

Kat Cammack Defends Women's Sports



Washington, D.C. — Congresswoman Kat Cammack (R-FL) joined House Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R-MN) at a women's leadership luncheon on Capitol Hill to reaffirm her unwavering commitment to protecting women's sports and ensuring fairness, safety, and equal opportunity for female athletes.

During the event, Rep. Cammack shared the resistance she faced when raising the issue of protecting women's sports while serving as chair of the bipartisan Women's Caucus.

"In the final minutes of a meeting to determine the initiatives we would champion, I suggested we take a position on

protecting women's sports," Cammack said. "What followed was immediate pushback and accusations simply for raising the issue. That moment made it clear to me that we could not stay silent."

Following that experience, Rep. Cammack founded the Republican Women's Caucus to ensure women have a dedicated platform to defend their rights and preserve the integrity of women's athletics.

The luncheon featured female athletes who have directly experienced competing against male athletes in girls' sports, including Payton McNabb, a former high school volleyball player who suffered a

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Best of the Best Medical Team

By TomL

I would like to tell you about an amazing medical team. But the story must start back a few weeks before in the Shands medical emergency room Ocala Fl.. My wife fell and hit her head on the corner molding opening her head up quit a bit it took nine staples to close her up. We took her to the Shan's emergency room in Ocala located I-75 and SR 27, nice clean looking facility no waiting quick service. After closing the wound. They had to check to see if she had internal damage, she did not but "oh no" there a mass (tumor) in her head, The doctors were surprised. They recommended we take her to a neurosurgeon with urgency.

I'm a newspaper guy so I know a little bit about research. My research told me the best

neurosurgeon was Doctor Jacob Freeman, he is one of the few that does this kind of surgery. He is very busy and was kind hard to access. His staff was on it. When I told the Surgical Nurse I was afraid my wife was on her way out and she needed his help. That was New Year's Eve, he said go to the HCA emergency room now, he will call ahead and after checking her they would give her a room and begin testing. Three days of testing they had scheduled her surgery for the next week. Surgery date was approved. While talking to Doctor Freeman he said he has been working with an ear nose and throat specialist a Doctor Jose L. Ziron Jr. MD so we were waiting to see if he could assist. Next day they scheduled the operation.

We showed up at the hospital at 5:30 AM

Modern Day True Grit

By TomL

Is it a Bird? Is it a Plane? NO it's Superman! Oops NO! wrong hero! One of my favorite hero's was John Wayne and the character parts he played. But remind yourself it was make believe. He was always the hero and the last movie I remember watching. At the end there was big open field and the gang of bad guys were calling him out he got on his horse Duke, and hollered "Fill your hands you SOB,s!" took the reins in his teeth, he roared against the whole gang of bad guys guns blazing guns one in each hand. Remember that was make believe!

Fast forward to modern day hero which this is not make believe, I bring you Donald J. Trump. Is he a bully maybe? Does he do what he says he is going to do, probably? Remember Trump is always setting someone up to negotiate. Did it work? Most of the time. I did not like the words "We are going to take Greenland!" As you can see we did not, but we did get a sweet deal and that was what he wanted in the beginning. But saying we are going to take them over bothered me. The people in Greenland are living a quiet life not bothering anyone but quietly the Russians and Chinese are trying to take control of them. We need it for defensive reasons to for us to build "The Big Beautiful Golden Dome" we want it to protect ourselves and everyone else on the other side of Greenland from Chinese and Russian missiles. With the Dome we would have a chance to shoot them down.

So just remember when he says something he is negotiating with someone. Is Donald Trump doing what he said he was going to do almost? I live in Florida and have paid as low as \$2.46 for gas not \$4.00 so that is going down, I am on a medication that my co-pay was \$524 per year, It is now it is ZERO. The price of egg went back down. General grocerys need work but if you give him time and the Republicans can keep control. You will see growth like we have ever imagine. I will keep fighting for him. I'm in my 80's but as long as I have the energy and my four digital monthly newspapers, I will fight for him. When did I decide he was one of the greats. It is hard to say but when he got shot in the ear that was not make believe, it was the real thing. When he raised his fist while bleeding he said FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT, I can't get that out of my brain.

Our politicians are causing this. They lost power and they put Trump on the center of the target! He has had every obstacle throw at him that they could make up can lie about,

and they started preparing her for the operation. The ear nose and throat specialist Doctor Ziron started by opening a passageway for Doctor Freeman to do the tumor surgery. He went in through the Nasal



Fight Fight Fight!

make up story, Impeach him? Now we are finding some of the reasons why. They are stealing the American Tax payers money. I don't have to tell you everything they have but this I know 'THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES HAS GRIT! He is my modern day John. Wayne. There are people in history that left their mark. His mark is the biggest ever made. He is the BEST OF THE BEST! If he can stay alive he will be recognize of the greatest. One of our most renowned historian Newt Gingrich who, served as speaker of the house is known as the most significant Historian ever known rates Trump in the top three. He is afraid to make him number one. I'm not he is the greatest president I have ever known.

If the opposite party had not weaponize the top Government Law enforcement Agency's to lie and make up untrue stories we would be a lot further with our wealth and the Left would not had stole so much of the tax payers money and given it to the enemy.

