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Tropicana Field approved for \$16.5M taxpayer-funded repayment

By Merrilee Gasser

(The Center Square) – Federal taxpayer funds will be used to reimburse part of St. Petersburg's hurricane repair bill for Tropicana Field as the home team eyes a move to another stadium.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has approved \$16.5 million to fix the stadium where the Tampa Bay Rays played baseball until Hurricane Milton heavily damaged it in 2024. The project is one of over 500 listed in a \$483 million disaster recovery package for Florida announced in late January.

The St. Petersburg City Council, legally mandated to maintain Tropicana Field through the 2028 season, approved around \$60 million in repairs.

The Rays have said they will spend three more years there while the team's new ownership negotiates a move to a new stadium at the beginning of the 2029 season.

In January, the Hillsborough College Board of Trustees approved a non-binding memorandum of understanding with the Rays to redevelop the college's 113-acre Dale Mabry campus across the street from Raymond James Stadium and about 20 miles from Tropicana Field.

A rendering of the team's proposed ballpark and mixed use district at the site includes an exterior of the stadium

See TROPICANA, PAGE 4

Hospital adds third surgical robot

LUTZ – St. Joseph's Hospital-North expanded its robotic surgery services with the addition of a third surgical robot in January to keep up with demand.

The three robots are guided by surgeons who are specially trained and experienced in robotic surgery. They performed 908 robotic surgeries last year. The hospital saw a 70% increase in robotic surgeries from 2021 to 2025.

Robotic surgery uses precise incisions, allowing unhealthy tissue to be removed without affecting surrounding healthy tissue. Smaller incisions cause less trauma

and pain for a patient's body, decrease blood loss and infection risk, and allow for quicker recovery and shorter hospital stays. Many robotic surgeries are done as outpatient surgeries and patients are discharged on the same day as their surgery.

"St. Joseph's Hospital-North is dedicated to offering the safest, most minimally invasive surgeries to our communities, ensuring better patient outcomes, faster recovery times and greater patient satisfaction," said Jennifer Downing, the

See ROBOT, PAGE 4



PHOTO COURTESY OF BAYCARE HEALTH SYSTEM
The newest St. Joseph's Hospital-North robot is staged for a surgery.

SMARTstart to host GROW Pasco for entrepreneurs



PHOTO COURTESY OF PASCO EDC

Johnny Crowder, CEO of Cope Notes, gives the keynote during last year's GROW Pasco.

LUTZ – The Pasco Economic Development Council is hosting the sixth annual GROW Pasco event through its SMARTstart program on March 19 at the Saint Leo University Wellness Center in San Antonio.

This conference-style event, presented by Suncoast Credit Union, brings together the Pasco County business community to network and learn ways to help their businesses grow and thrive.

The event offers 15 breakout sessions led by more than 30 business professionals. Speakers will cover topics such as artificial intelligence, funding options, marketing and community resources for businesses.

"GROW Pasco is a must-attend event for

all entrepreneurs," said Beth Galic, of the Bay Area Manufacturers Association and a 2025 GROW Pasco attendee. "The wealth of information gained from the event is invaluable to business owners."

The Pasco EDC SMARTstart entrepreneurship program, supported by Penny for Pasco, offers resources to help growing businesses achieve long-term success. The program delivers support in key areas, including access to funding, education, guidance, collaboration and workspace.

SMARTstart serves 54 incubator members, representing a diverse range of industries, from food-based businesses operating out of the East Pasco Incubator Kitchen in Dade City to high-tech companies headquartered at SMARTstart at the

Grove in Wesley Chapel. Members also have access to three Entrepreneur Centers throughout Pasco County.

"Through programs like SMARTstart and events like GROW Pasco, we're investing directly in the people that are innovators and who help drive our economy," said Jack Mariano, chair of the Pasco County Board of Commissioners. "Every new idea and business launched contributes to a stronger, more resilient Pasco County."

Taylor Doe, a former TEDx speaker and entrepreneur, is invested in community development, youth mentorship and fostering economic mobility for others. His

See GROW, PAGE 4

Fifth-graders run a city as BizTown celebrates 20 years

TAMPA – Nearly 120 fifth-graders ran an entire city recently within The Florida Aquarium.

Aquarium staff joined the students inside their storefront, stepping into their world of budgets, businesses and boardroom decisions. One student even served as CEO for the day, shadowing Florida Aquarium President and CEO Roger Germann and gaining a firsthand look at what it takes to lead a major Tampa Bay organization.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT
Florida Aquarium President and CEO Roger Germann and staff mentored students as part of a partnership with Junior Achievement.



See BIZTOWN, PAGE 4

What's Happening

Your Community Calendar • Submit 2 weeks in advance to: news@lakerlutznews.com • All listings free of charge

FEB. 26

Woodworking
Land O' Lakes Library invites adults ages 18+ (or youth 9+ with guardian) to use Makerspace tools for approved projects. Bring your own plans and materials. Closed-toe shoes and completed Foundry Waiver & Safety Playbook forms required. Registration required. Call 813-929-1214 for details.
9-10:30 a.m.; 10:30 a.m.-noon; or noon-1:30 p.m.; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

Storytime Fun!
Toddlers and preschoolers read, sing and dance at Zephyrhills Public Library. Call 813-780-0064 for details.
10-10:20 or 10:30-10:50 a.m.; 5347 8th St., Zephyrhills

Preschool Storytime
Land O' Lakes Library invites ages 3-5 and their caregivers for stories and songs. Call 813-929-1214 for details.
10:15-10:45 a.m. or 11:15-11:45 a.m.; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

Gardening Workshop
UF-IFAS Extension presents: Timely Tasks and Tips for Your Landscape at New River Library. Register in advance. Call 813-788-6375 for details.
2-3 p.m.; 34043 State Road 54, Wesley Chapel

Concert
Suzanne and Jim perform a concert at Hugh Embry Library. Call 352-567-3576 for details.
2-3 p.m.; 14215 4th St., Dade City

