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Thunderbolt Speedway filled need for speed

Thunderbolt Raceway, on Fleming Island, was aptly named, and it was Clay County's drag racing track in the late 1950s and 1960s.

The roar of finely tuned powerful engines shook the ground and echoed for miles. On moonless nights, a hazy dome of light glowing on the horizon could be seen from anywhere in the county.

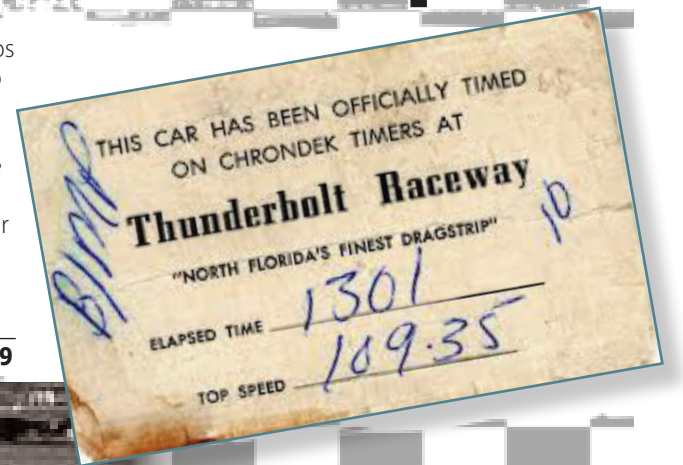
Organizers Burch Stump, Ed Taylor and Ben Zellner loved cars and kids and were concerned for the area's future with the imminent loss of the U.S. Navy Base in Green Cove Springs. The county's economy was sure

to take a hit, meaning, among other things, fewer jobs and more "lay about time" for teenage boys to get up to mischief like drag racing on the roads.

Their goal was to have a track that ranked among the top rural facilities popping up all over the Southeast in small towns in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. They put their money where their mouths were.

The availability of a deserted World War II airfield just south of County Road 220, with miles of paved

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9



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- ★ Ranked #1 County with Best Public Schools in Florida by Niche 2023
- ★ CCDS offers 34+ Career and Technical Education programs
- ★ All junior high and senior high schools have accelerated learning programs.
- ★ Seven CCDS schools are recognized as a Purple Star School of Distinction by the Florida Department of Education.
- ★ Enhanced at increased security measures to keep students and staff safe.
- ★ Secured over \$1.2 million in grant funds for fine arts programs across all schools.
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Black Rifle Coffee



Forged in premium coffee,
patriotism, community, culture



By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

Bill Faulk found a sense of belonging when he moved to Fleming Island last summer. And he found a purpose when he opened Black Rifle Coffee in August.

"We are a coffee shop for people who like coffee," Faulk said. "On top of that. Being veteran-founded, giving back to that veteran, the military, the first responder community, that's what sets us apart."

While Black Rifle Coffee has some of the frothy, sweeter assortment of drinks, Faulk focuses more on the standard cups

of joe.

"We'll make some of those fancy drinks for you, but a large caramel and vanilla latte won't be called the same thing. It won't be an upside-down Grande, double



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shaken. I don't even know. I'm no," Faulk said with a chuckle. "I don't do the fancy coffee. I don't even know what they call it. When they come in, I have to refer to my people who have been baristas before. They're like, 'Hey, this guy wants this. What does that mean?'"

The store at 1619 County Road 220 was Florida's third brick-and-mortar Black Rifle. When it opened, Faulk said as many as 40 cars were in line in the drive-thru on the first day.

Founded by veterans in 2014, Black Rifle was built upon the mission "to serve coffee and culture to the people who love America" and to "emancipate the American people from corporate coffee." The company grew popular and profitable through a direct-to-consumer online business model and has since expanded to operate physical locations.

Faulk is from Nashville and has a career background in the restaurant industry. He also comes from a family that has served in the military and as a first responder, so he resonates with the company's mission.

"It was a brand I could easily get behind. Once I researched and tried the product, I realized it would be an opportunity and a place for me. Our values are different than other coffee cafes," he said.

