

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS HERALD

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VOL. 12 NO. 2 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2024

Mission races ahead now that The Way Free Medical Clinic is open

Organizers working to address transportation issues to Keystone Heights

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – The Way Free Medical Clinic at 302 College Dr. is finally open, but that doesn't mean the mission slows down for Executive Director Don Fann.

After spending the last four years keeping the older clinic operating at 479 Houston St. in Green Cove Springs—all while trying to raise \$2.6 million to transform a 5,100-square-foot commercial building across from St. Johns River State College into a 7,300-square-foot modern clinic—Fann maintained his hectic pace.

On Dec. 3, he spent time at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, meeting with officials from the local hospital and the Rochester, Minnesota, headquarters about further assistance.

"I just had a great lunch with some people, some of whom were from Minnesota," Fann said. "We're building our partnerships. I'd eventually love to see all the hospitals that we partner with have their logos on our building. I think that would help to reinforce to our patients that we're not working in a vacuum; there are things that the hospitals are doing for our patient crews for which they don't get credit. We have residents rotating through. I can see us rolling out a more formal way of recognizing these partnerships for their hospitals."

Fann and newly appointed Executive Director Andrea Crowder said with a new building comes new challenges, like addressing transportation issues for patients in Keystone Heights and Green Cove Springs.

The Way is a nonprofit that provides free

SEE WAY, 7



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

A volunteer opens the door and welcomes a mother with her two children at The Way Free Medical Clinic at 302 College Dr. in Orange Park.

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PUZZLE FUN

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

There are four differences between Picture A and Picture B.



Answers:
1. Dog to the side 2. Missing ski pole 3. Green helmet different shape 4. Fallen skier in the back

GUESS WHO?

I am an actress born in England on January 3, 1996. I began my career as a singer, posting song covers to YouTube. My siblings also are talented and are in the business, with my brother starring in the series "Game of Thrones." In 2021, I made my Marvel debut in "Black Widow."

Answer: Florence Pugh

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CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Miller beer variety
- 4. Member of people inhabiting Bering Sea islands
- 9. Stomach
- 14. Investment vehicle
- 15. Fictional soccer coach Ted
- 16. Irregular in botanical parlance
- 17. Cease standing
- 18. "American Horror Story" actress
- 20. Grow milk teeth
- 22. Plant parts
- 23. Snow house
- 24. Most contemptuous
- 28. Note to repay
- 29. Old English
- 30. Wings
- 31. Financial institutions
- 33. Parks and Lopez are two
- 37. Mr. T's "The A-Team" character
- 38. Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)
- 39. Give off
- 41. Semitic alphabet letter
- 42. Farm state
- 43. Actress Sarandon
- 44. Back parts
- 46. Zoroastrian concept of holy fire
- 49. Touchdown
- 50. One point north of due east
- 51. Refurbishes
- 55. Silver and Dogg are two
- 58. Former Tigers catcher Alex
- 59. Type of envelope
- 60. Seriously considered
- 64. Unhappy
- 65. Past (archaic)
- 66. Asian wild dog
- 67. Old English letter
- 68. Young domestic sheep
- 69. Football players need to gain them
- 70. Witness
- 11. A small quantity of anything
- 12. Mountain Time
- 13. Affirmative
- 19. Word element meaning ear
- 21. Carried away
- 24. Short-billed rails
- 25. Newborn child
- 26. Sword
- 27. Groups of people
- 31. Prickly, scrambling shrubs
- 32. Become less intense
- 34. Polishes
- 35. Indicates position
- 36. Songs sung to one's beloved
- 40. The 12th letter of the Greek alphabet
- 41. Insects
- 45. Israeli politician
- 47. Pre-digital
- 48. Roaming
- 52. Ambience
- 53. Brew
- 54. Late
- 56. Make ecstatically happy
- 57. Semitic alphabet letter
- 59. Blend
- 60. Dash
- 61. Self
- 62. Exclamation of satisfaction
- 63. Hill or rocky peak

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Dormant Peruvian volcano
- 2. Norwegian composer
- 3. Indicates location
- 4. Pubs
- 5. Unable to walk easily
- 6. Electronic warfare-support measures
- 7. World leader
- 8. Midsection
- 9. Jewish calendar month
- 10. Urological condition

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS HERALD

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Clay Today, 3513 U.S. Hwy 17, Fleming Island, FL U.S.P.S. (063-800) Periodical Postage Paid at Orange Park, Florida

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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS

Think Big by Shopping Small, Shopping Local

By Don
don@claytodayonline.com

If you have a complaint, there are no 1-800 telephone numbers for The Tea Room of Keystone Heights and Gift Shop or Pat's Nursery. If you have a problem, they want to hear from you directly.

"You know, when folks come into the Team Room, I treat it as an extension of my home," said owner Jennifer Ford.

"Owning a small business is probably one of the most personal things I have ever done. I think I get the most gratification from building those relationships. I actually have a sign outside my Tea Room that says, 'Enter as Strangers, Leave as Friends.' I believe that was all my heart."

The U.S. Small Business Administration



Don Coble



urged Americans to support Small Business Saturday on Nov. 30. It was designed as one day to support small retailers and restaurant owners who are the backbones of the local economy.

But why just one day? When we spend our money locally, we keep our money in the local economy, which means we support local employment and local programs funded by taxes and contributions.

Shop Local should be a year-round commitment.

"We're small businesspeople, and if you add us all up at one time, it does help the economy," said Alan Stuckey, the Vice President at Pat's Nursery. "As far as that goes, you support many families – not that you don't do that with the big mass merchandise or box store. But if you keep things keeps things local ... people shop here, they have kids in school here, things like that. We always try to support the school systems and around the county. What comes around goes around."

According to the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, for every \$1 spent on locally owned businesses, 67 cents remains in the county, which helps to create higher-paying jobs for our neighbors for essential professionals like teachers and first responders. It also invests in entrepreneurship, takes advantage of local expertise and makes our community a destination.

Jennifer's Tea Room has established a unique clientele in the last three years. She requires a reservation for a group of at least

SEE SHOP, 5

Amid demographic climate, Florida legislators have choices to make

By A.G. Gancarski
For FloridaPolitics.com

State legislators must contend with an increasingly unfavorable demographic climate, the end of federal pandemic funds, and a housing market with cost pressures that discourage transactions.

As a result, they will face increased challenges in meeting obligations in the next three fiscal years.

That's the grim takeaway from Tuesday's legislative briefing from the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) regarding the state's long-term economic outlook.

While the upcoming budget year presents minimal challenges at current spending levels, projections suggest that tough choices await the Senate, the House, the current Governor and whoever succeeds him.

Expenditure is bound to increase without a revenue match.

EDR Coordinator Amy Baker described Florida's gross domestic product as returning to "normal" after the pandemic, saying the GDP was projected to be around 2% for the next three years. Florida is now 18th in the nation, "slowing as we expected it to slow," at 3.2%, down from sixth back in September.