Maybe Obama and our great Doctor Fauci would have been stopped. Then to make it worse Fauci was honored and Biden issued a pardon. Hopefully that might change. Their actions Killed millions!

I would never believe that we are living in such a corrupt country. I wrote about how the money was going to the Wuhan lab through a religious group. They tried to shame me! That is when I became a Republican during Obama's time. My father raised us to be Democrats and he said they were for the working man and they were. Not any more, they are stealing and mismanaging our tax money by giving it to the enemy! I had been watching and disagreeing with Obama but Wuhan Lab receiving our money was just not right!

What say you? tloruy@att.net

passage with a camera and surgical tools and took out the tumor. He explained later, he took most of the tumor it was benign, it was attached at a bad place. He settled for him

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CEP CHAMBER NEWS

BEYOND NETWORKING:

By Tom James

'We All Have Hidden Potential'

Mireyli Hernandez, Ameris Bank

Merriam-Webster describes art as “a personal, unanalyzable creative power” and “the faculty of executing well what one has devised.”

Art comes in an infinite number of forms, as Mireyli Hernandez proves.

“My artistic inspiration,” she says. “comes to life through welded metal art.”

A vice president and business banker with Ameris Bank, Mireyli describes using Fluxcore welding—a welding process using a continuously fed tubular electrode popular for its simplicity—to transform scrap metal into unique sculptures, most often working with stainless steel.

“I love incorporating materials like bearings, sprockets, bicycle chains, and everyday utensils—forks, spoons, and butter knives. Most of these pieces come from friends and others who pass along their leftover metal because they know I enjoy creating with it.”

So how exactly did the creative bug steer Mireyli in the direction of such a unique passion?

“I had been searching for a hobby that would allow me to be creative, find joy, and freely express my emotions. One day, while scrolling through social media, I came across events in other states where artistic welders were competing and crafting incredible pieces from scrap metal. I was instantly captivated, especially when I realized how few women were represented in this field. I thought, 'I can do that!' But then came the question: Where do I learn?”

Mireyli discovered Voyam Fine Arts in Ocala, owned by talented artist Carmen Rojas. On top of being an artist, Rojas is a certified welder.

“I signed up for one of her full-day workshops, and by the following week I had purchased all my welding gear and set up a small shop at home,” describes Mireyli. “The more I practiced, the more fascinated I became—and the more inspired I felt to create.”

Her first piece was made purely for her own enjoyment, but after sharing it on Facebook, people began reaching out, asking to buy her work.

“Now I'm not only creating for personal satisfaction; I'm making pieces that others want to display in their homes and offices.”

Inevitably, Mireyli has some entertaining stories to tell about reactions to her hobby.

“One of my neighbors builds fences, and I'd see him driving up and down my road almost every weekend. He'd slow down, glance over, then keep going—until one day he finally stopped. I happened to be in the middle of welding, fully suited up from head to toe (basically looking like a yellow penguin), helmet, gloves, and all.

“When he walked up,” she continues, “I lifted my hood and his reaction had me laughing for hours. His eyes flew wide open as he blurted out, 'Oh my God, it's a woman!' I just smiled and said, 'Yes, women can weld.' He told me he'd been so curious because he saw me out there every weekend but never knew who was behind the mask.”

Mireyli decided to take the humor and run with it.

Continued page 3

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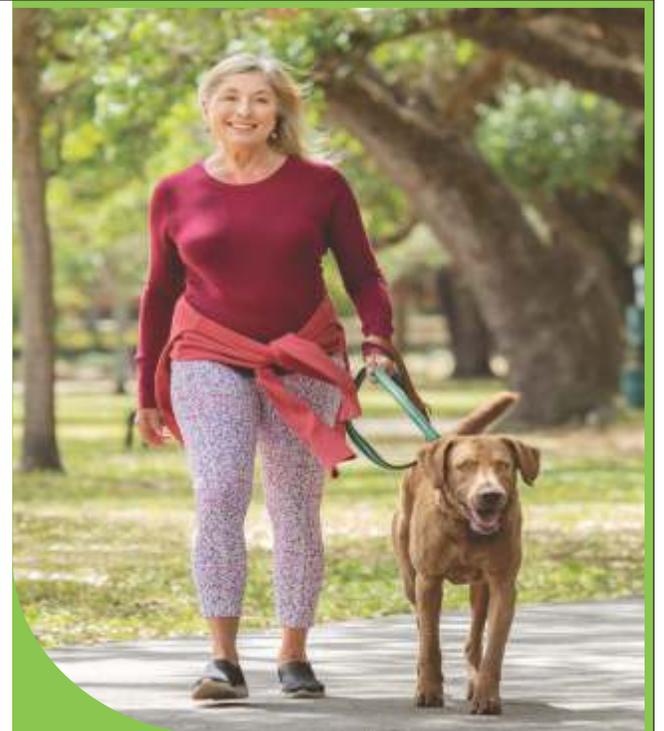
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Best of the Best

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taking approximately 90% of the tumor to avoid damaging a very tricky area where it was attached.