Mat Yoga
Michelle Mack instructs a mat yoga session at Zephyrhills Public Library. Bring a mat. Call 813-780-0064 for details.
4-5 p.m.; 5347 8th St., Zephyrhills

Yarn for a Cause
Join other yarn enthusiasts for a weekly gathering at New River Library. Participants share projects, tips and inspiration. Call 813-788-6375 for details.
6-7 p.m.; 34043 State Road 54, Wesley Chapel

Winter Ball Fundraiser
Live Oak Theatre and Conservatory invites the public to "Once Upon a Time," an evening of dining, dancing and entertainment at the Carol and Frank Morsani Center for the Arts. The event raises money for the installation of a fence to keep students and patrons safe. The suggested donation is \$85 per person. Buy a ticket, sponsor the event or make a donation by reaching out to Marie@liveoaktheatre.org, calling the box office at 352-593-0027 or visiting <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/2026-once-upon-a-time-gala>.

MOTOCROSS STARS TO DESCEND ON DADE CITY

DADE CITY – Thrill-seekers will be returning to Dade City next month for Red Bull Day in the Dirt Down South. Hundreds of motocross competitors across the U.S. will ride into Florida's Sports Coast following Daytona Bike Week. Riders of all backgrounds and skill levels, from amateur to pro, are invited to register and ride. Organizers tout the weekend of March 6 to 8 as a non-stop party. Here's what to expect:

- Three full days of racing across multiple classes and formats, from GP-style racing to team competition. This year's lineup includes a Pit Bike Race, a Head-to-Head Drag Race and the return of the Coup de Grace Survival Race, where victory is crossing the finish line. Riders who complete five events will be awarded the Ironman, with the overall event winner earning the honor of destroying the majestic sand sculpture.
- They'll ride at Dade City MX. This year's track features first-ever elements like an enduro line, presented by Florida Trail Riders, and a burnout pad incorporated into the race course.
- Amateur riders get to shred alongside some of the biggest names in the sport, including Red Bull athletes Carson Brown, Tyler Bereman, Kelana Humphrey and Tarah Gieger. Athletes will also be available for meet and greets.
- A live recording of "Bonifay Banter" podcast, as Red Bull athletes Tyler Bereman and Parks Bonifay reunite for a panel revisiting Island Hopper, the legendary freeriding stunt that took place on Florida's Sports Coast.
- Weekend festivities include a barn party on Friday evening and a Supercross watch party on Saturday night.
- Stark Future, a leader in electric motorcycles, will host bike demos throughout the weekend.

On the web: dayinthedirtdownsouth.com

facebook.com/LiveOakTheatre
6:30 p.m.; 21030 Cortez Blvd., Brooksville

FEB. 26-MARCH 8
Strawberry Festival
The Florida Strawberry Festival celebrates agriculture through exhibits, rides and entertainment. flstrawberryfestival.com
Various times; 303 BerryFest Place, Plant City

FEB. 27
Toddler Storytime
Land O' Lakes Library invites toddlers ages 1-2 and their caregivers for storytime. Call 813-929-1214 for details.
9:45-10:05 a.m., 10:15-10:35 a.m., or 11:15-11:35 a.m.; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

FEB. 28
Golf Fundraiser
The GFWC TampaBay Woman's Club invites the community to hit the links for a great cause on Feb. 28 at the newly renovated Tampa Bay Golf and Country Club. The event takes on a mixed team scramble format. Mulligans and extra putts are available. The tournament includes contests, prizes, drawings and a BBQ buffet lunch. Pick up a registration form at the pro shop or email tbwomansclubsanantoniofl@gmail.com. Proceeds support charities including the Veteran's Depot, Joshua House and Sunrise Domestic Violence Center.
8:30 a.m.; 10641 Old Tampa Bay Drive, Tampa

BBQ & Blues
The Pigs in Z'Hills BBQ & Blues Festival features a barbecue competition, children's fun zone, hog calling and music from the likes of The Nightbumpers and Thunderbolt Brown in Downtown Zephyrhills. eastpascochamber.org/pigz-in-zhills-bbq-blues-festival/
9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Downtown Zephyrhills

Supersized Storytime
Children listen to stories and songs during Supersized Storytime at Land O' Lakes Library. Call 813-929-1214 for details.
10:15-11 a.m.; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

Pokémon Party
Centennial Park Library throws a Pokémon Party with crafts, games and fun. Call 727-834-3204 for details.
2-4 p.m.; 5740 Moon Road, Holiday

Tribute Concert
The Beach Buoys perform hits from the Beach Boys in a concert at Starkey Ranch Theatre Library Cultural Center. Tickets cost \$13, plus taxes and fees. Call 727-815-7126 for details.
7-8:30 p.m.; 12118 Lake Blanche Drive, Odessa

MARCH 3
Medicare/Medicaid
Learn about Medicare, Medicaid and food stamps at Zephyrhills Public Library. Call José Rodríguez at 813-420-3013 for details.
9 a.m.-3 p.m.; 5347 8th St., Zephyrhills

Woodworking
Land O' Lakes Library invites adults ages 18+ (or youth 9+ with guardian) to use Makerspace tools for approved projects. Bring your own plans and materials. Closed-toe shoes and completed Foundry Waiver & Safety Playbook forms required. Registration required. Call 813-929-1214 for details.
10-11:30 a.m. or 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

Eco Wonders
UF Extension presents "Cuttings - Plants for wildlife diversity in our Florida yards" during the Eco Wonders program for ages 7-11 at New River Library. Call 813-788-6375 for details.