The Interstate 4 corridor, which is experiencing population growth, has also seen a strengthening in terms of GDP in recent years. Fiscally constrained counties are lagging in relative terms, leading to some "worry" from EDR.

Turning to personal income, COVID



A.G. Gancarski

SEE CHOICES, 5



Word OF THE MONTH

Word of the Week is a feature that aims to help readers boost their vocabulary in a meaningful way that has practical application. Each week, our editorial staff presents a word, its definition and its use in a sentence.

Send us a letter ...

We'd like to hear from you. Perhaps you are concerned about the county commission, the school board or your city council or commission, sit down and take a few moments to write us

a letter. All we ask is that you keep it civil, no name-calling and write no more than 600 words. All we ask is that you stick to local issues, be clear and make a point. We reserve the right to edit for AP Stylebook errors, grammar and spelling. In your

email, type Letter to the Editor in your subject and send it to Managing Editor Don Coble at don@claytodayonline.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Opinions ...

The views and opinions expressed on this page are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Clay Today.

Shop

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five. Groups are treated to 90-minute British-style tea with finger sandwiches, crackers, fruits, vegetables, spreads, slices of bread, scones and 40 different teas. And everyone is outfitted with traditional fascinator hats.

"It didn't actually start as a tea room," Jennifer said. "I like to tell folks I never really intended to buy myself a job, but I love it. "I can't tell you how many people, not only in the City of Keystone but just Clay County in general, are just thrilled that it's been successful."

Stuckey's nursery is a mainstay for

professional landscapers and homeowners. On weekends, cars are often lined for several hundred yards in both directions along U.S. Highway 17 on Fleming Island to buy plants, sod or to get advice. And each customer gets personal treatment, whether it's a question about identifying a weed or purchasing a \$1,000 palm tree.

"We're just a small business," Stuckey said. "I think we're pretty important in the community here. Our customers are our neighbors, our friends. It's not just a business; it's personal."

Every customer is greeted as they enter the parking lot, and their purchases are carried to their cars by an employee.

"We've built a good reputation over the



last 29 years," Stuckey said.

And they've helped make Clay County look beautiful – all while keeping most of

our money in the community because we decided to Think Big by Shopping Small.

This Month in History

Five years ago, 2019

- The North Florida Land Trust acquired 20 acres near Camp Blanding as part of a 463-acre purchase for the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor to connect the Ocala and Osceola National Forests.

- The Board of County Commissioners will give the Green Cove Springs City Council \$300,000 to build the Augusta Savage Museum.

- The county gives Orange Park 10 acres at Nelson Point for a riverfront park.

10 years ago, 2014

- The Fleming Island football team won the challenge among the county's football teams by collecting the most non-perishable food to benefit the Food Pantry of Green Cove Springs.

- The Lake Asbury Junior High's wrestling team wins the Cougar Growl Invitational.

- The Florida DOT presents a five-year plan to widen Blanding Boulevard to six lanes in Middleburg.

20 years ago, 2004

- The television show "American Justice" came to Clay County to record an episode on the 1995 murder-for-hire trial of Linda Jones of Lake Asbury.

- Clay County Supervisor of Elections Barbara Kirkman was elected vice president of the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections statewide.

- The Clay County Sheriff's Office checked 1,054 vehicles in a two-day traffic stop with assistance from the Florida Highway Patrol and the Starke Police Department.

30 years ago, 1994

- The Green Cove Springs City County tabled a request to increase the number of proposed homes built in the Magnolia Point Golf and Country Club from 740 to 975.

40 years ago, 1984

- St. Johns River Community College President Robert L. McLendon Jr. presented Clay County Superintendent Jesse Tynes and St. Johns County Superintendent Douglas Hartley with special awards for their contributions to education.

- Middleburg residents celebrated the opening of the first branch library,

Choices

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dollars created "robust" growth during the pandemic, but "wage growth" has driven the trend since, with more than 5% growth in the last two fiscal years, with a gradual settling predicted toward the end of the three years of projections.

Florida is 24th in terms of personal income growth, but at 5.2%, the annual change is slightly below the 5.3% national average.

"This has a lot to do with your thinking about the budget," Baker said.

She noted that Florida historically was a low-wage state compared to the average, but a "significant change" is underway. Florida wages are at 91% of the national average now, representing a high point.

Wages are expected to grow roughly 4% a year, and "it's almost certain these higher wages are here to stay," Baker said.

This "service wage issue" will affect state

contracts and increase budgetary obligations.

Job creation, meanwhile, is slowing, expected to be 1.2% in Fiscal Year 2025-26 and to stabilize at that level, which is half of what it was in recent years.

Unemployment is edging up, though at 3.3%, the state is below the 4% target.

"Even though it's coming back up, it's still on the good side at this point of time," Baker said, though she expects it to edge up to 4.6% in the coming years.

Baker noted that population growth continues to be driven by in-migration, though the numbers will moderate in the coming years to 1.2% by the end of the decade. This removes "pressure" seen in previous eras, but Florida's population growth is expected to triple the nation overall.

Deaths outweigh native births, a trend that turned negative during the pandemic but which was expected given the aging "demographic profile." However, newcomers

are expected to make up for the difference created by these negative trends.

Population growth is uneven, concentrated in Southeast Florida, the I-4 corridor and Duval. Meanwhile, "fiscally constrained" counties in North Florida are essentially static. The housing market has been a "roller coaster," Baker said, with the pandemic seeing artificially lower interest rates and a "big surge" in home buying in the state that exceeded the surge back in the middle of the century's first decade.

The bubble has largely popped, Baker said, due to rate increases and "price inflation" leading to "people being priced out of the market."

Growth is expected in the forecast years, but it will be "moderated" even though interest rates are expected to be lowered.

By Fiscal Year 2027-28, the state will be approaching a \$7 billion deficit unless changes are made. Pressures will build in Fiscal Year 2026-27, forcing legislators to

make a "big decision" ahead of the projected fiscal cliff.

Meanwhile, potential "black swans" such as hurricanes, wildfires and other environmental emergencies present potential wildcards.

Though the state is in "reasonably good shape" to deal with one emergency, multiple risks present graver doubts.

The forecast also presents a potential recession as a "black swan," given decreased personal savings by Florida families and personal debt that is "really taking off again," removing "cushion" for citizens in the event of an economic downturn.

Baker expects inflation to cool but says that people in legislators' districts are still experiencing higher costs. Deflation, which would lower costs, is not anticipated.

Meanwhile, Baker said that given prior experience with storm recovery, costs from 2024's hurricanes are expected to drive more pressure on legislators.

Construction to start on county's new Animal Shelter in early 2025

For the Herald

CLAY COUNTY—After years of planning, work crews are expected to start construction on a new animal shelter on Sleepy Hollow Road in Middleburg in early 2025.