From Café de Flore in Paris to Starbucks in Seattle, coffee culture usually leans left politically. Black Rifle stands out as an exception.

"We do things a little bit differently. We're a no BS company," he said.

Black Rifle captured nationwide headlines when it countered Starbucks' goal to "hire 10,000 refugees" by promising to hire 10,000 veterans.

Its menu features espresso varieties, black, green, and chai teas, cold brews and frozen coffee creations. A gift shop along the side displays hats, hoodies, mugs and other novelties.

Faulk's favorites are the Liberty Bell, sweet and caramelly, and the Smokey Joe, "like a campfire in a cup."

He said he's embraced a sense of belonging since moving to Clay County.

"It's such a big difference between Nashville and here," he said. "I feel like I'm part of this community. I love being here. There's a large veteran community. There's a reason why we opened Black Rifle here. It's no surprise we're here."

"I've been in the restaurant business where it's about making money. That's not why we're here. We're here because we're part of the community and here to stay."



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Island Liquor keeps pace with ever-changing trends in liquors, customer's tastes

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

Not long ago, when a customer walked into Island Liquor and wanted a bottle of Jack Daniels, store manager Chase Centers could simply reach around and grab the iconic squared bottle from the shelf behind the counter.

Now he needs more information since Jack Daniels now makes Jack and Coke, Single Barrel, Gentleman Jack, Bonded Series, Tennessee Honey, Tennessee Fire and Tennessee Apple flavors.

"Everyone's got their own taste, whether it's vodka, tequila, bourbons, whiskeys," Centers said. "There's just so many different things come out. It seems like every day you can find something different. Just 10 years ago, you didn't see flavor. Now everything is evolving."

So is Island Liquor.

Centers and store owners Jay and Nee-sha Patel are committed to keeping pace

with the ever-changing trends. Their inventories reflect the demands of their customers, especially from their regulars.

"People don't want to go too far to get what they like," Jay Patel said. "Once somebody finds a bottle they like, they stick to that same bottle. As long as they know that it's in stock and it's closest to their house, that's where they'll go. We try to keep a wide variety of stuff."

Island Liquor also operates AtoZBev.com, an online Liquor Store that allows it to expand its footprint and inventory beyond its address at 1545 County Road 220, Suite 124 in the Winn-Dixie Plaza.

"If you don't see something you like, we might be able to order it," Centers said.

But if you enter the store and want a



bottle of vodka, be ready to narrow your request because Island Liquor has traditional and flavors like whipped cream, citrus, raspberry, pineapple, cucumber, grapefruit, habanero, cherry, peach, grape, orange, coconut, mango, tropical, red berry, blueberry, berry, kiwi straw, berry, salted caramel, vanilla, cake, chocolate and orange whipped, pink lemonade, passionfruit, watermelon,

pear, lime, strawberry, sweet tea, ruby red, blood orange, strawberry lemonade, white peach and rosemary, cherry lemonade, apple, watermelon and basil, strawberry and lemongrass, mandarin, peppermint twist, cognac infused, peanut butter, sweetfire jalapeno, ginger, lavender, honey, hot pepper, Paw Paw, caramel, double espresso, cranberry, cotton candy, pumpkin spice, tangerine, black pepper, Sonoma habanero, mango pineapple and pickle.

Cheers!

Visit **Island Liquor** for all of your entertaining needs

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Santioni's Italian Restaurant

Where good food, and elegance share the same menu

The first Santioni's Italian Restaurant opened in 1987 in Jacksonville, but Bruno and Silvana Santoni brought their love for Italian food to Fleming Island in 1987. Michael Mastrocinque bought the restaurant in 2003 to continue and expand the classic romantic/fine dining that's considered an experience as much as a meal.

Santioni's exudes elegance, from its menu to its ambiance to its house pianist Gina Martinelli who plays Tuesday through Saturday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Under Mastrocinque, the legacy and legendary recipes continue to be the center of your dining experience.