6-7 p.m.; 34043 State Road 54, Wesley Chapel

MARCH 4
Baby Storytime
Babies listen to stories during Baby Storytime at Land O' Lakes Library. Call 813-929-1214 for details.
10:15-10:45 or 11:15-11:45 a.m.; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

Chair Yoga
Adults do various poses during Chair Yoga at Zephyrhills Public Library. Call 813-780-0064 for details.
10:30-11:30 a.m. or 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; 5347 8th St., Zephyrhills

Museum Lecture
The Dali Museum presents "Edutainment in the 21st Century: How the Dali Museum Combines Art and Technology" at Starkey Ranch Theatre Library Cultural Center. Call 727-815-7126 for details.
11 a.m.-noon; 12118 Lake Blanche Drive, Odessa

Mat Yoga
Michelle Mack instructs a mat yoga session at Zephyrhills Public Library. Bring a mat. Call 813-780-0064 for details.
4-5 p.m.; 5347 8th St., Zephyrhills

Master Gardener
Learn about the Florida wetlands during a Master Gardener event at Land O' Lakes Library. Call 813-929-1214 for details.
6-7 p.m.; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

MARCH 5
Storytime Fun!
Toddlers and preschoolers read, sing and dance at Zephyrhills Public Library. Call 813-780-0064 for details.
10-10:20 or 10:30-10:50 a.m.; 5347 8th St., Zephyrhills

Mat Yoga
Michelle Mack instructs a mat yoga session at Zephyrhills Public Library. Bring a mat. Call 813-780-0064 for details.
4-5 p.m.; 5347 8th St., Zephyrhills

MARCH 6-7
Yard Sale
A community yard sale will be held at American Legion Post #15 on March 6 (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) and March 7 (8 a.m. to 2 p.m.). Contact Barbara Smith at 336-524-4219 or barbboop5442@gmail.com for details. Various times; 37745 Church Ave., Dade City

Spring Book Sale
LOL Library Friends of the Land O' Lakes Library holds its spring book sale March 6 (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and March 7 (10 a.m. to 3 p.m.). The bag sale begins March 7 (1 to 3 p.m.). There will also be some collectible books and special priced series available at the book sale. Cash or check only. Call 813-929-1214 with further questions. Various times; 2818 Collier Pkwy., Land O' Lakes

MARCH 8
Kumquat Festival
The 29th annual Kumquat Festival has been postponed to March 8 due to weather. Hosted by the Greater East Pasco Chamber of Commerce, the free family-friendly festival welcomes more than 40,000 attendees each year for arts & crafts vendors, kumquat treats, live entertainment and community fun. kumquatfestival.org or eastpasochamber.org
9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Downtown Dade City



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HEART ATTACK

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ADVENTHEALTH HELPS FAMILIES TAKE CHARGE OF HEART HEALTH

SEBRING – AdventHealth Sebring is expanding outreach to protect heart health in rural Highlands County, where residents face higher rates of heart disease.

Dozens attended the hospital's annual Every Beat Counts Heart Symposium on Feb. 3, where physicians discussed common heart conditions, warning signs and treatment options, and showcased local diagnostic technology.

"For many people, heart disease can feel overwhelming," said Dr. Thomas Shimshak, chair of interventional cardiology at AdventHealth Sebring. "Our goal is to help people understand their risk, recognize symptoms early and know that exceptional whole-person heart care is available here in our community."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ADVENTHEALTH

During the Every Beat Counts heart symposium, community members got to speak with AdventHealth's expert team of doctors to learn more about common heart conditions, warning signs and treatment options available in the Sebring area.



Event attendees also got to take part in a special panel discussion with Dr. Giancarlo Speziani, Dr. Thomas Shimshak, Dr. Deepti Bhandare and James Leicht, who are all part of AdventHealth Sebring's heart care team.

The hospital plans a 100,000-square-foot expansion, including an open-heart program, with completion expected in fall 2027.

UNIVERSITY GETS ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE TECH

TAMPA – The University of South Florida's Center for Advanced Medical Learning and Simulation has become the first institution in Florida and third worldwide to install GE HealthCare's Allia Moveo image-guided therapy system.

CAMLS, part of the Tampa Medical & Research District, will be the first simulation center globally to integrate the technology into advanced education programs, allowing students and clinicians to train on hybrid operating room technology used in minimally invasive procedures.

"Gaining access to the latest surgical imaging and guidance technologies further ensures that innovation in education keeps pace with innovation in care," said Dr. Haru Okuda, executive director of CAMLS.

A second Allia Moveo system is scheduled for installation later this year at Tampa General Hospital for clinical use in its hybrid operating rooms.

HOSPITAL CELEBRATES INNOVATION CENTER

TAMPA – Tampa General Hospital recently celebrated the grand opening of the 32,000-square-foot TGH Innovation Center in Ybor City.

The facility, located within the Tampa Medical & Research District, will house TGH's innovation, ventures, analytics and IT teams, along with district offices and Palantir's Tampa headquarters. It includes event space, classrooms, production studios and a "hospital room of the future" showcasing clinical technology.

Officials say the center will serve as a collaborative hub for startups, researchers and industry partners.

BOOK EXPLAINS CONCEPT OF MORAL INJURY

TAMPA – Dr. James Taylor has released "Moral Injury: Arming Pastors to Help Veterans Battle Soul Wounds Caused by Military Service" through WestBow Press.

The book addresses the spiritual wounds many veterans carry home from combat.

Taylor contends that while churches honor military service, many lack un-

derstanding of "moral injury" – the inner conflict that occurs when wartime actions violate deeply held beliefs. He writes that such wounds require spiritual care, reconciliation and pastoral support, not clinical treatment alone.

The book encourages pastors to recognize their biblical role in soul care, understand military culture and help veterans navigate reintegration. It also explores Acceptance and Commitment Therapy as a values-based framework compatible with Christian theology.

Taylor is a retired U.S. Navy command master chief and former VA chaplain leader. The book is available through major retailers.

HOSPITAL OFFERS BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT

LUTZ – St. Joseph's Hospital-North offers a free in-person breastfeeding support group and class in March.

Events are open to all, regardless of which hospital you delivered or plan to deliver your children. The events will be held in St. Joseph's Hospital-North classrooms, 4211 Van Dyke Road.