Operations have outgrown the current shelter in Green Cove Springs, which is also in danger of flooding during large storms. Clay County Animal Services staff works daily to maintain the county's no-kill status, and the new shelter will allow for even more opportunities to help our county's animals.

The current shelter boasts 65 cat cages and 76 dog kennels and pens. The new shelter will augment these spaces, providing more opportunities to help these animals and increasing capacity.

The new facility will also have a larger

medical suite to accommodate more veterinarians, allowing more surgeries.

The new shelter will also be in a more centralized location, which county leaders hope will improve access and promote even more community engagement.

Community relationships are a key part of Animal Services' continued success. The facility will boast additional meeting and training space, allowing for even more collaboration with other partner agencies.

E. Vaughan Rivers, Inc. won the bid at \$21,515,585. Construction is projected to take 18 months.



CLAY TODAY ARCHIVES
The current Clay County Animal Services on State Road 16 is usually at capacity and is outdated.

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Way

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medical and dental services to improve the overall health of residents who are uninsured or underinsured and within 300% of the federal poverty guideline.

The new clinic not only has newer equipment but is also 4,000 square feet larger than the recently closed clinic in Green Cove Springs.

"I think for everybody, it's just a big fresh start here," said Medical Director Dr. Harry Madhanagopal, D.O. "We're excited about all the community involvement that was involved in making this building happen, and I think for a lot of our patients, they're very excited just in a new fresh facility as well to new equipment."

The new clinic has a large waiting room, a separate dental section with four bays and a maternity section.

Crowder, the Associate Executive Director who will become the Executive Director on Jan. 1 as Fann transitions into retirement, said The Way is working with JTA and the county on connecting residents in the southern part of the county who have transportation problems to the clinic.

"Getting this clinic open has been good for some parts," she said. "As far as Green Cove Springs (and Keystone Heights), they didn't want to see us go. We had a lot of clients who were in the Orange Park area as well as in Middleburg, so for them, it's a little bit of a shorter commute. But as Dr. Harry and a lot of the other administrators have mentioned, we're trying to find a way to get our patients from Green Cove Springs as well as Keystone Heights to the clinic. We're

Don Fann to retire from The Way Free Medical Clinic

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – As The Way Free Medical Clinic now accepts patients at its new clinic at 302 College Dr., Executive Director Don Fann decided it was time to retire.

The Board of Directors quickly moved to promote Associate Executive Director Andrea Crowder to replace him, effective on Jan. 1. Fann will remain with the nonprofit that provides free medical and dental services to residents to improve the overall health of



Andrea Crowder

those who are within 300% of the federal poverty guideline that are uninsured or underinsured into the spring during the transition period as the Interim Development Director until one is hired.

Andrea Crowder has more than 20 years of experience in healthcare and has been serving as Associate Executive Director for The Way for the past two years, running the clinic operation in Green Cove Springs while Fann managed The Way's new clinic facility project on College Drive. "I can't think of a better person than Andrea to replace me. She is well-loved by the community and will make a great leader for the organization," Fann said.

During Fann's tenure at The Way, he has overseen a major expansion of the clinic's resources and programming and successfully established its new permanent home on College Drive.

"I leave The Way with a good feeling in my heart—this has been the best work experience in my entire career," he said.

The Way was originally at 479 Hous-

ton St. in Green Cove Springs, but a surprising gift by Karen King of an expanded lot and building allowed Fann to start planning a move.

It took more than four years and \$2.6 million to complete the mission, but The Way closed its 3,300-square-foot building in Green Cove Springs the last week of November and opened its new 7,300-square-foot clinic a few days later.

"Clay County is such a unique community," Crowder said. "You put an ask out, and someone is there to answer it. I truly enjoyed this community. Since I moved here from South Florida, there's no looking back.

"While they were working on the building, Don, I and (Board Member) Bob Olson would come here every week just to see the construction. It was unbelievable during the last two years, especially after the walls went up. We knew it would be larger than the other clinic, but when you saw it, it was amazing."

looking into some options."

Fann said he will remain with the clinic as the interim development director until someone is hired in the spring. The work will undoubtedly continue.

"The new clinic is an amazing facility," Fann said. "It is a real testament to the community and their support of The Way and its mission. It's a beautiful environment for our patients who deserve to be treated in a pleasant environment and to receive the healthcare they need."



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Rockin' for Stockins' welcomes 22 new Rising Stars

Children treated to toys, music, Santa at annual Christmas event

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Every time Paul Wane shared the magic of giving a child a new musical instrument Sunday, he followed the gesture with the same welcoming words:

“Welcome to the family.”

Becoming a “Rising Star” as part of his Guitar for Kids nonprofit is a lifetime distinction. It makes a child different than any other, Wane said, because it allows for self-expression without limits, apologies or explanations.

“Don’t let anyone tell you you’re not playing it, right,” Wane told new Rising Star, Reid, after giving him a new guitar. “They don’t hear what you hear. You understand? You play your song. Okay? Love this. You go have fun. Go out and rock. Welcome to the family.”

The Rising Stars: Guitars for Kids program welcomed 22 more young musicians into its inner circle Sunday. In the past five years, Paul, Lisa and guitar builder Jay Murphy of Keystone Heights have gifted nearly



Reid promised he would take Paul Wane’s words to heart and make his music his own.

500 instruments to children and adults with challenges throughout Northeast Florida and Southeast Georgia to give them a platform to showcase their talents and bring their dreams to reality.

One of the highlights was a performance by the Shopping Mall Guerillas, a four-member band of Keystone Heights students. Many of the members started as Rising Stars.



Gavin became a Rising Star and got an Danelectro guitar from Paul Wane at Sunday’s Rockin’ for Stockins’.

“The thing I want is to get kids off the couch, to put the computer games down and get off the computer,” Wane said. “I want to give kids a better option to some of the bad choices they face.”

Wane and wife Lisa Yarbrough hosted their fourth annual Rockin’ for Stockins’



PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Hannah got a special pink guitar when she joined the Rising Star family Sunday.

Sunday at The Boogerville Hideout to expand their Rising Star family, hand out instruments and toys to children ahead of Christmas and thank the community for another year of support.

Every child received a bag of toys, each

SEE STAR, 9

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Star from page 8

containing a harmonica and ukulele. They were also treated to a photo with Santa, games, and an opportunity to build crafts at Santa's workshop, play in bounce houses, enjoy a free meal, win toys in raffles and have their faces painted. Some went home with bigger toys, like bicycles, in blind drawings.

"It's all about kids having something to unwrap on Christmas morning and making new musicians," Wane said.

Wane said a woman from St. Augustine donated 32 classic guitars her late husband collected. Some of those were passed along to new Rising Stars on Sunday.

"We gave out 17 of those guitars," he said. One of them went to Gavin.