Whether you desire a classic old-world Italian dish such as Lasagna, Eggplant Parmesan, Veal Marsala or the eclectic flavor of Frutti Di Mare, Filet Caprino, their fresh "Catch of the Day" or a classic Italian dessert like Almond Tiramisu and Cannoli. Their extensive menu and daily specials offer something for everyone. The restaurant looks forward to providing its guests with its most gracious service.

The pasta and sauces are homemade. Their meats are cut and trimmed in the kitchen. Sausages and meatballs are ground daily.

In addition to serving their reservation-requested clientele, Santioni's also can host private events, a

banquet room, and on-site catering.

As expected, Santioni's has an extensive assortment of fine wines, gins, whiskeys, liqueurs, tequilas, bourbons, vodkas, Amaretto, rums, Kahlua and Malibu.

Whether you are craving a classic Italian dish such as mouthwatering Chicken Parmigiana or the eclectic flavor of grouper Sorrento – their extensive menu offers something for everyone. Santioni's looks forward to providing you with our most gracious service.

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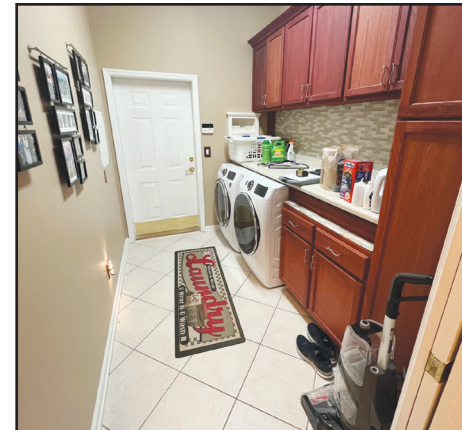
There are big things continue to happen in the little boutique shop at

Southern Brothers Flooring and Cabinets in the corner of the Winn-Dixie Plaza on County Road 220.

Owner Doug Mooneyhan's and tile/flooring/bathrooms sales associate CJ Nelson's imagination aren't confined by square-footage or a budget. Their creativity is a blank canvas, open to interpretation and creativity where a basic idea can be transformed into a dream space.

After working for another company for 30 years, Doug took a leap of faith and started his own company on Fleming Island. With no money or clientele in reserve, Southern Brothers has flourished in the past year by supplying quality flooring, bathroom, kitchen and cabinet materials, while working with a group of trusted contractors to complete most jobs quicker and cheaper than others.

"The contractors are not strangers to us," Nelson said. "They're essentially friends of the family. We've worked with them for years, and we're able to keep prices down. We kind of handle the project from the management side of the thing. Ultimately,



it's a kind of group effort. As far as getting these projects done in this day and age, there are big contracting fees and stuff like that. You don't see that here."

Nelson said the thrill comes from envisioning the final product before the first old flooring tile or cabinet is removed and seeing the homeowner's expression when the job is done. Most homeowners aren't sure what they want. They just know they need a change.

"We don't just sell material; we help color coordinate," he said. "You know, as much as Doug's been designing cabinets for the last decade for somebody else, now doing it on his own. He knows what the trends are.

"And for myself, an unofficial artist of some sorts, being able to make sure the cabinet color coordinates with the court's countertop, with the backsplash, with the floor that's going in, all those things are decisions that all come together at the same time. "It's not, let's do this, then let's do this, then let's do this. You got to look at them all together."

Southern Brothers have taken on big jobs like knocking down walls, expanding rooms, remodeling an entire house. They've also been called to spruce up a bathroom or brighten up a dingy kitchen.

"We may be just a little boutique shop," Nelson said, "but we've got something for everybody."



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

surface and a convenient water supply, put them leagues ahead of the competition. Some tracks provided dangerously little stopping space, with narrow, pothole-pitted tracks. Drivers were required to haul water in scrounged demi-jugs intended for moonshine.

Thunderbolt boasted a top-of-the-line "Christmas Tree," a technically sophisticated starting system. Every car was checked by a certified mechanic for safety and classified to ensure each contest's fairness. Almost immediately, challenges usually settled on the back roads, with two competitors roaring side by side down narrow county roads, sending citizens and livestock into the ditches for safety. They were "taken to the track."

