty. Finally, on June 11th, 1865, they reached Cárdenas, Cuba, bringing an end to one of the most extraordinary escapes of the postwar era. Breckinridge later lived in Britain, Canada, and Europe before returning to Kentucky in 1869 to quietly resume his law practice. He never sought a presidential pardon, instead relying on general amnesty eventually extended to most former Confederates after federal restrictions eased.

Today, motorists crossing bridges over the Indian River Lagoon or visiting communities such as Titusville, Fort Pierce, and Jupiter are traveling waterways that once carried the Confederacy's highest-ranking remaining official toward exile. Breckinridge's escape was not a final battle or military triumph, but the closing act of the Confederate government itself. It remains one of Florida's most remarkable—and least remembered—Civil War stories.

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JULIE MARCUS, PINELLAS COUNTY SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS

NOVEMBER 3, 2026 GENERAL ELECTION

GET ELECTION READY

Get Registered
- The deadline to register to vote is October 5, 2026.
- Voter registration applications are available at VotePinellas.gov or any Supervisor of Elections office.
- Make sure your address and signature are up to date and check your registration status at VotePinellas.gov.

Vote by Mail
- All mail ballot requests expired in 2024! The deadline to request a mail ballot is October 22 at 5 p.m.
- Request a mail ballot at VotePinellas.gov or call 727-464-VOTE (8683).
- Mail back your ballot or take it to any one of our secure mail ballot return locations.

Vote Early
- Vote Early at any one of our 7 Early Voting locations: October 19 – November 1, 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. daily.
- Bring your photo and signature ID to avoid delays.

Vote on Election Day
- On November 3 (Election Day), voters are required to vote in the precinct where they live.
- Polls are open 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. Bring your photo and signature ID to avoid delays.
- Visit VotePinellas.gov or call 727-464-VOTE (8683) to find your Election Day polling place.

SCAN HERE

(727) 464-VOTE (8683) ELECTION@VOTEPINELLAS.GOV VOTEPINELLAS.GOV

Community News

CASA PINELLAS

CASA Pinellas will hold its 4th Annual Scavenger Hunt on Saturday, November 7th, inviting residents to enjoy an afternoon of friendly competition while supporting survivors of domestic violence.

Participants will form teams and travel through downtown St. Petersburg, completing challenges, earning points, discovering local attractions, and celebrating the city's history. Teams are encouraged to begin fundraising before the event by sharing their campaign pages with family members, friends, coworkers, and social media followers.

The Scavenger Hunt will begin at noon at Welcome to the Farm, located at 242 1st Avenue North. An after-party and awards ceremony will follow at 3 p.m. at Good Night John Boy, 16 2nd Street North.

Tickets are $35 per person and include admission to the Scavenger Hunt, an exclusive event T-shirt, lunch from Gateway Subs, a beverage, and admission to the after-party featuring a live DJ. Prizes will be awarded to the top fundraising team, top-scoring team, and best-dressed team.

Funds raised will support CASA's mission to stand up to silence, assist survivors of domestic violence, and help create a violence-free Pinellas County.

Visit P2P.onecause.com/casa to register, build a team, or donate.

ROTARY CLUB OF INDIAN ROCKS BEACH

Submitted by David Kline

IT'S FOOTBALL TIME AGAIN! It is that time of year when football excites the masses. Yes, the pro and college seasons are in full swing and excitement is in the air. Watch parties are happening everywhere, tailgating is a focus for many fans, and all of our favorite teams are still in the hunt for that elusive trophy and ring.

This time of year also signals the presentation of Indian Rocks Beach Rotary Club's Big Game Raffle. This will be our 24th year offering the grand prize winner a trip of a lifetime to Los Angeles for the 61st edition of American football's Championship 'Biggest' Game. This year's Big Game will be played at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, CA, on Sunday, February 14th, 2027.

The Big Game Raffle will once again award the lucky Grand Prize winner two tickets to the game, four nights' lodging in the area, and $1,000. There are four additional cash prizes: second prize is $1,000, third prize is $500, fourth prize is $300, and fifth prize is $200.

The winning tickets for the grand and secondary prizes will be drawn at our BGR Drawing Party on December 6th, starting at 2:30 p.m. (you do not have to be present to win). We are grateful to our friends at Guilty Sea Sports Pub in Indian Rocks Beach who will again host the event. Guilty Sea will have all the day's football games on their many TVs. The drawing will take place at 5:30 p.m. Please plan to join us for a fun party; someone will be going to Los Angeles!