- **Breastfeeding Support Group:** For breastfeeding mothers, their babies and an optional support person. The group provides a place where breastfeeding mothers receive support from other breastfeeding mothers and certified breastfeeding consultants. The support group will be held March 5 and 19, 10 to 11 a.m.

- **Understanding Breastfeeding:** Provides information to the expectant mother and an optional support person about breastfeeding basics, skin-to-skin contact, tips for returning to work and when to call a health care provider or lactation consultant. The class will be held March 5, 1 to 5 p.m.

- **Understanding Your Newborn:** Provides information to the expectant mother and an optional support person about many aspects of safe infant care, including feeding, diapering, bathing, signs of illness and cues and communication. The class will be held March 19, 1 to 5 p.m.

Register for the free events by visiting BayCareEvents.org and choosing "St. Joseph's Hospital-North" in the "Facility/Location" filter and scrolling to the group or class you are interested in attending. Or, you can also register by phone by calling 855-314-8352 and pressing the number "2" at the prompt.

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ROBOT, from page 1

hospital's surgical services director. "Our patients trust that they are receiving the most advanced care, supported by cutting-edge technology and delivered by surgical teams known for their experience and compassion."

Robotic surgery can provide St. Joseph's Hospital-North surgeons with superior dexterity, enhanced vision and improved surgical access compared to conventional minimally invasive surgery or traditional open surgery.

The surgeon-guided robot navigates a precise approach to areas that traditional surgical instruments are unable to reach.

The four interactive arms of the robot are over the patient on the operating table. The surgeon operates the robot from a console. The console has a high-resolution screen that projects 3-D images of the surgical site.

The surgeon manually guides the surgical arms and instruments from the console using their hands and fingers. When the surgeon moves, the arms respond precisely to those movements in real time. The instruments work identically to the move-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BAYCARE HEALTH SYSTEM
Dr. Jonathon Tsai operates the robotic arms from a console.

ment of a human arm, elbow and wrist, but with an enhanced range of motion.

"Having the opportunity to use the newest robotic surgical platform, the DV5, has been a profound privilege," said Dr. Jonathon Tsai, a BayCare Medical Group and St. Joseph's Hospital-North surgeon. "It has allowed me to leverage cutting-edge technology to deliver the highest standard of care to our patients at BayCare



Robotic surgery team members Primo Gunabe, Julie Laplume, Hailee Olsen, Duane Kelloway, Louis Garcia and Ashley Lavine stand in front of the robot at St. Joseph's Hospital-North.

St. Joseph's-North here in Lutz. Robotic surgery has truly shifted the surgical paradigm, offering a level of precision that significantly minimizes postoperative pain and shortens hospital stays. I look forward to the future features of the DV5 and the possibilities this updated platform holds

for our field and community." St. Joseph's Hospital-North is accredited as a Center of Excellence in Robotic Surgery by the Surgical Review Corporation. The designation signifies the hospital's robotic surgery services provide the highest quality of care.

TROPICANA, from page 1

and a "Champions Quarter" neighborhood, inspired by projects like The Battery in Atlanta.

Taxpayer subsidies for new or renovated sports stadiums have drawn criticism in recent years.

Florida TaxWatch, which in 2024 examined a proposal for a new Rays stadium and surrounding development in St. Petersburg, said it could end up costing

city and county taxpayers much more than its estimated \$1.3 billion price tag.

Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has opposed using state money directly for stadiums, signaled his approval for the team's change of course, calling the Hillsborough College plan "mutually beneficial" and "what you need to succeed in this day and age."

Hillsborough County has considered using an existing half-penny sales tax to help fund the \$2 billion stadium.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT
Students learn what it's like to run a city during Junior Achievement's Muma BizTown.

GROW, from page 1

presentation will explore the overlooked moments behind entrepreneurial success, showing how founders start, grow and scale while leveraging relationships, resources and experiences to create opportunity and build a stronger ecosystem.

"What makes GROW Pasco truly special is the incredible cross-section of entrepreneurial journeys in one place, from those just starting out, to successful operators returning year after year, and everyone in between," said Dan Mitchell, assistant vice president of entrepreneurship. "They

inspire, lift each other up and make powerful connections, much like the 'And Then Moments' Taylor Doe will explore in his keynote, where one introduction or opportunity can change everything."

WANT TO GO?

Visit pascoedc.com/events/details/grow-pasco to learn more about the GROW Pasco sessions and to register. The cost is \$65 and includes breakfast, a keynote lunch presentation and access to various breakout sessions. Sponsorships are available and offer access to exhibit at the event.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PASCO EDC
Deb Mazzaferro talks about elevating one's sales game during a breakout session at last year's GROW Pasco.

BIZTOWN, from page 1

The visit also marked a milestone for Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay: the 20th anniversary of BizTown (now officially Muma BizTown) and Partner Tribute Day, recognizing the aquarium for helping bring learning opportunities to life for students across the region.

After weeks of classroom preparation, students interviewed for jobs, got hired and ran their businesses like real professionals, marketing products, producing goods and making decisions that showed how leadership and financial choices shape a thriving community.

"By investing time, talent and leadership, students are connecting classroom learning to real-world careers," said Richard George, president of Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay. "By showing up and engaging directly with kids, The Florida Aquarium is shaping the next generation of confident, capable leaders for the future of our community."

Germann and 16 team members worked alongside students in the aquarium's BizTown storefront as part of the organization's Day of Action.

"At The Florida Aquarium, we believe it's our responsibility to make the world a better place. Whether we're saving marine life or inspiring the next generation of leaders, investing in our youth through



Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay served 46,270 students across a 13-county region in the 2024-25 school year, delivering more than 1.85 million instructional contact hours.

partnerships like Junior Achievement's Muma BizTown makes a lasting difference," Germann said. "Seeing these students confidently dive into professional roles, tackle real-world challenges and make meaningful decisions is energizing and a powerful reminder that anything is possible."