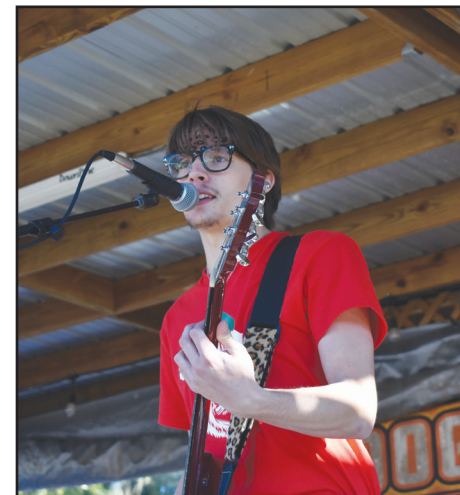
"Gavin, he likes rock and roll, but he likes a little flat-picking," Wane said. "He likes to play little bluegrass. He likes to have a good time and play all kinds of music. When I opened this case and saw this guitar that Miss Loretta donated out of St Augustine, I thought there's got to be a special young person for this one.

"Stevie Ray Vaughn carried three Stratocasters and one Danelectro as a backup. It was his weapon of choice. Guess what's in this bag, dude? This is the real deal. That guitar will play as dirty and ugly as you want, and it'll clean up and play as nice as Chet Atkins could ever ask you to. It is a fantastic instrument. "You take good care of it, you write your songs, you play the way you hear it. You don't let anybody tell you you're not playing right. Okay?"

"Welcome to the family."



Molly's Christmas wish came true when she got a complete drum set from Paul Wane's Rising Star: Guitars for Kids program.



Henry Carter of Shopping Mall Guerillas is a Rising Star who is now the lead singer and guitar player for the up-and-coming band.

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Help the Whos, stop the Grinch!

Locked In Escape Rooms opens all-new Grinch-themed mystery

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

MIDDLEBURG - Mystery solvers can help defeat the Grinch this Christmas in a re-themed local escape room.

'The Grinch... Mean and Green' is Locked in Escape Rooms' newest family-friendly challenge, packing in a series of puzzles and riddles into a 60-minute experience.

The adventure begins with a team of four to nine players traveling to Whoville on "Whoville Air." Using strategy, players are tasked with cleaning up the town that the Grinch has once again destroyed and piecing together clues to bring cheer back to the Whos in time for their Whobilation.

Keeping the county's Christmas spirit bright, owners John and Marcia Nicholls said the retheme was a no-brainer.

"[The] Grinch seems to be popular," John said. "It's one of our favorites. And, we absolutely love Christmas, we know other people do."

For larger groups, there is also an additional room that players will be able to test their escape skills in—the Grinch's lair. But, regardless of party size, all players will get a whole experience and grand finale.

SEE GRINCH, 11



STAFF PHOTO BY KYLA WOODARD
 Players travel to Whoville to clean up the town that the Grinch has again destroyed.



STAFF PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

John Nicholls, along with his wife Marcia, are the owners of Locked in Escape Rooms, located in the Silo Shoppes. Together, they said they have completed almost 400 escape games on all seven continents. The game will run until the end of January.



For larger groups, players will also be able to test their escape skills in the Grinch's lair.

They said the room, which has been officially open since Dec. 1, has received positive reactions, with about 30 bookings already in January.

The overlay will replace one of their most popular escape rooms, Flight 220, which will return in March. Locked In also hosts two other escape rooms: an Indiana Jones-style 'Tomb of Treasures' and 'Swallowed...A Pirate's Tail.'

The Grinch...Mean and Green will be offered until the end of January. Bookings are every two hours and cost \$35 a player.

To book a room or learn more information, visit lockedinflorida.com or call (904) 874-9697.

Grinch

from page 10

"We'll make sure that at the end, whether they solved everything or not, they still get the same grand finale ending," John said.

The Nicholls have owned Locked In in the Silo Shoppes since 2017, which was one of the first of its kind in Clay County. They said they've been designing this particular game from scratch for about a year, crafting storylines and outlining the scenery. They began building it around six months ago.

"We have ideas, we go in, we start mas-saging it, changing it, building it as we go," John said. "And then we come back and if something's not working we take it out."

John said it's all to make sure participants can play the best version of the game.

Escape room adventures have continued to be a passion of theirs. The pair said they've completed almost 400 escape games on all seven continents together. Since they know a thing or two about these jarring mind puzzles, they said they wanted to give others the same experiences.

"Our biggest thrill is just when people leave and they're saying, 'That was so much fun' or 'We had such a great time,'" Marcia said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAY COUNTY

From left, Kip Deckerhoff, VP, Patient Care Services, Baptist Medical Center Clay, Dawn Osterling, Director, Women's Services, Baptist Clay, Mary Canfield, Director, Clay County Public Library System, Brandy Black, Project Manager, Clay Library System, Jacquelin Carlton, Director, Carlton Foundation for Kids, Mia Torres, Certified Nursing Assistant NICU, Baptist Clay and Ed Hubel, Hospital President, Baptist Clay receive the first 50 books from the Clay County Public Library System to be delivered at the hospital's Labor and Delivery Unit.

County's libraries to donate books to Baptist Clay's Labor/Delivery Unit

FLEMING ISLAND – The Clay County Public Library System is working with community partners to distribute more than 500 books to families at Baptist Medical Center Clay's Labor and Delivery Unit.

It's all part of the Baby Bookworms program, which encourages early childhood reading in infants, toddlers and their caregivers by providing them with a children's book.

According to the Department of Education, the more children read and are read to, the greater their vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and overall academic success will be.

Baptist Clay will receive 507 books in total, each delivered in a goodie bag.

Families will receive a copy of "Goodnight Moon," a children's bedtime story by Margaret Wise Brown. Put together by our library staff each goodie bag contains a bib, a bookmark, a library card holder and brochures with information on activities that families can do at the library.

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96 Florida Youth ChalleNGe Academy cadets graduate from Phase 1

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – When 96 graduates received their Phase 1 diplomas from the Florida Youth ChalleNGe Academy Tuesday at the Thrasher-Horne Center, it only marked the beginning of their journey.

The program, supported by the Florida National Guard, Clay County District Schools, Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Children and Families, is a fast-track option for 16-to-18-year-olds who have dropped out or have extremely poor attendance records. It offers mentorship and training to help them turn their lives around.

The Class of 47 took that rigorous challenge. In the process, they learned the value of hard work, leadership, self-discipline,



Florida Youth ChalleNGe Academy Valedictorian Annabel Lindsey was emotional after delivering her brief, yet powerful, remarks to her classmates.

STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE



The drill team provided a flawless 10-minute routine to open the ceremony.

The program takes 17½ months, with the final 5½ as a residential cadet at Camp Blanding, which closely resembles military boot camp.