We are blessed, my wife said we had three the best of the best in the operating room the two specialists and the Lord. She was never afraid! We had hundreds or maybe thousands of people praying for her and the surgeon's skills. Lady Lake Chamber sent a best wishes with 40 signatures on it. The business club that I am president of, all members wished her well. I believe GOD was holding her hand but the next sign was two days in ICU and two days in a regular room and home to the recliner! She was instructed to do nothing, especially don't sneeze. Then I needed God holding my hand! Ha, just kidding. Her sinuses

were packed. Using a walker for a few days she was walking again in two days, now it is therapy twice a week and is doing everything the therapist says. Two weeks she is walking better without assistance of a walker, telling this story at press time my wife is seeing better she is threading the needle on her sewing machine, the tumor was putting pressure on her optics. She is sleeping better at night! She remembers everything and is doing most of what she did five years ago. Someone said her falling was an act of GOD and her healing is an act of top notch neurosurgeon Doctor Jacob Freeman and Ear/nose & throat doctor Jose L. Ziron who said, she was an assume patient and not to forget the great hospital care at HCA, they were caring for her when she needed it and the Nurse from Doctor Freemans Office.

A few years back I had a not so good experience at this hospital in the emergency

room area, I was kept overnight, it was a difficult problem. I checked myself out the next day but there curtaining was no sign of that now. I recommend HCA based on my wife's experience.

While researching I met two ladies separately that had surgery done by Freeman, I met another lady who had worked for Dr Freeman for nine years, she said he is the best, then our graphic artist had tumors removed by Dr Freeman, then I was talking to a person on the phone that is a surgical nurse, she said she has works with Dr Freeman some times and he is the best. Wow talk about a sign and checking the internet finalized it. Their credentials were limitless. I think they are THE BEST of the BEST and they bring the Lord with them!

"I endorse this doctor team and HCA Hospital"

Tom Loury said that Thank you All!

Kat Cammack

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severe concussion, brain bleed, and permanent whiplash in 2022 after being struck in the face by a male athlete competing on a girls' team.

"All of this could have been avoided," McNabb said. "My life changed completely in an instant. I lost my ability to play the sport I loved and had to fight through months of recovery and academic challenges."

Rep. Cammack emphasized that stories like McNabb's underscore the real-world consequences of policies that ignore biological differences in athletics.

"This is not about exclusion. It is about protection," Cammack said. "Women's sports were created to ensure equal opportunity and fair competition. We have a responsibility to safeguard that legacy for the next generation."

Rep. Cammack will continue working with House leadership, including Majority Whip Emmer, to advance legislation that protects women's sports, preserves competitive fairness, and prioritizes the safety of female athletes nationwide.

CEP

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"After that, I decided to add some personality to my welding helmet with a few fun stickers. My favorite one reads: 'I'm the welder, not the welder's wife.'"

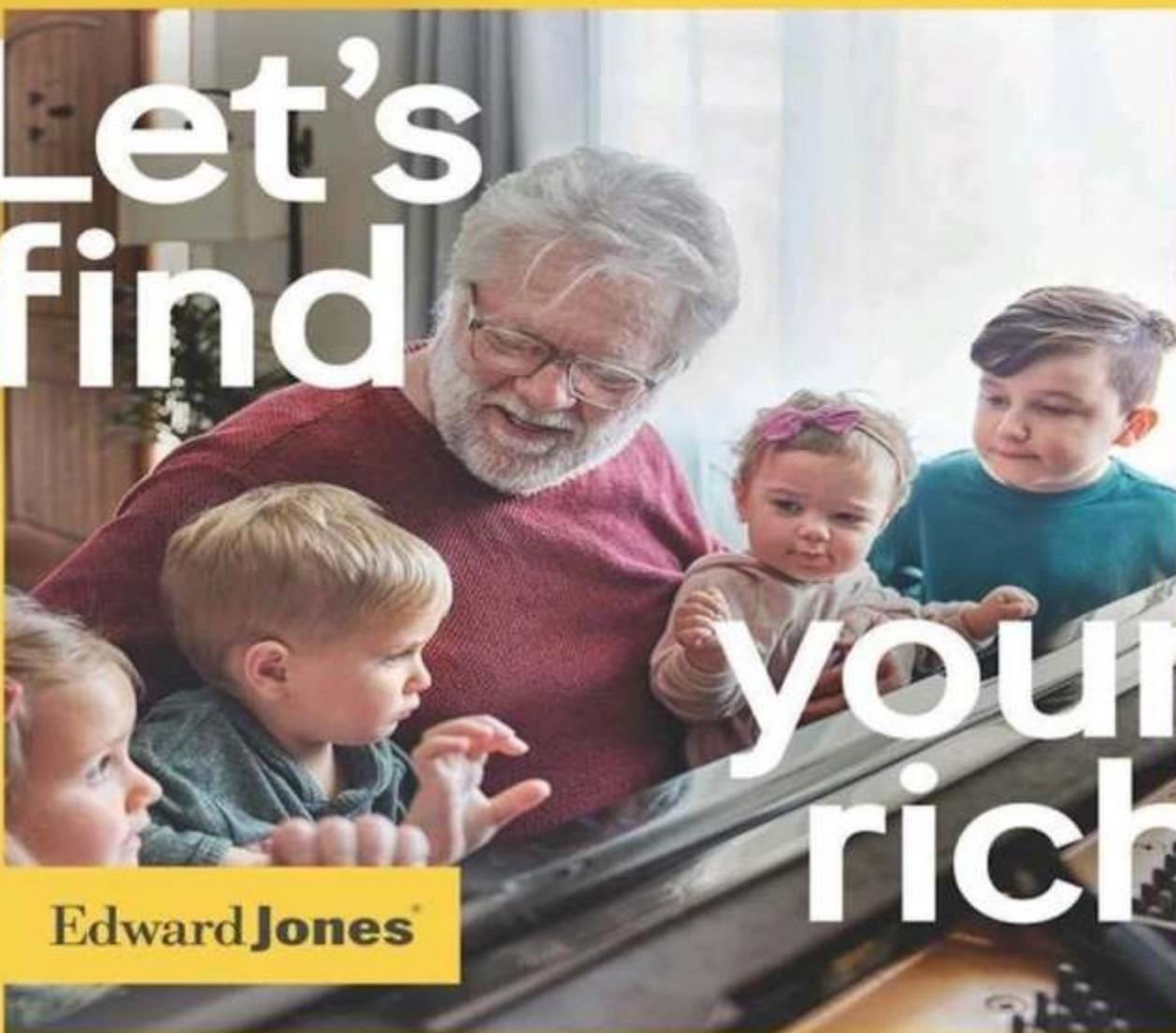
Working as a business banker, Mireyli helps business owners reach their goals, specializing in commercial credit. But when the weekend hits, welding takes center stage.