The 20th anniversary also marks the official renaming to Muma BizTown, in honor of philanthropists Pam and Les Muma. Their decades of support, including a \$5 million planned gift and \$2 million to \$3 million in operational funding, have impacted more than 300,000 students across Tampa Bay.



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PHOTO COURTESY OF LIBERTY MANOR FOR VETERANS
Community partners such as Tim Hurley of CarePlus Health Plans help ensure veterans at Liberty Manor have access to basic resources. Hurley regularly visits Liberty Manor for Veterans to support residents. Visit libertymanor.org to learn more about the nonprofit.

CEOS CONTINUE BUILDING HABITAT HOME

LARGO – More than a dozen Tampa Bay-area CEOs volunteered Feb. 13 in the Ridgcrest community of Largo during



PHOTO COURTESY OF HABITAT FOR HUMANITY TAMPA BAY GULFSIDE
HGTV's "100 Day Dream Home" hosts Brian and Mika Kleinschmidt pose for a photo during Day 3 of Habitat's 2026 CEO Build.

Habitat for Humanity Tampa Bay Gulfside's fifth annual CEO Build.

The event marked the third of four build days supporting a new home for the Wesley family. Participants laid sod and planted greenery.

Brian Kleinschmidt and Mika Kleinschmidt, hosts of "100 Day Dream Home," served as guest site supervisors.

Since launching in 2022, the CEO Build has grown from 50 leaders raising \$160,000 to 100 leaders raising \$250,000 this year to provide a safe, affordable home for Tyshawna and Andre Wesley and their four sons.

On the web: habitatatbg.org/ceobuild/

DUKE ENERGY OFFERS CUSTOMERS RESOURCES

TAMPA – Floridians may see higher power bills following the recent cold snap as heating systems worked harder and used more energy.

Duke Energy Florida said rates are still declining overall. Residential customers using 1,000 kilowatt-hours will see a \$33 reduction on February bills compared to January, followed by another \$11 decrease in March.

The company also warns scams may increase. Nearly 800 scam reports were made in February 2025 after a previous

cold snap, and a similar spike is expected.

Customers can request installment plans, due date extensions and access programs such as Share the Light Fund. Free home energy assessments and rebates are also available.

"Duke Energy has a dedicated team ready to provide our customers with the individualized support they need," said Melissa Seixas, Duke Energy Florida state president.

GOLF TOURNEY TO RAISE SCHOLARSHIP DOLLARS

WESLEY CHAPEL – The North Tampa Bay Chamber Foundation will host the inaugural Fairways to the Future: Scholarship Golf Tournament presented by AdventHealth Wesley Chapel on April 10 at Saddlebrook Resort.

The scramble-format tournament supports scholarships for local graduating seniors. Golfers of all skill levels can register as a team or individual. The event includes prizes, raffles, hole challenges and a post-play awards luncheon. Special guests and celebrity golfers will also participate.

Registration begins at 8 a.m., followed by a 9 a.m. shotgun start.

Fees are \$700 per team of four or \$175 per individual player.

Visit northtampabaychamber.com for details.

19 ACRES SELL IN PORT RICHEY

PORT RICHEY – Hold-Thyssen, a commercial real estate firm based in Clearwater and Winter Park, has completed the sale of a 19-plus-acre vacant tract at Richey Drive and Wilkins Street.

Carol L. Kinnard, a transaction specialist in the firm's Clearwater office, represented the seller, Jose Albert Kreijman of Malaga, Spain, and the buyer, Port Richey Drive LLC of Delray Beach.

"This sale reflects ongoing demand for well-positioned land in Port Richey and surrounding communities," Kinnard said. "Large tracts like this are increasingly dif-



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOLD-THYSSEN

Carol L. Kinnard facilitated a land sale in West Pasco County. She said there's continued investor interest in well-located development sites within the Port Richey market.

ficult to find, and buyers recognize the long-term value of securing land in growing corridors."

Hold-Thyssen specializes in commercial sales, leasing and investment properties statewide.