Teenage shade tree mechanics made challenges reconciled with official standards and under adult supervision. Newspapers published race results and radio station WAPE announced live from the track. The quality of the operation brought big names and events. Vehicles stretched bumper to bumper down the then narrow, two-lane U.S. Highway 17 past the Big Ape radio station and turned west into the woods at the towering steel thunderbolt piercing the ground.

Fans rubbed shoulders in the pits

with the sport's greats and watched drag racing's big dogs, like Connie Kalitta, Chris "The Golden Greek" Karamesines, Don "The Snake" Prudhomme and "Sneaky" Pete Robinson, begin and soar into legends. Art Arfons lit the skies over the island twice when he demonstrated his jet engine-powered car streaking a quarter mile in about five seconds.

Big Daddy Don Garlits was a real crowd-pleaser. He had them all collectively holding their breaths the night he took a wild ride into the high brush. His Swamp Rat I blew an engine in the timing lights, skidded on its oil and went backward through a fence and back out into a field. It was pitch black and dark, but they found him quickly because he was pitching a very vocal fit. In those days, Garlits traveled to races with the car on an open flatbed truck followed by a pick-up truck or a sedan with tools and parts in the trunk. He could build a car and challenge the champions for \$1,500 to \$2,000. To make a run these days costs \$10,000, and a crash means the loss of a quarter-million-dollar car.

Garlits broke the magical 170 mph barrier in the quarter mile in 1957 at Brooksville and proved the California gurus of drag – who said it couldn't be done – wrong. He was the hero of every southern man or boy.

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Oasis of Sweet Persimmons

Largest farm in NE Florida brings fresh fruit, joy to community

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND - A place of joy. That's what Vivien Aqui McWilliams calls her family's persimmon farm.

Situated on 2½ acres of land on Raggedy Point Road, the orchard stretches far and is filled with tall trees and wide varieties of the "super fruit."

The largest persimmon farm in Northeast Florida, Sweet Persimmons, allows customers to walk through the orchard and freely pick from the trees.

The farm was once her father's, Wilfredo "Willie" Aqui Sr. After retiring, he moved to Fleming Island in 2000. McWilliams said that with tons of land and nothing to do with it, her father began trying to find ways to use it.

"He basically made it his oasis," she said. Back in their hometown, Willie previ-

ously had a couple of persimmon trees, so he was well-versed in the fruit. But he still began more research using the 1994 book *Oriental Persimmons in Florida* by E.P. Miller and T.E. Crocker.

Flipping through the pages, McWilliams said that's where her father kept all his notes on all things persimmons, including how to grow and care for them.

She said that one day, her father was able to procure a bunch of skinny sticks, which would become a family heirloom.

"[He] basically started the gridwork on the property and just made rows and rows," McWilliams said.

From his home, Willie grew just a few trees, discovering the ins and outs of persimmon farming. But soon, his fruitful spirit grew. And he wanted more.

With 1,000 persimmon trees, she said her father grew five varieties of Japanese persimmon fruits- Fuyu, Saijo, Honan Red, Tanenashi and Hachiya.

Willie's Sweet Persimmons was a hidden gem, welcoming local customers who



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wanted a taste of what each season had to yield.

Although her father passed away five years ago, McWilliams said her family comes together every season to continue his legacy.

McWilliams, her husband Scotty, her sister Leah and her mother Amelia tend to the farm every season.

With 500 trees left at Sweet Persimmons, McWilliams said the Fuyu remains their most abundant type.

As the only non-astringent, McWilliams said you could pick the Fuyu from right off the tree. However, the rest are all astringent, meaning they are not edible until fully softened and ripe, almost like a water balloon.

McWilliams said her dad's favorite was the Saijo.

"He would put them in egg cartons, throw them in the freezer when they were really soft like that and then take them out and just use a spoon and eat it," she said.

The persimmon fruit has proven to be in high demand with local customers.