"Just for fun, I told my husband I was going to give myself an artistic nickname: The Welding Banker. It's a perfect balance for me—calculating numbers in my head during the week and releasing my emotions during the weekend. I breathe freedom—of course with a filter mask to ensure I don't get metal in my lungs.

"I've learned through this passion that whatever I'm feeling can be poured directly into a sculpture or art piece," she concludes. "The emotions we experience as humans are universal—shared by many of us, though felt with different intensity depending on what life brings our way. Through art, we can release that overflow and transform it into something meaningful and unique. We all have hidden potential and we often have more than one special gift in life."

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Tom Loury Tom Loury Long time member of CEP/Ocala Chamber of Commerce, Past President of the Ocala Business Leaders and current member, Co-Founder and past President of Select Business Associates, Past President of the Lady Lake Chamber and current member. If you want to make contact with the newspaper / Tom Loury email tloury@att.net

PUBLISHER'S NOTES



If anyone is a Hall of Famer it is Bill Belichick. He is the winningest coach of all times, with 8 Super Bowl. Tom Brady and fans are very upset. They are demanding consideration or overturning their

Our world is filling with hate and it seems to be coming from the same place.

Tom Brady said it was completely ridiculous! Donald Trump voiced outrage. I don't think anything will come good from this and it will hurt the game! But while I am at it TV is hurting it. We use to be able to see football on regular channels without paying extra. Most people are not watching because they don't want to pay extra! They could double the audience by putting it on regular TV. Football is our national sport and making us pay extra for it is like asking us to pay to fill out a political poll. It is unAmerican! Everything is about money. 800,000 voter were clean off the list making that many fewer opportunities for voter fraud...

Speaking of illegal acts!

By the way I have been harassed by telephone foreign solicitors. Probably 5 years now, ten times a day at least. I ask them many many times over the years. Last week this guy says hi I'm Mack from XYZ

decision to SNUB him. It is strictly politics. It is done by secret vote. A new stadium has tens of millions invested could be at stake. Some say Belichick might turn down the offer if it's made next year. A SNUB FOR A SNUB! Maybe they need to over hall the Hall of Fame if the best does not win? They need to have transparency on who voted for who. There is 50 members voting takes 80% of the vote, now everyone acts shocked. I think the decision should take a revote and over turned. There is to much to lose over stupid politics! All this is over a first pick that was adjudicated years ago!

pharmacy selling EYZ drugs, I said I have been asking you guys for years to take me off your call list, He called me an MF'er and hung up.

Ten minutes later I got another call from the same company, so I said one of your people cursed me and called me an MF'er he said and I quote "That is because you did not buy anything from him!" An hour later a woman called me selling the same thing. I explained that I would never buy anything from them one of your caller cursed me and used language that is probably against the law.

When you call the number back it is not a working number which means they are stealing access to the phone system. As sophisticated as our systems are why can't they stop this? Attorney General Uthmeier or Governor DeSantis or Kat Cammack can you please look at this outrageous illegal act and misuse of cell phones? "The Save America Act!"

When the announcement came out about "The Save America Act!" 70 some politicians are co-sponsoring it. I always thought co-sponsors were a couple of reps, but now it means many. Thinking back I wonder how many times I heard the term I am open of the co-sponsors.

Speaking of illegal acts!

800,000 unqualified voters were clean off the voting list making it fewer opportunities

for voter fraud...which means that Judicial Watch lawsuits brought under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) have now been responsible for removing 5.8 million invalid names from voter rolls nationwide. WOW!

