

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

NOVEMBER 2021 Volume 8 Issue 11

Ponte Vedra, Palm Valley, Nocatee and South Ponte Vedra Beach

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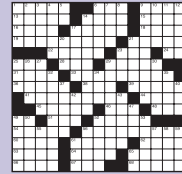
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tag! Children's Museum of St. Augustine breaks ground on four-acre campus

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com



Photos courtesy tag! Children's Museum
tag! Children's Museum groundbreaking
with donors, local community and busi-
ness leaders, family, and friends.

tag! Children's Museum of St. Augustine broke ground on the first phase of construction on Oct. 7. Phase 1 of the interactive experience will be completed during the coming year. Once completed, tag! will be a community resource, local destination, an educational laboratory, and an advocate for children. tag! announced Phase 1 with a generous lead gift from The Newman Family Foundation.

"We are thrilled that tag! Children's Museum will soon begin construction of one of the most unique museums in the country. tag! will
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Flip flop art making waves

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Tucked behind a strip mall off Old Palm Valley Road is Ocean Sole — a studio that contains upcycled flip flops found along the beaches and waterways in Kenya. Flip flops turned into turtles, giraffes, manatee, hammerhead fish, zebras, hippos, rhinos, key chains and pretty much anything imagined or requested. The art is available in any measurement, including life-size, otherwise known as a "masterpiece."

While the studio is easy to miss, its impact as a social enterprise is far-reaching. Case in point: Ocean Sole collects 47 tons of flip flop waste per year and recycles 750,000 flip flops. Ocean Sole has 90 employees, mostly Kenyan artisans.

In 2008, Ocean Sole was founded by Julie Church as a way to help local Kenyan women collect, wash, and cut the discarded flip-flops into colorful products to then be sold at local Kenyan markets as another form of family income. In 2016, Ponte Vedra Beach and Kenya resident Erin Smith became the CEO, excited to bring her business background to the social enterprise.

"We want to have a social impact and be impact-driven," said Smith, in between car rides to take 20 Ocean Sole masterpieces to the September Jacksonville Fall Home + Patio Show. "The artisans receive full payment, we create loans, scholarships, invest in a welfare program and the ethos is people focused. We are also big into helping unskilled women."

After a video on Ocean Sole went viral in 2017, Smith said the demand for the product increased, and people wanted to support the cause. And now Smith's mother and sister-in-law both work at the non-profit.

"I love working at Ocean Sole. It is a non-profit that has a huge impact on conservation efforts, employment and



Photo courtesy Tiffany Merlo Phelps
Ocean Sole items at the PVB-based studio.

cleaning beaches. After working for over 20 years with Congressman Crenshaw and Rutherford, I was excited to join my daughter, daughter-in-law and son in this fun and rewarding endeavor," said Jackie Smith.



Photo courtesy Tiffany Merlo Phelps
Ocean Sole CEO Erin Smith at the PVB-based studio.

Erin Smith lives half of the year in Ponte Vedra Beach and half of the year in Kenya, the latter location a place that she and her husband treasure.

"It is an amazing place," said Smith. "We live on the Indian Ocean, which is why we are so passionate about the beaches. The beaches are so dirty in Kenya."

Erin said three billion people wear flip flops, and it is known as "the poor man's shoe." And in places like India and China, it is the only shoe that is worn. With no waste management in Kenya, the flip flops eventually end up in the ocean and wash up on the shorelines, she said.

"It is a massive problem that most folks never see," said Smith.

In addition to collecting the flip flops, Smith said Ocean Sole also cleans the beach of all trash, divides it up and protects the turtle hatching areas.

"We aim to recycle a million flip flops a year, recycle over one ton of Styrofoam a month and save over 500 trees a year by using flip flops instead of wood," said Smith. "We contribute over 10 – 15 percent of our revenue to beach clean-ups, vocational and educational programs as well as conservation efforts."

Flip flop art cont. on pg. 2

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Flip flop art cont. from pg. 1

International online orders account for the majority of sales with the smallest revenue coming from the United States, according to Smith. With constant collaborations in the works and the world's first "Flip Flop Gallery" slated for the link building in Nocatee, she hopes to improve sales locally and build more support in Ponte Vedra Beach.

"Sometimes people do not connect with the brand because they do not connect globally," said Smith. "I would love if Ponte Vedra Beach or Jacksonville would connect with marine conservation. I think the beaches here are so clean that it is hard to comprehend the actual mess we find on our beaches — it is the same in some parts of the Caribbean, Central America and other parts of the Indian Ocean."

The launch of the Flip Flop Gallery will be held Nov. 13, and tickets are still available. Proceeds will go to Ocean Sole and the Sapna Foundation (the link CEO Raghu Misra's non-profit).