Tuesday's ceremony included a presentation from the academy's drill team and introductions by Platoon 1 Archers, Platoon 2 Spartans and Platoon 3 Guardians. It also recognized Valedictorian Annabel Lindsey,

Salutatorian Stefani Gallmon, \$5,000 scholarship winners Mia Hoyos and Christopher Burris, and \$1,000 scholarship winners Summer Zorger and Kyla Kelley. Mia Hoyos (Most Improved), Jermelle Curtis (Physical Fitness), Leilani Arias (Service to the Community), Kenneth Butler (Life Skills) and Jeremy Perez (Post Residential Action Plan) won special awards.

respect, moral and ethical standards and military customs to advance to the second phase of the program—the credit recovery program and their high school diplomas.

Enjoy the enchanting holiday experience at OP Mall

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – As if 112 retail stores and services weren't enough at the busy Orange Park Mall, A Night of Wonders will offer an enchanting holiday experience every Thursday through Sunday until Dec. 29 in the mall's parking lot near JCPenney.

According to event founder Matthew Mitchell: "Everyone is invited to immerse themselves in midway rides, an ice-skating rink, Santa's train, cozy igloos available for rent, appearances by Mrs. Claus and other holiday characters, live reindeer encounters, children-friendly activities, games, food trucks and festive holiday music to keep the spirit bright from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m."

Mitchell and his family organized a street festival in the Orange Park South neighborhood three years ago. Residents on Apopka Drive decorated their houses and yards and



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Event founder Matthew Mitchell and Orange Park Mall General Manager Randy Bowman are eager to welcome everyone to this year's A Night of Wonders.

invited people to see the festive decorations. Mitchell realized the popularity demanded a bigger venue.

He moved to Elrod Acres in Green Cove Springs, which attracted thousands of visitors with its farm-like setting. This year, A Night of Wonders will focus on Christmas and carnival rides.

"We change it to bring something new for our guests and attendees to experience," Mitchell said. "You know, we always want to provide an experience of change, so it's not the same thing every single year, and we make sure that when you do change it up, we get it right."

In addition to the Thursday through Sunday schedule, there will be additional sessions on Monday, Dec. 16, Tuesday, Dec. 17, Wednesday, Dec. 18, and Monday, Dec. 23.

SEE HOLIDAY, 19

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Community Briefs

Work to widen County Road 220 to start next week

For Clay Today

MIDDLEBURG—Lane widening and reconstruction on County Road 220 from Hollars Place west of Henley Road to Knight Boxx Road will start next week. The entire project is expected to take 16 months to complete.

Work will begin during the week of Dec. 16 and will include improvements at Ride-out Ferry Road. Drivers can expect detours that will continue for the duration of the project. All businesses and residents will have full access to their properties. The county worked closely with emergency responders and the school district throughout the planning process.

C.R. will be widened to four lanes from Hollars Place to Chief Ridaught Trail, including intersection improvements at C.R. 220 and Henley Road. Due to construction phasing, lane closures will occur daily.

Also, C.R. 220 will be widened to four lanes from Chief Ridaught Trail to Knight Boxx Road, including a new four-lane bridge over Little Black Creek with signal updates at Knight Boxx Road and Blanding Boulevard to ease traffic congestion.

Tickets available at 2024 prices for 2025 THE PLAYERS Championship

PONTE VEERA BEACH – Tickets for THE PLAYERS Championship, the PGA TOUR's flagship event, are now available. Tournament officials are excited to announce that ticket prices at launch will remain unchanged for the 2025 event, highlighting the tournament's commitment to keeping the event accessible to the Northeast Florida community.

A wide selection of ticket options allows local fans and visitors to experience Northeast Florida's premier sporting event. With tickets dynamically priced based on demand, fans are encouraged to purchase early to secure the best rates and avoid missing out on the action, as last year's event saw a sellout on select days.

THE PLAYERS is set for March 11-16, and fans are encouraged to secure their tickets early to lock in the best rates. Tickets are available now at THEPLAYERS.com/tickets, with prices starting as low as \$30 plus taxes and fees. Fans can purchase up

to six tickets a day for each account.

THE PLAYERS Championship continues to offer a family-friendly youth ticket policy. Up to two children 15 and younger can attend for free with a ticketed adult all week long.

Military and veteran ticket packages will return for THE PLAYERS Championship, offering complimentary and dis-

counted admission for service members and veterans. Parking passes for the PLAYERS Championship must be purchased online in advance. A separate parking pass is required for each day of the tournament. Parking passes will be digital; no parking will be sold on-site. For more details and to purchase parking passes, visit THEPLAYERS.com/parking.



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Holiday gift giving ideas

Six unique and affordable gift ideas for this Christmas season

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY - Secret Santa, White Elephant, Christmas Day. There are plenty of opportunities to give out the best presents this year.

If you're unsure what to gift, here are six affordable and unique options currently on the market.



Bamboo Charcuterie Board Set

1 Perfect for charcuterie lovers, this affordable set comes with a 22.8 x 11.4 magnetic folding cheese board, cheese knives and a sauce bowl. A total cost of \$29.98

Candle Warmer Lamp

2 This gift provides a safe way to enjoy your candles without open flame, smoke, soot or pollution. Clean and efficient, the electric warmer melts the candle and wax from the top down and has dimmer control. Perfect for bedroom decor, living rooms and even yoga rooms. A total cost of \$36.99.



Rechargeable Electric Wine Gift Set

3 A unique gift for those who love to 'wine down', this 4-in-1 set comes with an electric wine bottle opener, automatic aerator, reusable vacuum stopper and a foil cutter—a total cost of \$39.49.

Storm Glass Weather Predictor

4 This unique gift is perfect for those who like to keep up with seasonal weather patterns. The glass barometer is a functional weather forecaster and a decorative item. As the weather



changes, so do the patterns in the bottle. The gift comes in three different sizes: the small costs \$24.99, the medium \$36.99, the large \$29.99 and the extra large \$36.99.



Tabletop Fire Pit

5 The kit comes with a four-pound fire pit, three extendable roasting sticks, and a bamboo serving board for indoor and outdoor use. Flames reach eight to 12 inches high and are ignited with bioethanol fuel or isopropyl alcohol—a total cost of \$39.99.



Movie Night Popcorn Kernels and Seasoning Kit

6 Popcorn and a movie have never looked so flavorful! This kit, by Urban Accents, comes with three non-GMO kernels- fluffy white gold, crunchy ruby red and sweet tricolor blend. It also comes with various seasonings- Buttery Caramel Corn, Spicy Chili Lime, Cheezy White Cheddar, Sizzlin' Spicy Sriracha and Sweet and Salty Kettle Corn—a total cost of \$22.