With many health benefits, including its ability to fight cancer, improve vision, regulate blood pressure, soothe the stomach, and its sweet taste, McWilliams said it keeps customers coming back for more.

She said it's amazing to see the smiling

faces of returning and sometimes new customers each time they walk through the farm and hold up that home-grown sign. She said she enjoys having customers make delicious treats and meals using the fruits from the orchard.

She said she remembers a time when the girl's track and field team at Fleming Island High ran from the school to pick fruit on the last day of the farm season.

"This has just been kind of like a destination for a lot of people," McWilliams said.

In 2022, the farm sold almost 4,000 pounds of persimmons for its last productive yield, equivalent to about \$20,000, which she said was all her father's doing.

"That's what he did," McWilliams said. "For my mom and our family to help pay for the taxes on that property. That was part of his legacy [and] he wanted to make sure, in essence, that it was self-sufficient."

The trees, which are about 15 years old, don't require much maintenance. Scotty and Leah are the grove managers, and to keep up with the trees, McWilliams said they mix just two ingredients- 10-10-10 fertilizer and Epsom salt. Throwing a handful at the base of each tree, water, and sun work the rest of their magic.

However, McWilliams said this season couldn't have been the same experience as previous ones, with the farm having

to halt their annual U-picks. Having just enough fruit to give, they had to limit it to a first-come, first-served basis. She said it was a tough decision for the family.

"It's hard not to be able to open up and have enough fruit for people to pick," McWilliams said.

But there's always next year. To grow, to learn and to continue her father's legacy.

McWilliams said she could still feel her

father's presence in the orchard, sitting in his chair amongst the persimmons.

She said she hopes to continue to share a piece of him and her family with the local community, given all that he has left.

"Having places like our farm... it gives the opportunity for people to connect with friends [and] family," McWilliams said. "To me that's what our family's about."

Taste

Persimmons have a silky texture and a honey-like flavor. They are in season from November to December and are native to warmer climates like China, Korea, and Japan.

Fuyu

A sweet, non-astringent persimmon that can be eaten when firm and crisp. You can rinse it, remove the leaves, and slice it like an apple. The peel is edible.



Hachiya

An astringent persimmon that should be eaten when very ripe and soft. You can rinse it, remove the leaves, and cut it in half lengthwise. Then, scoop out the flesh with a spoon. You can also slice off the top and spoon out the flesh directly.

Uses

You can also use persimmons in recipes for smoothies, yogurt bowls, quick breads, and cakes.

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In addition to breakfast, many of the dishes and sandwiches have a Middle Eastern flair. Hamburgers, pitas, bagels, subs, gyros and camel ryders are prepared when ordered. There is a large selection of Middle Eastern sides like tabouli, hummus, kibbie, grape leaves, falafel and baklava, as well as a variety of other salads.

Tony's Pizza

2219 County Road 220
Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.;
Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.
Sunday, noon-9 p.m.

The dough is made in house and the pies, calzones, strombolis and garlic knots are hand-tossed. Tony insists there's a difference between a New York and New Jersey style pizza, and judging by the New York memorabilia on the walls, it's clear he serves a New York-style menu. Tony believes in huge portions and the crust often comes out with bubbles characteristic of a wood oven.

Poke Bowl

1647 County Road 220, No. 102
Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.
Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.
Sunday, noon-9 p.m.

The traditional Hawaiian fare starts with fresh ingredients and means "to slice" raw fish tossed in sauce and served either as an appetizer or a main dish, usually in a rich broth made of a sweet, salty and savory flavors comprised of combinations of soy sauce, sesame oil rice vinegar, ginger and garlic. Main ingredients usually include tuna, octopus, onions, sesame seeds, edamame and seaweed.

Sunset Tiki Bar

3108 U.S. Highway 17 (at Doctors Lake bridge) Monday-Friday, 5 p.m.-10 p.m.
Saturday noon-11 p.m.; Sunday 1-10 p.m.

Located at the Doctors Lake Marina, the menu and setting is laid back and simple. And that's

by design. In addition to a full bar, the menu includes appetizers like chips and salsa, nachos, quesadillas, wings, chowder, teriyaki shrimp skewers, queso dip, pulled pork sliders, sausage flatbread, steamers, salads, pizza, burgers, sandwiches, tacos, seafood and desserts.