Photo courtesy Tiffany Merlo Phelps
Artwork at the Ocean Sole Studio.



Photo courtesy Erin Smith
Dirty beaches in Kenya, where the flip flops are collected along with all trash to protect the environment.

"This will be our first exhibition and with the CEO of the link's support, we will be able to use the link as a platform to interact with the community, school children and others about conservation and art. To be able to have all of the art in one place is so exciting for us to show off and tell our story in such a great place," said Smith.

Misra agreed, adding that 15 – 20 flip flop masterpieces are already at the gallery with more to be added in the future. The launch will also include the announcement of a Conservation Club in which one endangered species will be highlighted each month.

"the link is all about entrepreneurship and conservation. Ocean Sole fills both of those buckets. Our family gets excited about these things and creating art is just icing on the cake," said Misra. "This is also a phenomenal way to educate younger people and to promote rethinking, reimagining and conservation."

For more information, visit solemates@oceansoleafrica.com or call (904) 907-3596.

Hospitality members honored at Golden Pineapple Gala



Photo courtesy Leigh Cort

The second annual Golden Pineapple Gala Awards Dinner was held at Deerwood Country Club on Sept. 29, 2021. The Womens Food Alliance, founded by Leigh Cort, surprised and honored 10 hospitality members at the event:

Hospitality Lifetime Legend: Liz Earnest, The Chef's Garden

Hospitality Pillars: Cindy Stavely, Colonial Quarter and Nicole Chapman, Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association

Specialty Food Originator: Amy Morales, Sweets for the Soul

Lifetime Celebrated Chef: DeeAnn Hobbs, Renaissance Hotel

Restaurant Pioneer: Aine Culhane, Culhane's Irish Pub

Rising Gold Star: Dawn Hutchins, Vege-Cooking

Creative Business Architect: Charlay Smith, The Lentil House

Golden Inspiration: Lauren Titus, Edible Northeast Magazine

Miss Congeniality: Kelly Mabry, Tropical Smoothie

Visit www.WomensFoodAlliance.com for more information.



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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Bubbles!



BREED:

Australian Labradoodle

FAVORITE ACTIVITY:

Visiting the neighbors and taking walks

FAVORITE TREAT:

MilkBone Gnaw Bones

FAVORITE FRIEND:

Ann and Debbie and puppy friend Maxwell

HOW YOUR BFF GOT HIS NAME:

I got his name from a guy who had a "Bubbles" puppy that was very cute several years ago.

Do you have a cute pet? Send us your pet's picture and the answer to the five questions above before the 10th of the month. Also tell us you saw the BFF contest in Ponte Vedra NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in Ponte Vedra NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Are you interested in promoting your business in St. Johns Business Monthly, a feature section included in both The CreekLine and Ponte Vedra NewsLine? Call Linda 904-607-5062



Senior NewsLine

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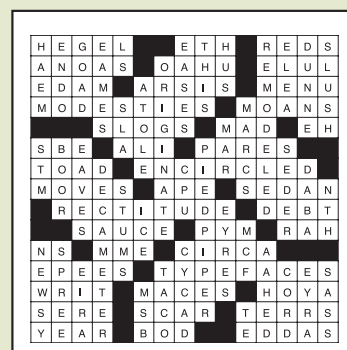
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MYSTERY PHOTO



Can you guess where this is?
Submit your answer to:
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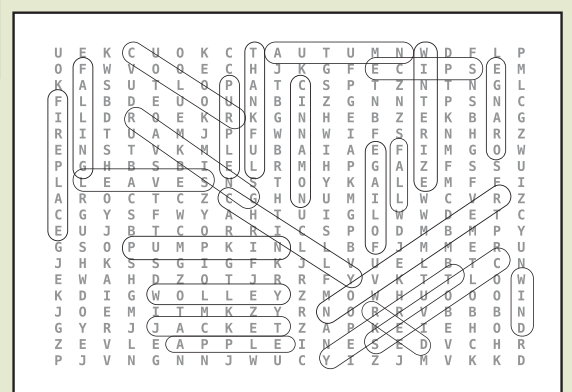
Last month's Mystery Photo was the World Market on JTB. Our winner was Jamille Sergent. Congratulations!



Answers
to our
Puzzles
PG 18



Answers: A. autumn B. leaves C. pumpkin D. brisk



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NOVEMBER

What's Going On in Ponte Vedra?

A modified calendar of events

Community Calendar

The Newcomers Alumnae will hold this month's luncheon on Nov. 3 at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. in Ponte Vedra Beach. Numa Saisselin, president of The Florida Theatre Performing Arts Center, will be the guest speaker and will discuss The Florida Theatre, a 1,900-seat theatre in downtown Jacksonville that first opened its doors on April 8, 1927. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. The cost for this luncheon is \$23. Reservations for lunch must be made by contacting bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible in order to reserve a seat.