North Florida Land Trust celebrates 25th anniversary

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Smith Lake Preserve was the perfect setting for its recent 25th-anniversary celebration of the North Florida Land Trust. Nearly 100 friends, partners and donors joined NFLT staff and board members at the flagship property, part of the Gold Head Branch State Park. Everyone enjoyed guided property tours

on the Hixon Buggy, had an opportunity to “meet” our new firetruck, Lola D, a custom-built, large-capacity firetruck gifted to NFLT by the Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund, enjoyed music by the Remedy Tree, ate barbeque and took self-guided hikes of the property.



THE PLAYERS opens auditions for National Anthem performers

For The Herald

PONTE VEDRA BEACH – THE PLAYERS Championship is once again inviting the talented individuals and groups of Northeast Florida to audition for the honor of performing the National Anthem at the annual Military Appreciation Ceremony and Concert on Tuesday, March 11.

In its continued commitment to inclusion, THE PLAYERS is now accepting applications for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to sign the National Anthem during the ceremony.

“We’re excited to invite local talent to be part of this special ceremony as we honor the brave men and women who serve our country. The Military Appreciation Ceremony is one of the most meaningful traditions of THE PLAYERS Championship. Having a community performer deliver the National Anthem adds a unique and personal touch to this powerful moment,” said Lee Smith, Executive Director of THE PLAYERS Championship. “It’s a way for us to bring together the spirit of service and the heart of Northeast Florida as we celebrate the dedication and sacrifice of our military.”

Local soloists and groups of all ages are encouraged to submit a video of their rendition of the National Anthem by 5 p.m. on Jan. 15.

A panel of judges will review submissions, and selected performers will be notified via email. Any questions regarding the application process should be directed to mirandarossum@pgatourhq.com.

To apply, visit theplayers.com/anthem.



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'Occupancy 250: Fans, Bands and Fried Chicken'

Orange Park High alumni celebrate the Einstein A Go-Go era with new book

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

JACKSONVILLE - The year is 1985.

The world has been introduced to its first mobile phone. Coca-Cola has just announced its new formula. "Back to the Future" is released in theaters and is set to become the year's highest-grossing film.

And, a little closer to home, Jacksonville Beach has become a new breeding ground for punk rockers and alternative music lovers alike. Einstein A Go-Go has opened its doors on North 1st Street and will change the lives of local youth all over the city.

The new dance club, open to all ages, was a place for a new wave of music. Emerging acts like Nirvana, The Cranberries, Living Colour and the Red Hot Chili Peppers took the stage to headline what was known as an "alternative music revolution."

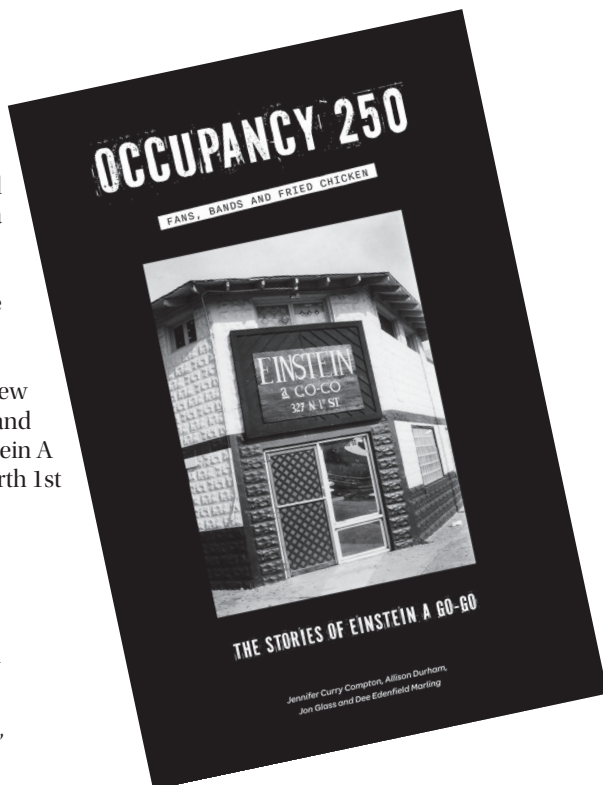
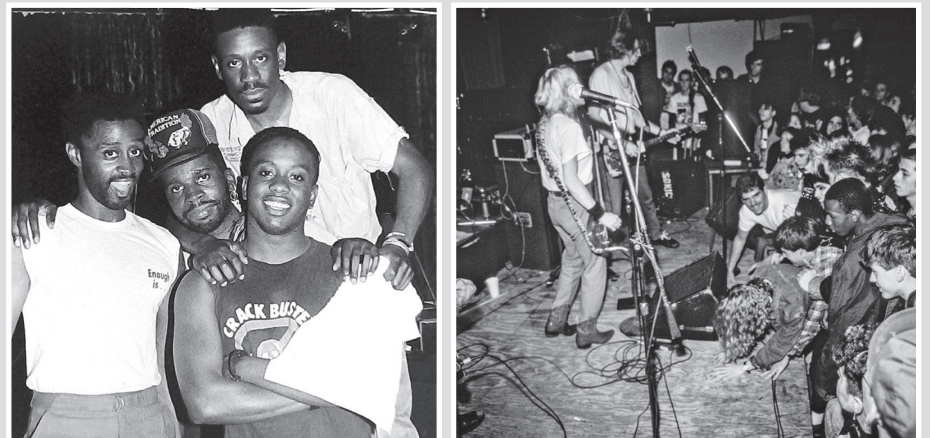


PHOTO BY ALLISON DURHAM/EAGG PRESS

Left: Lead singer of rock band Jane's Addiction Perry Farrell. Center: Hope Nicholls, lead singer of alternative band Fetchin Bones. Right: Sisters Terri and Tammie Faircloth owned the nightclub with their parents from 1985 to 1997.



Left: Living Colour was a rock band that performed at Einstein A Go-Go. Sonic Youth was another rock band that performed at Einstein A Go-Go.

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It was a time that Dee Edenfield Marling, Jon Glass and Jennifer Curry Compton remember fondly. And, together, they're reminiscing about it in their new book, "Occupancy 250: Fans, Bands and Fried Chicken- The Stories of Einstein A Go-Go."

"It was a home away from home where we could go, and it was safe," Marling said. "We could just be ourselves and find a family."

The book includes exclusive interviews with musical artists and past Go-Go clubbers, along with mementos and memories, to examine the cherished venue and its impact on local rockers.

The book also features rarely seen "pre-digital era" photos of the club in action, taken by photographer Allison Durham.

As Orange Park High alumni Marling, Glass and Compton said, they graced the club almost every night in their concert tees, vintage button-ups, black eyeliner, hair dye and denim.

"There was nothing like it over in Orange Park at that time," Glass said. "And, so, it felt

worth the drive. We'd all get together and make that trip, a 45-minute trek."

It was owned by the Faircloth family and had a capacity of just 250 people. The club was filled with young people of all genders, races, and backgrounds who shared one thing in common—their love of music.