Santioni's Italian Restaurant

3535 U.S. Highway 17
Tuesday-Thursday, 4 p.m.-9 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 4 p.m.-10 p.m.; Sunday, 4 p.m.-9 p.m.

This classic Italian restaurant is known both for its food, romantic ambiance and daily specials. It starts with an elegant selection of appetizers like Arancini di Riso, Calamari, Caprese salad, Escargot and Burrata, and moves to more than 17 freshly prepared pasta dishes. Diners can choose from scampi, chicken, filet mignon, lamb, ribeye, New York strip, seafood, Italian sausage, veal, pizza and calzones.

Salomas Panamanian Cuisine

2820 Town Center Blvd., Suite 13
Wednesday-Sunday, 9 a.m.-8 p.m.

Looking for traditional Latin American food? You can find it in front of the AMC Fleming Island 12 theatre. Salomas serves breakfast featuring omeletes, hojaldre, tortillas and yucca frita, and has authentic Panamanian fare like flan, pollo guisado/chicken stew, omelets, lechona de feria (specially marinated fried pork), sancocho (light chicken soup with white yam) and the Panamanian platter.

Benito's Italian Restaurant and Pizzeria

2219 County Road 220, Suite 317
Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.; 4 p.m.-9 p.m.
Saturday-Sunday, noon-3 p.m.; 4 p.m.-9 p.m.

For those in a hurry at lunchtime, Benito's offers a buffet with a large selection of Italian favorites, including pizza, pasta, vegetables, sauces, soup, garlic bread, dessert, lasagna, parmigiana and salad. Dinners are more refined with most of the pasta dishes, chicken, seafood and veal dishes, sandwiches, desserts and pizza.

Whitey's Fish Camp

2032 County Road 220
Monday, 3 p.m.-9 p.m.; Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. (bar closes at 10 p.m.) Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. (bar closes at midnight); Sunday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. (bar closes at 10 p.m.)

A staple in Clay County since 1963, the third-generation restaurant started when Ann Ham decided to cook the extra catfish her husband trapped in nearby Doctors Lake, Swimming Pen Creek and the St. Johns River. One of her first and most faithful customers was Ronnie Van Zant, the founder and lead singer of the Southern Rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd. Whitey's has an inside and outside restaurant, a tiki bar, a boat dock and a launch with a fueling station and a campground. But more than anything else, it has seafood. Favorites include fried shrimp, stuffed flounder, clam strip baskets, fish sandwiches, fried gator tail and Mahi sandwiches.

Mercury Moon Bar and Grille

2015 County Road 220
Daily, noon-2 a.m.

While known for its live music, sports bar and package store, Mercury Moon also serves food, including lunch specials. Menu items resembled fair food, like Moon Cheese Steak, Moon Burger, Lumpia (crispy wrappers filled with ground pork, beef and vegetables that are deep fried), funnel cakes, fried Oreos, fried Snickers bars, corn nuggets, wings, Southwest egg rolls and pork rinds.

Barley and Pie Brewing Company

1605 County Road 220, Unit 145
Monday, 3 p.m.-10 p.m.; Tuesday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.; Thursday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-midnight; Sunday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.

The restaurant specializes in sourdough neo-Neapolitan pizza. Pepperoni, Hot Honey, and Bacon Mac & Cheese are popular pizzas on the menu. The restaurant also sells sides, salads, appetizers, tater tots, salmon and lox pizza, carbonara balls and vodka ravioli. It also has an assortment of eight craft beers brewed on-site.

Take-Away Buffet

1805 East West Pkwy, Suite 4
Hours: Monday-Friday, 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m.
Sunday, 11 a.m.-6:30 p.m.