PASCO COUNTY EXPLAINS PURCHASING OPPORTUNITIES

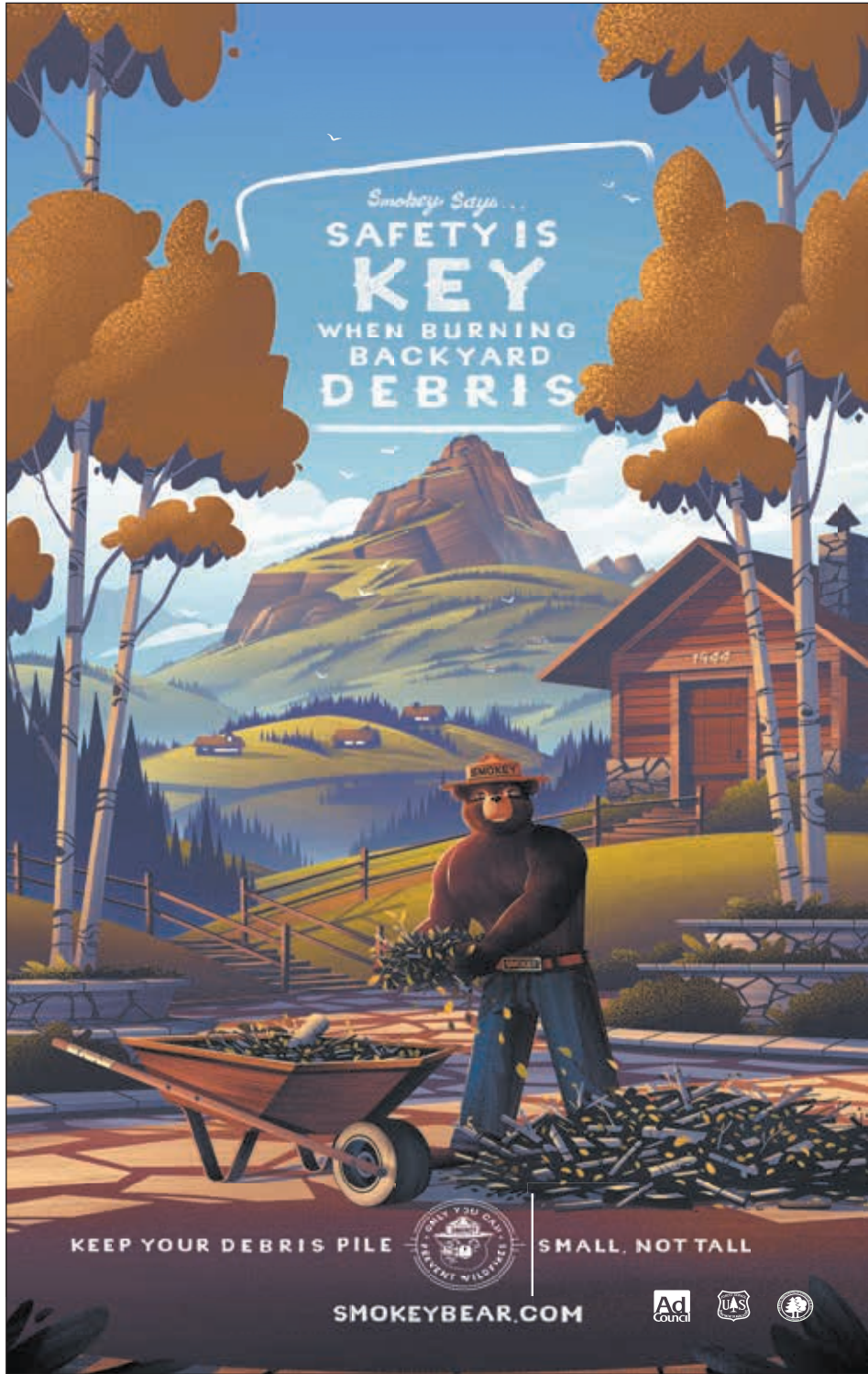
WESLEY CHAPEL – The Pasco County Purchasing Department will host its "Doing Business with Pasco County" Vendor Workshop and Reverse Trade Show on March 2 at the Wesley Chapel Recreation Complex.

The event invites vendors interested in working with the Pasco Board of County Commissioners to learn how to bid on county projects and connect with departments, major vendors and other business owners.

Topics include the Vendor Preference Policy, RFP and RSQ processes, the Consultants Competitive Negotiation Act, and how to prepare and submit bids and proposals. Attendees will also learn about county operations and available resources.

The workshop runs from 2 to 4 p.m. at 7727 Boyette Road, Wesley Chapel.

On the web: mypas.co/VendorWorkshop



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NEWS BRIEFS



PHOTO COURTESY OF PATTY CAMUNAS
GFWC Lutz-Land O' Lakes Woman's Club delivers a \$2,000 check to Operation Patriots.

WOMAN'S CLUB SUPPORTS VETERANS

LAND O' LAKES – GFWC Lutz-Land O' Lakes Woman's Club presented a \$2,000 check to Operation Patriots from the proceeds of its Tombola fundraiser to support entertainment and cookouts for veterans at Baldomero Lopez State Veterans' Home.

The presentation took place Feb. 7 at the veterans' home in Land O' Lakes. Club leaders said the donation reflects the organization's ongoing commitment to community service and honoring local veterans who have served the nation.

SCRIVENER RUNNING FOR 12TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

LAND O' LAKES — Branden Scrivener has announced an independent bid for Florida's 12th Congressional District, saying his campaign will focus on government accountability, education and lowering living costs.

"I am running for Congress to put people over special interests," Scrivener said. "Our current system is built to serve corporate and foreign interests while the

working class is left behind. It's time for a representative who is unowned by political parties, figureheads and special interests. One who is focused solely on our community."

His platform includes term limits and limits on corporate donations, fully funding Title I public schools and addressing medical debt and housing affordability.

Learn more about his campaign at brandenscrivenerfl.info.

FUNDRAISER HELPS POLICE OFFICERS

TAMPA – West Central Florida Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.) will host its Blue Hope Gala on March 7 at the Firefighters Museum.

The chapter is seeking sponsorships

and auction items for the event, with all donations tax-deductible.

Donna Wudyka, a retired Detroit police officer and president of the West Central Florida chapter, said the organization supports families and co-workers of officers killed in the line of duty across nine counties, including Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas.

The nonprofit provides emotional support, financial and legal resources, training for agencies and travel assistance for survivors attending National Police Week.

National C.O.P.S. has served more than 80,000 survivors through over 50 chapters nationwide.

Contact Wudyka at 313-622-6048 for sponsorship information.

Register at <https://qtego.us/qmlink/wfcops>.

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NEWS@LAKERLUTZNEWS.COM

APP HIGHLIGHTS THEOLOGY PROFESSOR

ST. LEO – Thomas Humphries, professor of philosophy, theology and religion at Saint Leo University, was scheduled to be featured Feb. 23 on the Ascension App as part of the Lenten season.

His reflection was to premiere on the first Monday of Lent and be available worldwide through the Catholic Bible and Catechism mobile app's daily Scripture readings.

"On the first Monday of Lent we read from Leviticus in Mass: 'Be holy, as I the



Humphries

LORD your God am holy!" This kind of holiness means nothing less than entering the mystery of God Himself," Humphries said. "It is a blessing that we get to invite our students and those who use the Ascension App to a deeper relationship with Christ through Scripture and the Sacraments this Lent."

Humphries teaches theology and emergency management at Saint Leo and is active in Campus Ministry. He is the author of two theology books.

LEARNING GATE TO HOST ECOFEST

LUTZ – Learning Gate Community School will host its annual EcoFest from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 25 at the Hanna Campus, 16215 Hanna Road.

The free, family-friendly event celebrates Earth Day with live music, local artisans, workshops and food trucks. The Green Ribbon School uses EcoFest to promote sustainability and environmental stewardship throughout the community.