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tomlpublishing.com then click on back-issues



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Newspaper Deadlines

Editorial & Ad Copy for April

Seniors Voice & Ocala DownTown

Noon, March 20th

Lady Lake Magazine & Village Spectator

12am, March 25th

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CHAIR CHAT

BY BRIGGITTE SMITH

Dear Board Member

Subject: Promises Made / Promises Broken

The school board made a commitment to the Marion County citizens that it would conduct a national search to fill the leadership role of School Superintendent. This commitment was discarded, as honestly noted with concern by Board member Cummings during the Dec 18th Board meeting.

First – We have no malice or adverse position against Dr Brewer; however, we do object to circumventing the promised process to nationally seek and evaluate all qualified candidates. The MCREC supports selecting the best leader to improve the lagging academic performance of this school district. We request the continued evaluation of the current leadership while conducting the national search process. This approach accomplishes two complementary goals;

a) assessing on-going student performance / improvement, and

b) completing a competitive leadership search to sustain long-term improvement.

The Dec 18th announcement to short-circuit the comparative / competitive process, immediately followed an overview of recent PM2 test score data, as well as anecdotal comments by the Board. The test scores review just prior to the “Superintendent decision,” appears to be part of the rationale to discard the promised “national search” process. As noted below, the recent test scores indicate county-wide there is a significant segment of students that are still lagging in essential skills.

2025 PM2 Test Data - County-wide Grades 3 to 8 scores indicate: 60% of students did not meet criteria for reading, and 70% did not meet criteria for math

A further review overview of select data indicates:

PM2 2024 vs 2025 Language Arts Test Scores

Language Arts - The 3rd, 4th and 10th grade individual schools language / reading scores were evaluated using a paired t-test ($\alpha = 0.05$ / 95% 2-tail confidence interval) – this simple analysis indicates there is no

statistical improvement in student performance.

As an example; for 3rd grade - 17 out of 31 schools scored below 31% proficiency; therefore, more than 70% of third grade students in these schools are lagging in reading / language skills. This is very problematic since third grade performance is cited by experts as a predictor of future success.

Subject: Promises Made / Promises Broken (page 2 of 2)

Math – 3rd, 4th and 5th grades 2024 vs 2025 data (same statistical methodology as above)

Grade 3 - statistical improvement although the 2025 PM2 county-wide average is below 25%, therefore, 75% of students are not demonstrating on grade math skills.

Grade 4 -no statistical change, scores indicate 24 schools scored < 20% proficiency, therefore, ~80% of students at these schools are below math criteria.

Grade 5 - data indicate a statistical improvement; however, 15 schools scored < 25% proficiency; that is 15 schools with ~75% of students below criteria

Overall, the test scores reflect a school system that continues to struggle to educate students to achieve basic skills needed for future success.

Promise Made / Promise Broken – Given the sustained lagging performance of Marion County Schools a rigorous competitive recruitment for Superintendent should be a key driver. If at the end of this competitive process Dr Brewer is selected, this would further validate her for the position; the decision to short-cut a competitive selection in essence undercuts her credibility.

Comments were made by Board members about the subjective feeling of “comfort and familiarity,” this is not a rigorous metric. In fact, some level of discomfort often drives change that could lead to greater academic success. Yes, there are schools / students excelling and achieving solid academic results; however, the data indicates an overall (county-wide) lack of academic excellence.

Our Ask:

As an organization the MCREC supports the Board's work to improve our schools, however, we respectfully request the Board revisit the matter to continue the competitive

recruitment process for a new superintendent as publicly promised. At this point there is no dramatic improvement in test scores to warrant or justify a decision change at this time.

Again, promises made / should be promises kept!

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Marion County Republican Executive Committee, please feel free to contact us if there are any questions.

Len MRacioppi, V. Chair MCREC
Brigitte Smith, Chair MCREC

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It is my Great Honor to endorse America First Patriot, John E. Sununu, who is running to represent the beautiful State of New Hampshire in the U.S. Senate.

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The Great Tornado Drill

Seminole County, FL (February 3, 2026) — Seminole County's Office of Emergency Management invited community members to practice their tornado action plan during 'The Great Tornado Drill' on Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

Some community members participated as a business, school, faith-based organization, or family unit. Participants should discuss how they would receive a tornado warning alert and practice taking shelter in the most secure interior room at work or home.

The Seminole County Office of Emergency Management and the National Weather Service in Melbourne partnered to

develop The Great Tornado Drill in 2015. Since then, the State of Florida adopted the event, with all 67 counties participating annually during Florida Severe Weather Awareness Week.

Therapeutic Riding

How Horses Help Heal: The Power of Therapeutic Riding

By Stirrups 'n Strides Therapeutic Riding Center, Inc.

At Stirrups 'n Strides, we see something truly special happen every day — moments of courage, joy, and transformation that begin the moment a rider meets a horse. But what exactly is therapeutic riding, and how

do horses help people heal?

What Is Therapeutic Riding?

Therapeutic riding is a program that uses horseback riding to improve physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Under the guidance of certified instructors and trained volunteers, riders with a wide range of abilities and challenges learn to ride, build strength, and gain confidence — all while forming a unique bond with their horse.

The natural movement of a horse closely mirrors the human walking gait. As a horse walks, the rider's body moves in a rhythmic, three-dimensional pattern that improves balance, posture, coordination, and muscle tone. For many riders, this is more than just exercise — it's the first time their body moves with such symmetry and freedom.