First, Take-Away Buffet is something other than a buffet. It's a takeout restaurant that serves gourmet comfort food. The menu usually features a weekly special, and diners can choose from sticky chicken, chicken pot pie, beef stew, chicken rice and broccoli casserole, pot roast, meatloaf, baked Tuscan chicken breast, smothered pork chops or lasagna as an entrée. You can also choose one entrée with one or two side dishes or two entrees with four side dishes.

The Cafeteria at Baptist Medical Center Clay

1771 Baptist Clay Drive
Hours: Breakfast, 7 a.m.-10 a.m.; Lunch, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.; Coffee shop, Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

You don't need to be sick or visit a sick friend or family member to get one of the best hamburgers on the island. There are three stations featuring grilled fare like burgers, barbecue and salads. The cafeteria also has many other items not found in a typical hospital.

New York Pizza

1811 Golden Eagle Way No. 25
Wednesday, 4 p.m.-8 p.m.; Thursday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m.; Friday-Saturday-11 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sunday, noon-8 p.m.

The restaurant was founded by a man who once was a director of food services at a Long Island, New York, hospital. He settled on Fleming Island with a menu that includes hand-tossed 14-, 18- and 24-inch pizzas with traditional toppings, plus unique offerings like upside-down New York style mozzarella cheese base, topped with pizza sauce and oregano, Chick fil-A with honey mustard base chicken, waffle fries and mozzarella cheese and Bianca which includes olive oil base with creamy ricotta, mozzarella and fresh garlic.

Eat like the locals



Hibernia Pub

2260 Town Center Blvd.
Monday-Friday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.;
Saturday-Sunday, 8 a.m.-10 p.m.

Located in the clubhouse of the Fleming Island Golf Club, the pub serves breakfast on the weekends and has a full menu the rest of the week that features Irish-tainted fare, like a giant pretzel with beer cheese, Irish cheese steak, Hibernia Pub Sub, Irish Cheese Board, Smoked Salmon sandwich, Irish pub sandwich, Hibernia patty melt, Guinness beef stew, Jameson glazed French pork chop, Bangers and Mash and Sophia's Shepherd's Pie.

Talons Clubhouse Restaurant

2217 Eagle Harbor Pkwy.
Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sunday 1 p.m.-9 p.m.; Sunday Brunch, 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

In addition to Sunday brunch, the restaurant at Eagle Harbor has several oversized selections like the half-pound grilled hamburger topped with bacon, onion straws, goat cheese and blackberry jam, a sizzling steak and cheese topped with mushrooms on a toasted hoagie roll and a redfish sandwich, as well as an assortment of soups and salads, desserts, starters, including Nashville hot shrimp and filet tips.

Corks and Barrels

1824 Town Center Blvd., Suite 101
Tuesday-Thursday, 4 p.m.-10 p.m.; Friday, 4 p.m.-midnight; Saturday, 11 a.m.-midnight; Sunday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

This restaurant focuses on a place where groups can meet to have a glass of wine or signature cocktails, upscale cognacs, whiskeys and scotches and enjoy charcuterie boards of cured meats and cheeses and finish with an elegant dessert.

Mr. Gordo's Tacos and Cantina

3535 U.S. Highway 17, Suite 8
Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

The foundation of Mr. Gordo's menu is one word—authentic. Sauces and carne asada, pollo, carnitas, chorizo, Zapata and Chori pollo are house made. The food is fresh and made when ordered. The expansive lunch menu includes an in-house Taco Tuesday special, as well as vegan and vegetarian options.

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Mawhinney focused on team state title repeat

By Randy Lefko
randy@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND - Winning a second golf state title would be nice, says Fleming Island junior golfer Tyler Mawhinney, but, despite his impressive resume of national and international play over the past summer and fall, Mawhinney still remains focused on one thing.

"I would like to see the team win the second state title, honestly," said Mawhinney, who put in a Canada individual title over the summer, an amateur title over the summer, the Randy Warren Memorial title just a month ago and has been jet-setting the countryside chatting with college coaches as well.

And, keeping his game tight despite a month of rain.

"The rain that we have had, I think 10 days straight in a 14 day period, has been tough on my game," said Mawhinney, who has been on a national type tour of tournaments around the country and in Canada prior to returning to join his Golden Eagles' team. "I only get to play with these guys for three months of the year and you always want to play for the team. I had one tournament with a team over the summer, but the rest were individual tournaments."