Organizers are accepting applications from local vendors, artisans and non-profits, particularly those aligned with a "green" mission.

Admission is free. Visit learninggate.org/ecofest for vendor applications and event details.

org/ecofest for vendor applications and event details.

KIDS TAG ART STORE OPENS FOR 2025-26

TAMPA – The Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Kids Tag Art online store is now open, featuring more than 2,700 original designs created by fifth-grade students from over 55 schools for the 2025-26 school year.

Proceeds directly benefit participating schools' art programs, funding classroom supplies and resources. Since launching, the program has raised more than \$149,000 for school art education.

"These talented fifth-grade artists have worked hard to create unique designs, and now it's our turn to show them support," said Hillsborough County Tax Collector Nancy Millan, who is partnering with Hillsborough County Public Schools on the fundraiser. "Every mug, keychain, or license plate you purchase isn't just a beautiful piece of student art. It's an investment in arts education."

Shoppers can filter by school and choose from products including vanity license plates, mugs and keychains.

Browse designs at HillsFaxFL.gov/shop.

QUICK HITS

- Scott Brewer, of Lutz, made the provost's list for fall at Ohio University College of Health Sciences and Professions in Athens, Ohio. Students must have at least a 3.5 grade point average to qualify.

- Sarah Caudill, of Lutz, made the president's list for fall at Ohio University College of Health Sciences and Professions in Athens, Ohio. Students must earn a 4.0 grade point average to qualify.

- Blake Graham, of Odessa, made the dean's list high honors for fall at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College in Woods, Indiana.

- Zayne Jack, of Lutz, graduated from Milwaukee School of Engineering in the fall. Jack received a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

- Trevor Mayberry, of Odessa, made the dean's list for fall at Mississippi State University. Students must have a grade point average between 3.5 and 3.79 to qualify.

- Naila Schoefberger, of Lutz, was among nearly 1,400 students graduating from Mississippi State University in fall 2025. Schoefberger received the Bachelor of Science from MSU's College of Arts and Sciences.

LOCAL

wildlife



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRENNIA HICKS

Cowbird is on the move

Cowbirds are known to follow animal herds to get food and lay their eggs in other birds’ nests. Show some initiative, Cowbird!

The LAKER / Lutz NEWS

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Letter: How am I making a difference?

By Derick Farfan

While Black History Month is a time to honor the men and women who bravely and boldly paved the way for the African Americans who came after them, it’s also an opportunity to look to the future and ask yourself: How am I making a difference?

Personally, I see the answer in my kids’ generosity and kindness towards others, but I’m one of the lucky ones who can see it in my work as well.

As a 15-year Duke Energy employee involved with the African American Association of Blacks in Energy, I have the privilege of sharing the energy industry with young people from all across Florida.

Every summer, my colleagues and I host Youth Energy Academies, hands-on programs designed to expose often underserved students to the inner workings of electric utilities while encouraging them to consider pursuing careers in STEM.

They participate in fun activities and demonstrations; engage in conversations with lineworkers, control room engineers and more; and tour towering facilities housing complex equipment that they’ve likely never seen or even heard of before.

The Youth Energy Academy concept was conceived by three Duke Energy employees in 2011 and has since grown from one location with a handful of students to seven sites (Jacksonville, Gainesville, Ocala, Orlando, St. Petersburg, Lake Wales and South Florida) with roughly 60 attendees each.

With several of these students coming back year after year and some even going on to succeed in the industry, including at Duke Energy, we know it’s helping create a better, brighter tomorrow for underrepresented groups in our communities.

Derick Farfan serves as large accounts manager for Duke Energy Florida.

Tampa Theatre sees progress on \$30M campaign

TAMPA – Tampa Theatre announced progress on its Second Century Campaign: a \$30 million capital initiative to restore, enhance and expand the landmark as it approaches its centennial on Oct. 15.

The campaign, which is focused on preservation, education and enhanced patron experiences, will ensure Tampa Theatre continues to thrive as a hub for arts, entertainment and community engagement.

As part of the first phase of the campaign, which totals \$24.5 million, Tampa Theatre will restore the historic Duncan Auditorium to its original grandeur. The Duncan Auditorium will be closed March 10 through the end of September for infrastructure upgrades, restoration of the decorative paint and plaster, and preservation of its original fixtures and furnishings.

Other priorities for the first phase include:

- Opening the John T. Taylor Screening Room, a 43-seat microcinema adjoining the historic lobby, in June 2024, creating an intimate space for first-run films and ensuring that film fans will have access to Tampa Theatre even as the historic auditorium undergoes restoration.

- Renovating underutilized space on the Florida Avenue side of the building to create a new, two-story education wing that will house permanent classrooms and archival

storage for year-round learning opportunities in partnership with the University of South Florida, the University of Tampa and others.

President and CEO John Bell described the Second Century Campaign as a “transformational investment in our community’s cultural legacy.”