Healing Beyond the Saddle

Therapeutic riding is about much more

than physical progress. Horses have an incredible ability to connect with people on an emotional level. They sense energy, mirror feelings, and respond with honesty and calmness — offering riders a sense of trust, comfort, and acceptance that words can't describe.

For some, the barn becomes a place of peace and belonging. Riders learn patience, responsibility, and teamwork while caring for and communicating with their horse. The simple act of grooming, leading, or sitting quietly beside a horse can reduce anxiety, build self-esteem, and create a sense of accomplishment.

The Team That Makes It Possible

Each lesson at Stirrups 'n Strides is made possible by a dedicated team — our instructors, volunteers, and, of course, our amazing horses. Together, they create a safe and supportive environment where riders of all ages and abilities can grow at their own pace.

Whether it's a child taking their first independent ride, a veteran regaining confidence, or an adult finding joy after hardship, every moment in the arena tells a story of hope.

Join the Journey

Therapeutic riding changes lives — for riders, families, volunteers, and everyone who witnesses the power of these horses.

If you'd like to be part of the magic, Stirrups 'n Strides is always looking for volunteers, sponsors, and community supporters. No horse experience is needed — just a kind heart and willingness to learn.

Stirrups 'n Strides Therapeutic Riding Center, Inc.

4246 W Hwy 318, Citra, FL 32113

Contact: Brandi Lashinski 352-286-2519 or Betty Gray 352-427-3569

Ocala Skate Park

Ocala Skate Park Expansion Grand Opening with Rodney Mullen

Date: 03/28/2026 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Location: Ocala Skate Park, 517 NE 9 St., Ocala, Florida 34470

Join Ocala Recreation and Parks in partnership with The Boardr as we celebrate the completion of the Ocala Skate Park expansion!

This FREE, family-friendly event will feature: Live Music; Food Trucks; Trick Competitions; Prizes & Giveaways

Special Guest: Skateboarding legend Rodney Mullen will speak during the ribbon-cutting ceremony and participate in meet-and-greet opportunities.

About Rodney Mullen: Widely regarded as one of the most influential skateboarders in history, Mullen invented foundational tricks like the kickflip, heelflip, and 360 flip. He's a Skateboarding Hall of Fame member and has appeared in skate films and video games, inspiring generations worldwide.

About the Park: The newly expanded Ocala Skate Park now includes additional street and bowl features, improving flow, increasing competition capacity, and creating new opportunities for community programming and regional skate events.

After the grand opening, head to the Marion Theatre for a FREE screening of:

Bones Brigade: An Autobiography 6 - 9 p.m.

Q&A with Rodney Mullen from 6:30 - 7 p.m.

Continued page 8

Ocala Fire Ground Breaking

Ocala Fire Rescue Holds Official Groundbreaking for Station #8

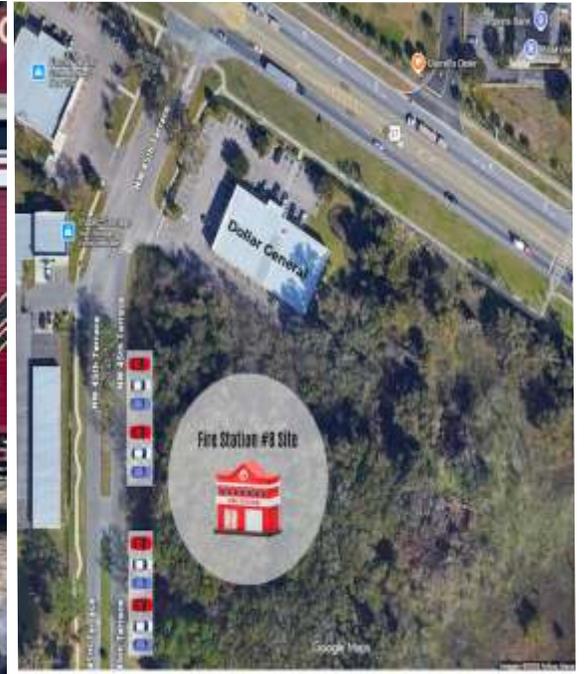
(OCALA, FL.) Feb. 19, 2026 – This morning, Ocala Fire Rescue (OFR) held the official groundbreaking ceremony for Station #8, a new facility designed to enhance emergency response in Ocala's growing northwest corridor. City leaders, council members, CEP representatives, and senatorial aides joined the celebration.

The station's location was strategically chosen for its accessibility to I-75 via US 27 and SR 40 via NW 44th Avenue, ensuring faster response times for residents and businesses in the area. City Manager Pete Lee highlighted the significance of the project, noting that the groundbreaking "represents our continued commitment to public safety and responsible growth. As Ocala expands, emergency services must expand with it. Seconds matter."

Council President Ire Bethea emphasized the community impact, stating that "growth is a sign of a thriving community, but it comes with responsibility. Station 8 ensures residents have the protection and rapid response they deserve. Public safety is foundational."

Station #8 will strengthen OFR's emergency network with three apparatus bays, an engine and rescue unit, and 15 additional personnel. The project is expected to be completed by late 2026.