The Jacksonville Camera Club will meet on Nov. 3 and Nov. 17. On Nov. 3, Bronwyn Horvath, an accomplished photographer, will present "12 Tips for Better Travel Photography." On Nov. 17, the results for images entered in the club's final digital contest for 2021 will be presented. Visit jax.jax-cameraclub.com for more information and meeting location updates.

GTM Research Reserve will host a guided exploration hike on Saturday, Nov. 6 from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. Meet at the GTM Research Reserve Trailhead Pavilion (west of Guana Dam), 505 Guana River Road. Wear comfortable, closed-toe shoes. The event is

free but parking is \$3 per vehicle. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information and to register.

The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, Nov. 8 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine-St. Johns County Airport Authority, North East Florida Regional Airport. This will be an in-person meeting inside of the Passenger Terminal. RSVP to info@scjroundtable.org if you would like to attend. Email info@scjroundtable.org to register for the meeting or for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

Crosswater Community Church will host an **Overdose Awareness Seminar** on Nov. 9 from 6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m. at the church, located at 211 Davis Park Road in Nocatee. This event will bring awareness to the opioid addiction crisis and features panelists St. Johns County School District Superintendent Tim Forson, Fire Rescue Medical Director Dr. Kerry Bachista, Sheriff Rob Hardwick, Medical Director Dr. Michael Sorna and Florida National Guard Captain Michael Coy. Registration is free.

Nocatee announces the following events, open to the public: Ponte Vedra Auto Show on Nov. 14 from 11 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at Nocatee Station

Field and Farmers Market Fall Festival on Saturday, Nov. 20 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. Visit www.nocatee.com/events for more information.

The Friends of Ponte Vedra Beach Library will host a free performance of the Gerson Yessin Music Series featuring two of the Florida Troubadours, Jim Carrick and Charlie Simmons on Tuesday, Nov. 9 in the FOL Room at 6 p.m. Both are extraordinary singers and fingerstyle guitarists. The community is invited to hear their musical stories as they play and sing.

The Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet on Tuesday, Nov. 16 for a 6 p.m. Chat & Chew and 6:30 p.m. meeting at Christ Episcopal Church, Room 106, 400 Solana Road. Dr. Tru Leverette, UNF African-American Studies professor, will speak on "Critical Race Theory" and why so many are concerned about teaching racial history in this country and across the globe. Email janetkary@gmail.com for more information about the club.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Nov. 16 at 11:15 a.m. at Blackstone Grille, 112 Bartram Oaks Walk in Fruit Cove. Doors will open at 11 a.m. The event will feature a

presentation about what's trending in travel, both stateside and overseas, by travel agent Janice Vanormer. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$33 for members. All reservations must be received by Nov. 5. Contact Sue Aird at sjaird@comcast.net to register. Members are encouraged to bring a non-perishable food item (non-glass container) to donate to the food pantry at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church.

The Friends of Ponte Vedra Beach Library will present Chef Andrea Rosenblatt in the FOL Room of the library on Tuesday, Nov. 16 at 6 p.m. as part of the group's Speaker Series. She will share with home cooks the tricks and tips of professional cook masters along with her topic "Food in Writing." She will discuss food writing vs. cookbook writing while sampling some cookies that are perfect for the holidays.

Ponte Vedra Woman's Club announces its monthly meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 17, celebrating fall fashions at Sawgrass Village. Attendees should meet outside in front of Nona Blue between 5 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. to visit stores A'propos, Scout & Molly's and Carla's. Then, at 6:30 p.m. dinner will be held at Nona Blue Modern Tavern. Register for this event at www.pontevedrawomansclub.com.

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**Q & A with St. Johns County School Board
Member Kelly Barrera, District 4**

Q: Do you have an update on High School III [as of interview date of Oct. 19]?

A: The construction continues on schedule and we will have the topping out ceremony on Oct. 21. Next month, the school board will vote on a name for the school. The names have been narrowed down to five finalists that will be considered: Sampson Creek High School, Bayside High School, Beachside High School, Ocean Valley High School and St. Johns High School. After this, the principal and the community will pick a mascot. The school colors have already been chosen and they are navy blue, gray and bright green. We are looking forward to filling the PTO and hiring school staff, which will likely happen after the first of the year.

Q: Does the St. Johns County School District still have employment opportunities?

A: Yes. We are still hiring due to the growth we have had in the county. We have instructional and non-instructional positions available. This might be a good time to come out of retirement and take a part time job! Visit the school district website (www.stjohns.k12.fl.us) for details and to apply.