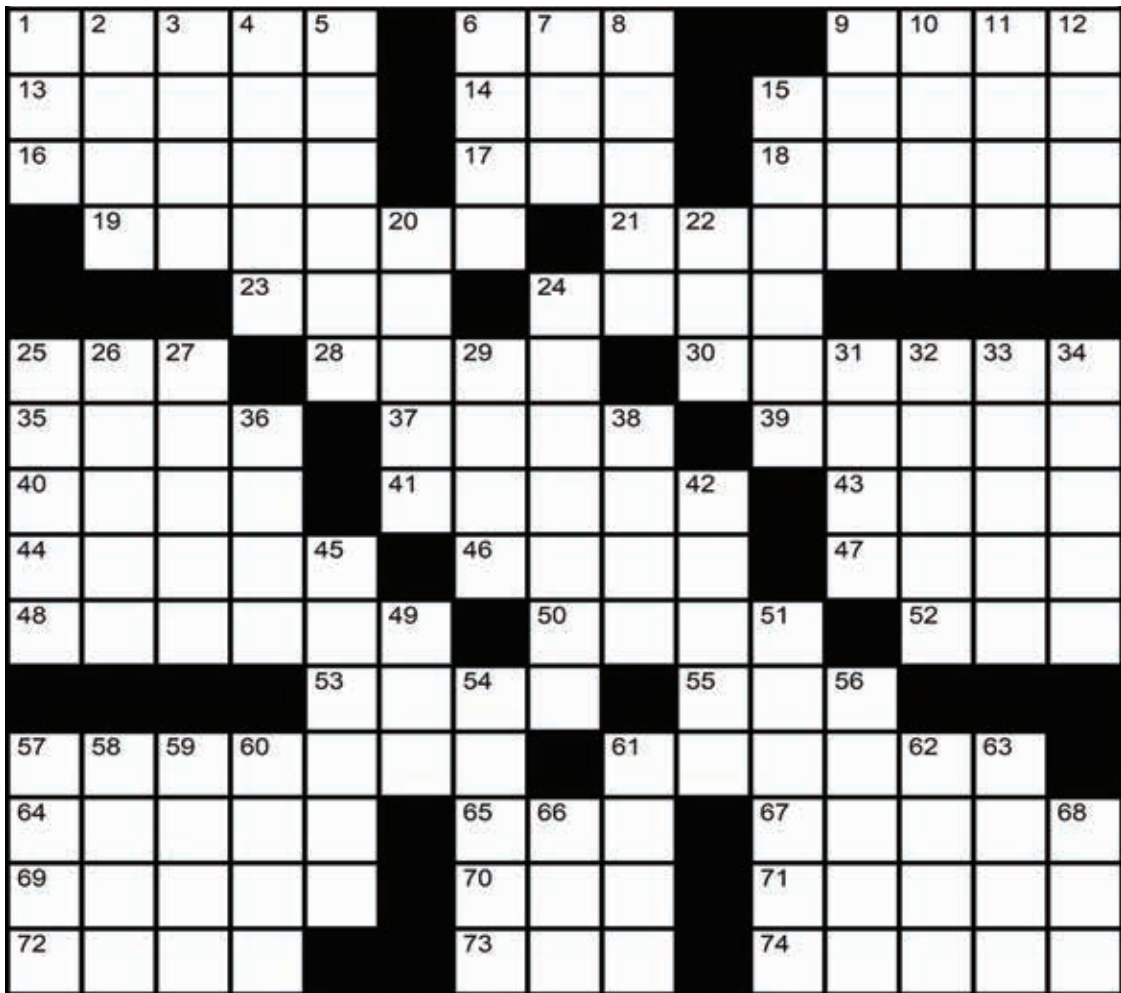
“By authentically restoring the historic Duncan Auditorium and expanding our capabilities through new spaces, we’re confident that Tampa Theatre will continue to educate, entertain, enlighten and unite people for generations to come,” Bell said.

Thanks to the generosity of the community and leadership gifts from Bank of America; Celia and Jim Ferman in memory of Martha Ferman; Bonnie S. Sonnenfeld; and John T. Taylor, the campaign is more than 93% of the way toward its first-phase goal.

Significant public funding has been provided by the City of Tampa Community Redevelopment Agency. This project is sponsored in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida as well as the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners.

Visit tampatheatre.org/secondcentury to make a donation or learn more about naming opportunities and other ways to give.

The LAKER / Lutz NEWS CROSSWORD PUZZLE



CLUES ACROSS

1. Traction aid
6. Freddy’s street
9. Reach a high
13. Italian bowling
14. Entrepreneur Gary Vaynerchuk’s alias, Gary ____
15. Jolly good one
16. Parallel grooves
17. Many, many moons
18. “Take it back!”
19. “Song Sung Blue” Best Actress nominee
21. *Movie with most 2026 Oscar nominations
23. Make a seam
24. Vampire’s tooth
25. Tai’s partner
28. South American monkey
30. Naphthenic acid + palmitic acid
35. Pilot’s stunt
37. Forbidden, to a baby
39. Vampire of Greek mythology
40. Italian wine region
41. Not Astroturf
43. Alpine lift
44. Sports figures, e.g.
46. Cantina pot
47. Email folder
48. Not vivid and bright
50. Nessie’s abode
52. *Jamie Foxx won for his role in this 2004

biopic

53. Eagle’s nest
55. Unreliable newspaper
57. *2026 nominated film with Stone and Plemons
61. *Chlo Zhao’s nominee
64. Newton or Stern
65. Romanian money
67. Star-crossed one
69. To the point
70. a.k.a sodium hydroxide
71. Novelist Zola
72. Formerly, formerly
73. Aye-aye
74. “He ____ it like it is”

CLUES DOWN

1. Not NBC or ABC
2. Reluctant
3. Pantyhose hue
4. DNA and RNA, e.g.
5. Cups and saucers
6. 20-20, e.g.
7. “One Battle After Another” Best Actor nominee
8. High IQ society
9. *#7’s nominated co-star
10. “Anything ____?”
11. Wing-shaped
12. K to Romans, pl.
15. Like athlete’s foot
20. Behind on rent, e.g.
22. Night spot

24. At last
25. Necklace fastener
26. Popular garden perennial
27. I to Greeks, pl.
29. *2026 nominated Benicio del ____
31. Benatar and Morita
32. Fly in ____, or a reminder of the past
33. Tarzan’s swing rope
34. *Fictional table tennis champ
36. *Nominated “F1” star
38. Nobel Peace Prize capital
42. Sacrum, pl.
45. Communicating with spirits event
49. Hawaiian flower garland
51. *Inspiration for #61 Across
54. Pep gathering
56. Lawn ornament
57. Angler’s hope
58. ____-friendly
59. Needlefish, pl.
60. Brewer’s kiln
61. Color wheel elements
62. Like fairytale stepmothers?
63. Be a snitch
66. Payment for an eye
68. Hi-____ graphics