This groundbreaking is more than turning dirt—it is a promise to protect Ocala today and prepare for tomorrow. As Chief Welborn



FAIRTax



The Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) is an agency within the Executive Office of the President that provides objective economic analysis and advice on both domestic and international policy. The CEA is considered one of the most prestigious appointments an economist can receive and is often viewed as the “pinnacle” career. Unlike other government agencies that are often led by political operatives, the CEA is almost exclusively staffed by top-tier academic economists including several Nobel Prize winners. This is why reports issued by the CEA are taken seriously by both politicians and economists.

The January 2026 report by the CEA is labeled “The Economic Impact of State Income Tax Elimination” and their Executive Summary states:

- * Income taxes are more economically damaging than sales or property taxes;
- * The harmful economic effects of state income taxes include outmigration, brain drain, stifled innovation and entrepreneurship, and reduced GDP;
- * The harmful fiscal effects of state income taxes include revenue volatility with

“feast and famine” cycles, with states often gaining little or no new revenue from income tax hikes because of the negative economic effects they unleash. Key findings from CEA’s analysis of state income tax phase-out include:

- * A 1 to 1.6 percent increase in the level of GDP for the average state;
- * A 16 to 19 percent increase in new startups for the average state;
- * A \$4,000 increase in the average wage;
- * A significant influx of new high-income taxpayers;
- * An average state sales tax of under 8 percent under full revenue replacement with no limits on spending growth;
- * An average state tax rate of 6.2 percent under a scenario with spending growth limits.

The remainder of this CEA report discusses extensively each of these points. While the economists who have done studies for the FAIRtax have pointed out many of these points, it is great to see a group as prestigious as the CEA make a compelling case for the elimination of state income taxes and replacing them with consumption taxes. This CEA report is an indicator that serious people are paying attention to what is a growing movement among states for eliminating their state income tax.

What is missing from this analysis is the effect of a family consumption allowance (FCA), the prebate. The FCA allows purchases up to the poverty level to be not subject to the state sales tax.

Alabama and Georgia are contemplating passing a state version of the FAIRtax. One

of the reasons that the plans are gaining favorable attention from both sides of the aisle is the inclusion of the FCA ensuring that people in the lower income levels are not adversely affected.

The momentum is growing. As of now Mississippi, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Iowa and Georgia have passed legislation targeting the full elimination of the state income tax. Other states are moving to greatly reduce or eliminate their state income tax.

The other thing that is not directly considered by the CEA report is the effect that the repeal of the federal income/payroll tax system and replacement by a consumption tax, like the FAIRtax, will have on the U.S. If elimination of the state income tax has these benefits, the benefits on the national level will be even more pronounced than at the state level.

The FAIRtax is the answer.

For more information, please go to FAIRtax.org

Skate Park

Continued from page 6

This documentary chronicles the rise of the legendary Bones Brigade skateboarding team, featuring Rodney Mullen and other icons who shaped modern skateboarding. (Film is rated PG)

For more information, visit www.ocalafl.gov/skatepark.

Ocala Events

First Friday Art Walk

The First Friday Art Walk takes place the first Friday of each month, October through May from 6 to 9 p.m. First Friday Art Walk is a free event located within Ocala’s historic downtown. Event festivities include over 30 artist displays, monthly live entertainment, free family art activities provided by local arts organizations and extended shopping hours. The public is invited to enjoy an evening of art, live performances, and downtown shops and restaurants.

Soggy Doggy Swim

Date: 03/21/2026 9:30 AM - 3:00 PM
Location: Jervey Gantt Recreation Complex
2200 SE 36 Ave, Ocala, Florida 34470

Discovery Fest & Duck Derby

Date: 03/21/2026 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Location: Tuscawilla
800 NE Sanchez Ave., Ocala, Florida 34470



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OCALA DOWNTOWN MARKET

Join us at the Ocala Downtown Market (ODM) to purchase a diverse array of products from farmers, artisans, craftspeople, food trucks! A true destination location, ODM is set just blocks off the Ocala Downtown square, in a beautiful open-air Market Pavilion. Besides permanent roof cover the facility it also has large overhead fans, restrooms, a nearby ATM, and water fountains. The Market Pavilion is also available for rental.



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WEBSITE AT HABITATOCALA.ORG



Love is just a leash away!!

The HSMC is here for you and the animals who depend on us. We wanted to share that we will continue to be here to help unwanted pets during this pandemic while following all Marion County and Florida state guidelines.

As this situation is constantly changing, we ask that you continue to visit our Shelter using the safety guidelines in place.

How can you help?

Pet Food Bank: Help stock our Pet Food Bank with pet food and supplies for people who cannot afford them due to job loss or other reasons. You can also bring donations to our Shelter daily from 10-6. Masks required please! If you need help keeping your pet with you during this time, our Happy Paws food program is here for you.

Volunteer: A small number of volunteers have returned to help in various departments. We are accepting volunteer applications but do not yet know when we will schedule orientations for new volunteers. Please contact us for more information about volunteering. We are currently working on a digital orientation.

Opt to adopt: According to the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, there is no evidence that companion animals such as cats and dogs can spread the virus that causes COVID-19.

Donate: We know there is a lot of uncertainty right now but homeless and unwanted animals still need us. Donate to help the Humane Society of Marion County so we continue our lifesaving work and make them feel safe and loved.