Q: What's the latest on redistricting due to the recent Census?

A: There will be community meetings held on Nov. 1 at 6 p.m. at the School Board building, 40 Orange Street and on Nov. 2 at 6 p.m. at Nease High School in the media center. These meetings pertain to redistricting of our county's five districts due to the population increases in the recent census and have nothing to do with school zoning. On Dec. 9, the St. Johns County School Board will hold a joint meeting with the Board of

County Commissioners to finalize the redistricting for the county. Proposed maps are online at www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/redistricting as well as additional information. All of these meetings are open to the public.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 4?

A: First, the ESE Parent Advisory group will hold its first meeting of the year, online, on Nov. 9 beginning at 6 p.m. There will be a presentation by the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System/Northeast to go over the offerings for parents with disabilities.

Also, I have some students I'd like to highlight:

Ponte Vedra students who placed in the annual Betty Griffin "A Day Without Violence" Art and Poetry Contest are: First place, Ailani Valencia, 10th

grade Ponte Vedra High School, Art; Honorable Mention, Juliette Weber, fourth grade Palm Valley Academy, Art; and Honorable Mention, Hollis Lane, 10th grade Ponte Vedra High School, Art.

Freedom Week Essay Contest winners include Pranathi Chinthalani, 12th grader at Nease High School and Tucker Dimberg, 12th grader at Ponte Vedra High School, who won best overall essay.

The Jeff Holt Coach of the Year Award was also announced. Congratulations to Max Gurowski, Boys' Lacrosse at Nease High School and Mickey Leapley, Boys' Golf at Ponte Vedra High School.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

A: They can email me at kelly.barrera@stjohns.k12.fl.us or call me at (904) 547-7510.



**Q&A with St. Johns County Commissioner
Jeremiah Blocker, District 4**

Q: Can you give some insight into the recent hiring procedure for the new county attorney?

A: We are in the process of hiring this position. We had a wide search and received 50 – 60 applications. Commissioners Dean and Smith narrowed the field to two finalists and then at a recent special meeting of the Board of County Commissioners, we voted to hire David Migut. We are currently [as of interview date of Oct. 14] in contract negotiations and will likely have the hire finalized by the time this issue of Ponte Vedra NewsLine is in circulation. David most recently worked for the City of Jacksonville in its general counsel office, but

he is a St. Johns County resident and previously worked for St. Johns County.

The county attorney is one of two positions, along with the county administrator, that the Board of County Commissioners hires. They work for the board and all the rest of the St. Johns County staff works for one of the two of them.

Q: Do you have an update on the FEMA berm?

A: We are in the process of holding a Dune Enhancement Project Town Hall Meeting now. This community meeting gives the public the opportunity to learn more about the

FEMA berm and to ask questions. The project is on schedule and community members should expect Mickler's Landing Beachfront Park to be closed Monday through Friday from Nov. 1, 2021 to late spring 2022. Beach access will be open on the weekends during

this time.

Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you?

A: Readers can email me at bcc4j-blocker@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 679-2620.

tag! cont. from pg. 1

become a critical part of arts and sciences enrichment and allow children, students, and adults to recapture the pure joy of discovery. It also makes good business sense. tag! will become another destination drawing more people into Northeast Florida and boosting our economy," said Chuck and Diane Newman of the Newman Family Foundation of St. Johns County.

Phase 1 will include a playful collection of indoor and outdoor spaces including the Lastinger Big Backyard, the Florida Blue Healthy Gardens, The Cofrin Family Tree Story Garden, and The PLAYERS Championship STEM programming. Phase 2 includes additional buildings with more indoor exhibits, learning labs, and outdoor learning adventures.

"Our mission calls on us to inspire play, discovery, exploration, and innovation through science and creativity, and to be a partner and resource for those who work with or on behalf of children, youth, and families," said tag! Executive Director Kim MacEwan.

Corporate partners and stakeholders include Dr. Jimmy and Karen Glenos, The Platt Family, Danielle and Gene Fraser, The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, and Bozard Ford Lincoln.

Fundraising efforts for the museum are ongoing and the \$7 million capital campaign provides families, businesses, and others the opportunity to invest in the future of Northeast Florida. The organization is currently \$2 million from the goal needed to complete the facility.

tag! Children's Museum will be the first cultural institution built in Northeast Florida in more than 20 years and is anticipated to have an estimated \$2 million annual impact on the community. tag! will enrich the lives of an estimated 300,000 area students, 76 school districts, and engage 85,000 expected visitors annually.

tag! Children's Museum, a 501 c 3 nonprofit, will be located off Arapaho Avenue, just behind Target on US Highway 1 near Windward Marina in St. Augustine. Visit tagmuseum.org for more information.






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