Marling said no alcohol was permitted, but you could smoke to your heart's desire, dress up and mingle with the musical artists. Band members could even eat some of the best-fried chicken cooked by Bill Faircloth himself.

When she first moved to Orange Park, Marling said it was a whole new world from life in California. In listening to many radio stations, such as Rock 105 and the Big Ape, she said there were very few, if any, that played alternative music.

But Einstein A Go-Go gave her so much more.

"It was a place for me to go," Marling said. "I was a little rebel. I ran away from home and often found myself at Einstein listening to bands."

They said the live bands changed the way

they viewed music as a whole, as a different type of sound and experience that filled the airwaves.

"We had no idea at the time what these bands might go on to do," Compton said. "It was so low-key where we saw them. We were enjoying ourselves, and we were kids."

Compton remembered a special moment with the North Carolina band, The Connells. She snapped pictures of the band with a disc camera, capturing moments she would never forget.

"The singer saw me, and while he wasn't singing, he took the camera from me, made us pose, me and my friends, at the front of the stage, and took our photo. We were so excited," Compton said. "And it turned out great, and it's in the book."

Glass said the club fueled his passion for live music. As a journalist, interacting with the bands gave him an outlet for his artistic side and inspiration for his next story.

"The chance to meet bands that I appreciated and loved listening to and getting their autograph and all that stuff. It was



Left: Dolores O'Riordan, the lead singer of The Cranberries. Sonic Youth was another rock band that performed at Einstein A Go-Go.



Occupancy

from page 18

special for a young music fan like me," Glass said. The three clubbers said that although they all fell into their own circle of friends, hanging out with each other at the club is a memory they will never forget.

"You didn't feel weird because weird was kind of the norm," Compton said. "So, I got more confident and met many more people. I feel like it fostered an artistic sensibility for me."

What was once Einstein A Go-Go eventually became the local bar, The Shim Sham

Room, which is now permanently closed. The group said they've heard ideas of a possible demolition.

"We think the building will not be around for that much longer," Glass said.

All the more reason to keep the club's legacy alive. They hope the book continues to do that in every way possible.

"I think it's a vital record of everything that happened," Compton said. "We're losing people every year. So, having these things in print, where future generations, the Einsteiners' kids, can see what it was. It's a story that needed to be told."

To order a copy and learn more about the book, visit Occupancy250.com.



Holiday

from page 14

"When you bring in major pieces, like what we brought in for this year's event, at the end of the day, it always makes it worth it when you see the families coming through and enjoying that," Mitchell said.

Mitchell said there are different nightly themes and entertainment lineups. For a list of nightly themes, visit anightofwonders.org/events.

"I wouldn't say it's difficult to pull all that together," he said. "It is time-consuming. There are some days that you're not going

to get it right, and there are some days that you know you're going to get it right, but it's important to be able to pivot to the next day or the next time and make sure you have enough activities."

Mitchell said his family has always enjoyed Christmas time. He loved it when a community joined to share joy, laughter and happiness, especially those struggling. A smaller act, like decorating his house, grew into decorating a street. That evolved into creating a three-night Christmas village at Elrod Acres, and now it's a month-long Christmas Carnival.

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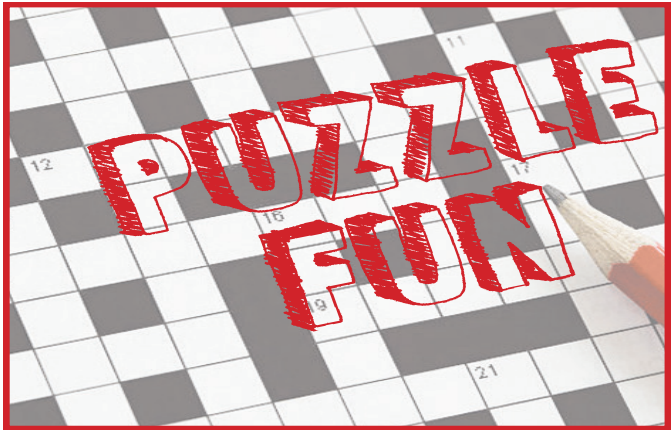
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			2	6		3	7	8
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9	6				8	7		
		3					2	
2			6	3				

Level: Beginner



CLAY TODAY ARCHIVES

Twisted Oaks Rescue founder Jessie Shekels said her nonprofit will close in 2025 because she has to focus on surgery and treatment for a severe neck and back injury.

Twisted Oaks Rescue to close

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Twisted Oaks Rescue founder Jessie Shekels decided to close her pet food distribution and wellness clinic next year because she needs surgery and treatment for a severe neck and back injury.

According to a Facebook post, the pantry is full and cannot accept any more pet food donations.

The organization also posted:

“Thank you all for your support over the last five years! As a team, we made a huge difference in the lives of local pet families. We are forever grateful for the opportunity to serve our lake area pet community!”

CRYPTO FUN

Solve the code to discover words related to cold and flu. Each number corresponds to cooking. (Hint: 6 = E)

A. 5 25 8 10 10 20 6 5
Clue: Runny nose

B. 10 6 7 6 17
Clue: Elevated temperature

C. 24 9 11 6 5
Clue: Body soreness

D. 14 24 20 24 8 5 6
Clue: Unwell

Answers: A. sniffles B. fever C. aches D. malaise

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to cold and flu.

VSEIRSU

Answer: Viruses

GUESS WHO?

I am a comedic actor born in Canada on December 17, 1946. In high school I used humorous campaign posters to win the student council race. I've worked alongside fellow Canadians and am known for my thick eyebrows and glasses. My most iconic role was as an awkward dad in a movie about teenagers and virginity.

Answer: Eugene Levy

UNDER THE WEATHER WORD SEARCH

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

WORDS

- ARTHRITIS
- BACTERIA
- COMMON COLD
- COVID
- DISEASE
- E-COLI
- FUNGAL
- HEPATITIS
- HOOKWORMS
- ILLNESS
- INFECTIOUS
- INFLUENZA
- MIGRAINE
- PAIN
- PARASITE
- PERTUSSIS
- SALMONELLA
- STOMACH BUG
- STREP THROAT
- THRUSH
- TOXOPLASMOSIS
- TRANSMISSIBLE
- TUBERCULOSIS
- VIRUS



8	3	5	7	9	6	4	1	2
6	7	2	8	4	1	5	9	3
1	9	4	3	5	2	8	6	7
5	1	9	2	6	4	3	7	8
3	2	8	5	1	7	6	4	9
7	4	6	9	8	3	2	5	1
9	6	1	4	2	8	7	3	5
4	8	3	1	7	5	9	2	6
2	5	7	6	3	9	1	8	4

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Clay County alumni playing in upcoming college bowls

Kendy Charles in TaxSlayer Bowl

JACKSONVILLE — TaxSlayer Gator Bowl Chairman Andy King and the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl Board of Trustees announced today that Duke will play #14 Ole Miss in the 80th TaxSlayer Gator Bowl on Thursday, Jan. 2.