Tickets are five for $20 and are now available from the following:

- Any IRB Rotarian
- At the Rotary tent at the Rock the Rocks Music Festival/Market on the second Saturday of every month, starting at noon, at Crabby Bill's main restaurant in IRB
- The Taste of IRB, November 2026
- By contacting David Kline at (727) 418-1673 or DavidKline92@gmail.com.
- At the BGR Drawing Party on December 6th at Guilty Sea Sports Pub

CITY OF LARGO

Submitted by Carolyn Stroud

The City of Largo is welcoming fall with a full lineup of free community events featuring live music, local food, art, wellness programs, and family activities.

The season begins with Largo Vibe Fest, a free three-day arts festival taking place October 2nd–4th at Largo Central Park, 101 Central Park Drive. Hosted by the Central Park Performing Arts Center in celebration of its 30th season, the festival will feature live music, regional artists, interactive art experiences, a Youth Entrepreneur Market, and local food trucks.

Headlining the weekend will be Squonk's Joy Machine, an immersive outdoor production combining original music, giant musical sculptures, kinetic machines, puppetry, and audience participation. Seven performances are planned throughout the weekend, with interactive workshops following each show. Friday evening will also feature a showing of Toy Story 5 in the park.

Festival hours are 3–8 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Saturday, and 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free. Visit LargoArts.com/Vibe for the complete schedule.

Beginning in October, the city will also introduce recurring community events at Horizon West Bay, 440 West Bay Drive. Food Trucks at Largo Lunch Rush will bring rotating food vendors downtown from 11 a.m.–2 p.m. Thursdays. Largo Live will feature free music from 7–11 p.m. Fridays, with visitors encouraged to bring blankets or chairs. Leashed pets are welcome.

Health on the Horizon will take place from noon–1 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month. HCA Largo will present programs covering a variety of health topics, with select events also featuring fitness classes and other activities.

Beginning October 1st, visitors ages 21 and older may also purchase alcoholic beverages from participating businesses and sip and stroll within the designated downtown district along West Bay Drive.

Visit DowntownLargo.com for weekly updates.

BROOKER CREEK PRESERVE EDUCATION CENTER

Submitted by Julia Myers

Local nature enthusiasts and families are invited to celebrate Florida's native flora and essential wildlife during the annual Wildflower & Pollinator Festival on Saturday, October 3rd from 9 a.m.–2 p.m. Held at the Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center in Tarpon Springs, this community event highlights the vital role that native wildflowers play in supporting butterflies, bees, hummingbirds, moths, and beetles, while teaching residents simple strategies to build pollinator-friendly landscapes at home.

Throughout the campus, attendees of all ages can participate in a variety of interactive educational activities and hands-on experiences. Visitors can purchase Florida-friendly plants from regional growers, explore the trail network through a guided Wildflower Quest, view a honeybee observation hive, and speak with naturalists at educational stations. Family-friendly highlights also include kids' make-and-take nature crafts, a beeswax candle-making booth, temporary ecological tattoos by Kate Dolamore Art, and information tables hosted by local conservation organization partners. Visit Explore.Pinellas.gov/pinellas/programs for more information.

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Community News

BLUFFS WINE WALK

The 12th Annual Bluffs Wine Walk returns to Belleair Bluffs on Saturday, October 24th, from 3–7 p.m., bringing wine, music, shopping, dining, and community spirit to the West Bay Drive corridor.

Hosted by the Bluffs Business Association, the Wine Walk invites residents and visitors to stroll among participating businesses while sampling wines and discovering local shops, restaurants, and services. Live music and entertainment will be featured at locations throughout the route, and complimentary trolley transportation will help guests travel between participating businesses and event areas.

Wine Walk ticket holders will receive an official wristband, a commemorative wine glass while supplies last, an event map and tasting guide, access to participating tasting locations, and entry into select promotions and activities.

Wine tasting is limited to guests ages 21 and older, and a valid government-issued photo ID will be required at check-in. Although only adults may participate in the tastings, the overall event atmosphere is family-friendly, and many participating businesses welcome visitors of all ages.

The Bluffs Wine Walk is the Bluffs Business Association's signature annual fundraising event. For more than a decade, it has brought thousands of people together while highlighting the businesses that serve Belleair Bluffs and the surrounding Gulf Beaches.

The event will take place rain or shine. Guests are encouraged to wear comfortable walking shoes and consider carpooling, using a rideshare service, or designating a driver.