Mawhinney's travels had him in and out of tournaments all over the North America continent, but he noted the jet lag aspect has not been a factor.

"I played a tournament in Maryland, then went to Canada, then got in the US Amateur and flew to Minnesota," said Mawhinney. "I flew straight to Vanderbilt (Vanderbilt University in Tennessee) for a visit, came home, played a high school event, left the next morning for Auburn. I came home for a day then went to University of Florida. I was gone for close to five weeks in a row, then I came home and it rained for like 14 days. I didn't get to work much on my swing and I think I really need to."

At the Randy Warren Invite, Mawhinney, finished with a 3-under 33 for the front nine at

the Fleming Island Golf Club before obliterating the back nine with birdies on five holes including the five par, 528 yard 16th hole to push his lead entering the final two holes. Mawhinney finished with a fifth birdie on 17 and a par on 18 with a rare missed five foot putt.

"I think I missed just one green on 17," said Mawhinney. "I like to play with the team and if I have a risky situation, I would take the easy stroke so we can win the team title. I would rather us win the team title more than my own title."

For the team scores, Fleming Island, now in Class 2A, dominated to with a 273 total to finish 12 strokes ahead of runnerup Creekside, in Class 3A, with a 285 and Beachside in third at 286.'

"This is only like the second or third match that we got to play 18 without weather," said Mawhinney. "I try to keep my flexibility and tightness work going when I can't get hit on the course."

Fleming Island coach Bruce Cloud noted that Mawhinney is constantly coaching up his teammates because he is just that kind of kid.

"He is constantly working on his game to get better but he also is helping our younger players get better," said Cloud. "He knows that it



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*For Mawhinney,
it's simple...*

"I play my game, the team plays their game, we finish close to each other and the rest of the state has to beat us."

takes the whole team to win championships."

With the rain drying up come November and maybe the torrential snowstorms that Florida gets, Mawhinney and Cloud could see clear sailing to his team's aspirations.

"We faced about a 10 day period of not even being able to get on the driving range or go to the course at all," said Fleming Island coach Bruce Cloud, who is looking to repeat as a state champion; this time in Class 2A as well as seeing his Class 3A individual champion Tyler Mawhinney,

who has competed in a handful of major national tournaments, repeat that title. "We should be getting into post-season shape by the time districts roll around. Fortunately, Tyler Mawhinney has probably played more golf than anyone else on the team and is doing rather well for himself."

With Fleming Island High's boys team in the midst of defending their class 3A title (now in Class 2A) this year with just about the entire team returning from 2023, the amount of course time for September has been reduced significantly by rain. The Golden Eagles, now in Class

2A and ranked third behind American Heritage of Palm Beach and Broward (both top 10 Class 2A 2023), are currently ranked at just 14th state wide, but with only five matches recorded with many of the teams in the top 10 state wide in double figures. American Heritage (Palm Coast) has 16 rounds of play in region 4-2A action.

"I wasn't real familiar with 2A talent, except Ponte Vedra and Beachside but as luck would have it, both teams moved up to 3A as we moved down," said Cloud. "It's the teams down south that we need to study up for and see exactly what we're

going to face. In the end, the real challenge will be the golf course and playing it like we know we can."

For Mawhinney, it's simple.

"I play my game, the team plays their game, we finish close to each other and the rest of the state has to beat us," said Mawhinney.

"We got lucky last year after regions where we almost didn't make it to state, but the FHSAA gave us the at-large big and we made the most of it. Obviously, we have to have that good day at the right time again."

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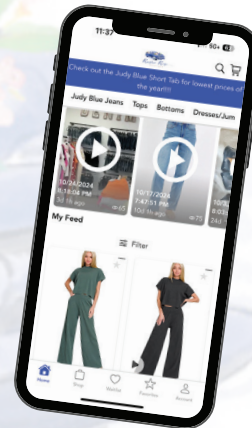


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