On the Duke University defense is former Orange Park High School All State Defensive end Kendy Charles, who played four years at Liberty University and will finish his college career as a Duke Blue Devil.

"Kendy's been a great addition to our defense," said Duke head football coach Manny Diaz, in a zoom press conference call on Tuesday, December 10 with Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin. "We were very inexperienced at defensive tackle and, in our scheme, defensive tackle is where it all begins. We felt Kendy had all the tools of being a disruptive force when he got here."

Charles, in 37 career games, (21 starts), has compiled 108 tackles, 22.5 TFL, 13.5 sacks, six QB pressures, one PBU, one fumble recovery and one caused fumble. Charles has registered 3+ tackles on 19 occasions and 5+ tackles 10 times. Charles posted a career-high eight tackles against BYU in 2022, while earning a career-best 3.0



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DUKE ATHLETICS
Former Orange Park High all state Kendy Charles, left, and above No. 91, gets one more chance to play in front of his hometown crowd as Duke will visit TaxSlayer Gator Bowl against Ole Miss in Jacksonville Jaguars Stadium on Thursday, Jan. 2.

TFL and 3.0 sacks against Old Dominion in 2021.

Diaz, who coached Oakleaf High grad Shaquille Quarterman while at University of

Miami, noted Charles' immense athleticism gives him an edge as a big man in the middle of a defense.

"Against the run; twitchy, good with

movement skills and Kendy has enough juice that he could affect the quarterback," said Diaz. "It's been fun watching him get more and more comfortable all year and his reward is being able to play a major bowl game close to home. I've seen a few great players from the Jacksonville area."

In his career, Charles has played in four bowl games (2020 Cure, 2021 LendingTree, 2022 RoofClaim.com Boca Raton, and 2023 VRBO Fiesta).

The 80th TaxSlayer Gator Bowl will be the first ever meeting between these two teams. This will be the first appearance in the Bowl by Duke who finished 9-3 and coming off five consecutive Bowl wins. Over the past three years, Duke has finished 26-12. In its 79-game history, the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl has hosted Ole Miss three times including one of the most iconic games in bowl history. In January 1971, Ole Miss met Auburn in Jacksonville for the 26th Gator Bowl featuring Heisman runner up and Ole Miss icon Archie Manning in a full arm cast.

"It's a tremendous honor to host the 80th annual TaxSlayer Gator Bowl. As the 6th oldest bowl game in the nation, writing the 80th chapter of this iconic game carries a lot of pride for our membership and our community," said Andy King. "The

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Former Oakleaf High offensive tackle and shot put state champion Jalen Rivers will be part of University of Miami football team playing in Orlando's Camping Bowl Stadium against Iowa State in the Pop Tarts Bowl on Dec. 28.



Ridgeview quarterback Tyler Huff got a Conference USA title and MVP award last week and will be in Orlando to play in the Cure Bowl against Mid-American Conference Champion Ohio University on Dec. 20.

Bowls

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opportunity to host two top-tier teams in Duke vs Ole Miss as well as their players, coaches and fans to our city for a great week of activities celebrating both programs' successful seasons."

The 80th Annual TaxSlayer Gator Bowl will be played on Thursday, Jan. 2 at 7:30 p.m. on Bill Gay Grounds at EverBank Stadium in Jacksonville, Fla., and will be nationally televised on ESPN.

Tickets and Bowl information are available online at www.taxslayergatorbowl.com.

OHS Rivers; Miami, to face Iowa State in Pop-Tarts Bowl

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — The Miami Hurricanes football program announced Sunday that it has accepted a bid to the 2024 Pop-Tarts Bowl.

Miami will take on Iowa State at Camping World Stadium in Orlando, Fla. on Dec. 28. The game will be broadcast at 3:30 p.m. on ABC.

"We are excited to accept an invitation

to the 2024 Pop-Tarts Bowl," Vice President/Director of Athletics Dan Radakovich said. "Florida Citrus Sports is an outstanding host and always puts on a terrific show. I know our student-athletes and fans will enjoy their bowl experience in Orlando."

On the field for Miami will be Oakleaf High School fifth-year redshirt junior player Jalen Rivers, a starting offensive tackle. Rivers, a 6'-5", 325-pound player, is a 2023 All-ACC second-team selection for his position and was named to the Outland Trophy Watch List in July.

In 2024, Miami's offense accumulated 2148 yards rushing and 4311 yards passing with 66TDs behind an offensive line bolstered by Rivers.

Miami, with a 10-2 season record with two losses; to Georgia Tech 28-23, and Syracuse 42-38 sandwiched around a win over Wake Forest 42-14, is set to play in its 46th bowl game in school history. The Hurricanes own a 20-25 record in its previous postseason contests.

The 2024 Pop-Tarts Bowl will mark the first-ever meeting between Miami and Iowa State on the gridiron.

The Hurricanes are making their fifth bowl appearance in Orlando since 2009. Most recently, Miami faced Oklahoma State

in the 2020 Cheez-It Bowl at Camping World Stadium.

RHS Huff comes back to Florida for Cure Bowl in Orlando

ORLANDO—The Jacksonville State University Gamecocks football team, fresh off its first Conference USA championship game last week, will be heading to Camping World Stadium in Orlando, Fla. for the 10th Annual StaffDNA Cure Bowl, accepting the invitation to play Mid-American Conference champion Ohio on Friday, Dec. 20 at noon.

Leading the Gamecocks at quarterback is former Ridgeview High standout Tyler Huff.

Jax State is making its second appearance in a bowl game in its second season as a member of the FBS.

On Friday, December 6, the Gamecocks clinched its first Conference USA championship in its first year eligible for the game with a win at home over Western Kentucky 52-12. The Gamecocks will enter the contest with a 9-4 record.

The Gamecocks (9-4), beaten by the Hill-toppers just six days earlier, jumped out to a 14-3 lead in the opening quarter and kept

their foot on the gas the rest of the night.

Huff accounted for three touchdowns and Tre Stewart continued to etch his name in Jax State's record book with three more rushing TDs, giving him 23 on the year.

Huff's 167 yards on the ground established a CUSA Championship Game record for rushing yards by a quarterback. He was selected as Championship Game Most Valuable Player by the media.

Huff was a dual threat all night, completing 11-of-15 passes for 176 yards with touchdown throws to Sean Brown and Cam Vaughn.

"I'm proud of our players and coaches for earning a spot in a great bowl game in a great venue," said Jax State Football Coach Rich Rodriguez. "We're very excited about the opportunity to showcase Jax State football in front of a national audience at the Cure Bowl."

This is just the second time in the 10-year history of the Cure Bowl that two conference champions will go head-to-head. The Bobcats defeated Miami (Ohio) in the MAC Championship just before the announcement of the game was made and are 10-3 this season.

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