Tickets and updates are available through the Bluffs Business Association at BBAStrong.com.

SAND KEY CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Submitted by Al and Kim Kozak

The Sand Key Civic Association will host a speaker forum featuring candidates for Florida's 13th Congressional District. Leela Gray will discuss her vision and priorities, while a separate event will be held with U.S. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna. Florida Senate District 21 candidates Sheriff Chris Nocco and Jordan Hensley will also be invited to participate. A question-and-answer session will follow the presentations.

The forum will be held October 6th from 5:15–7 p.m. at the Belleair Beach Community Center, 444 Causeway Blvd., Belleair Beach. A reception featuring light appetizers and a cash bar from Hogg Daddy's, sponsored by USI Insurance, will begin at 5:15 p.m. Speaker presentations will begin at 6 p.m.

The event is free, but registration is required. To register or submit questions for the candidates, send an email to SandKeyEvents@gmail.com.

MILITARY ORDER OF WORLD WARS

The Clearwater Chapter of the Military Order of World Wars meets the first Tuesday of each month at the Dunedin Golf Club, 1050 Palm Blvd., Dunedin. Social hour is at 11:30 a.m. followed by lunch and a short program. Active duty, retired, or former military officers and their spouses are invited to attend. The MOWW Clearwater Chapter invites those interested to RSVP for lunch by emailing Col. Brian K. Smith at SmithBK@comcast.net.

Community News

BEACH ART CENTER

Submitted by Hope Fitch-Mickiewicz

The Gulf Beach Art Center is welcoming fall with new classes, youth programs, exhibitions, and community events for artists and art lovers of all ages.

The season begins October 10th, when the Art Center joins the Oktoberfest celebration at Kolb Park in Indian Rocks Beach. Families can stop by for face painting and creative children's activities.

The Art Center is also expanding its educational programming with a new Homeschool Art Program and youth pottery classes. The growing fall schedule includes adult art and pottery classes, limited series, guided studio sessions, and single-day workshops for beginners and experienced artists.

On Friday, November 6th, the Art Center will host the opening of a curated exhibition and art sale featuring the work of St. Petersburg artist Elizabeth Barenis. The ticketed opening event will run from 6–8 p.m., with ticket information and additional details to be announced.

The Annual Holiday Artisan Market returns November 21st from 9 a.m.–4 p.m. at the Art Center, 1515 Bay Palm Boulevard in Indian Rocks Beach. Visitors can shop for original artwork, handmade jewelry, pottery, photography, textiles, ornaments, candles, and other one-of-a-kind creations while supporting local artists.

The season concludes December 5th with the inaugural Brushes on the Beach: A Plein Air Art Walk & Celebration. Up to 30 artists will paint outdoors at locations throughout Indian Rocks Beach and neighboring beach communities from 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Residents and visitors can follow a self-guided art walk, watch the artists work, and explore local businesses.

A reception, awards ceremony, and silent auction will follow from 5–7 p.m. at the Art Center. The free event is supported by Creative Pinellas and Visit St. Pete-Clearwater through the countywide Art Everywhere initiative.

Visit BeachArtCenter.org for classes, registration, and event details.

ALPHA-GAL WOMEN'S RETREAT

Soul Quest Healing Horizons Foundation, Inc., a Tampa Bay-area 501(c)(3) nonprofit, will host its inaugural Alpha-Gal Women's Educational Healing Retreat November 6th–8th, 2026, at the Sheraton Sand Key Resort on Clearwater Beach.

The retreat is designed for women living with alpha-gal syndrome, a potentially serious allergy to alpha-gal, a sugar found in most mammals. The condition can develop following certain tick bites and may cause reactions to mammalian meat and other products containing alpha-gal.

Living with the condition can make everyday activities such as dining out, traveling, and attending social gatherings difficult. The retreat will give women an opportunity to learn, relax, and connect with others who understand those challenges.

The weekend will feature meals prepared specifically for the retreat by the resort's culinary team, educational speakers, wellness experiences, gifts, snacks, beachfront activities, and opportunities for fellowship. The retreat package also includes hotel accommodations and scheduled programming.

The event supports the foundation's broader mission of increasing awareness of alpha-gal syndrome, creating safer travel opportunities, and helping bridge the educational gap between patients and the hospitality and travel industries.

For registration details and current promotional pricing, visit SoulQuestTravel.info.

Steve Frankiewicz

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