Bilbie

Bilbie is a 14 weeks old male brought to the HSMC with her brother Wombat! We believe they could be Xolaitzcuinli, or Xolo, which is Mexican hairless dog breed.



Fuchala is a 15 week old paralyzed kitten full of love.



Ninja is paralyzed in his hind legs but enjoys runs with his wheels.

Your donations make it possible to provide medical care, food and shelter to animals in need. On behalf of all the animals, thank you for caring.



Humane Society of Marion County
PO Box 1542 Ocala, FL 34478
Mail check or complete the credit/debit card payment form.



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Donations to the Humane Society are tax-deductible. Check with your accountant for more information. No goods or services have been provided to the donor as a result of this gift.

FROM THE DESK OF ATTORNEY GENERAL UTHMEIER



Attorney General James Uthmeier Secures Convictions in Multi-Million-Dollar Organized Retail Theft Scheme

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General James Uthmeier announced that the Office

of Statewide Prosecution secured a conviction for husband-and-wife duo, Robert and Jaclyn Dell, of St. Petersburg, for running an organized retail theft scheme. Robert, a former pastor at The Rock Church in St. Petersburg, and his wife, Jaclyn, operated a 'transformation center' purporting to provide counseling and assistance to individuals recovering from drug addiction.

"These fraudsters hid their true motives behind faith and charity to launder proceeds from a large-scale criminal enterprise," said Attorney General James Uthmeier. "I am grateful to Ag Law Enforcement, FDLE, Chief Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Paul Dontenville, and Assistant Statewide Prosecutors Eric Ross and Gianna Fina for ensuring that justice was served in this case."

"These verdicts show exactly what happens when Florida refuses to be a soft-on-crime state," said Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson. "Our Agricultural Law Enforcement agents were proud to lead the investigation in this case alongside the

Attorney General's Office, FDLE, and Home Depot to dismantle a long-running retail theft ring that victimized businesses across multiple counties. Organized retail crime drives up costs for everyday Floridians and undermines public safety. We will continue to use every tool at our disposal to protect law-abiding families, support our law enforcement, and deliver real results for the people we serve."

"These two criminals were defrauding vulnerable Floridians while pretending to serve our communities," said Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Mark Glass. "I applaud our analysts and partners for uncovering the full scope of their exploitation and helping secure this verdict."

"Today's guilty verdicts are yet another powerful example of Attorney General James Uthmeier's relentless efforts to dismantle organized retail crime for the safety of our stores, our customers and our team members," said Scott Shalley, President and CEO of the Florida Retail Federation. "In collaboration with Agriculture Commissioner Wilton Simpson, FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass, local law enforcement and our retail stores, General Uthmeier has made clear that Florida is a law and order state, where organized retail crime is not tolerated and criminals will be held accountable. With the strongest laws and enforcement in the nation, Florida is a safer place to work and shop."

"At The Home Depot, the safety of our associates is our top priority. We have

implemented comprehensive strategies to protect against organized retail crime (ORC) over the past few years with great success, but it remains at a high across the retail industry," said Scott Glenn, Vice President of Asset Protection at The Home Depot. "We're proud to play a role in the nationwide effort to combat ORC and grateful for the partnership and dedication of Attorney General Uthmeier and local law enforcement in investigating these cases and holding offenders accountable."

Robert and Jaclyn Dell were arrested in August 2023 following a joint investigation by the Office of Statewide Prosecution, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and The Home Depot Asset Protection Team.

Investigators determined that under the guise of counseling and assistance for people recovering from drug addiction, the Dells coordinated a long-running, multi-million-dollar retail theft scheme targeting The Home Depot.

Co-conspirators Jessica Wild and Daniel Mace stole power tools from The Home Depot locations across Citrus, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Sarasota counties. The stolen merchandise was delivered nightly to the Dells' house and then sold online. The scheme generated over \$2 million in illegal proceeds from 2015-2023.

Following a two-week jury trial, Robert was found guilty as charged of RICO, Conspiracy to Commit RICO, Dealing in Stolen Property, and Money Laundering (2 counts). Jaclyn was also found guilty as charged of Conspiracy to Commit RICO. They are facing up to 150 years and 30 years

in the Florida Department of Corrections, respectively.

Sentencing is set for March 13, 2025, in Pinellas County.

Attorney General James Uthmeier Secures 120-Year Prison Sentence for Convicted Human Trafficker

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General James Uthmeier announced that the Office of Statewide Prosecution secured a 120-year prison sentence for Marquett James, 50, of Hillsborough County; the incarceration will be served over 90 years, with some terms running concurrently.

"In a case that the Biden DOJ refused to prosecute, our Office of Statewide Prosecution worked with HSI under the Trump administration to deliver a sentence that ensures this offender will never have the opportunity to exploit another victim," said Attorney General James Uthmeier. "Crimes of this nature cause life-long harm and must be met with punishments that reflect their severity. In Florida, there will be no leniency for sexual predators and human traffickers."

James was convicted in November 2025 on felony charges of Human Trafficking (2 counts), Racketeering, and Conspiracy to Commit Racketeering. He will serve his sentence in the Florida Department of Corrections.

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FROM THE DESK OF

GOVERNOR DESANTIS



Governor Ron DeSantis Announces Another Record-Breaking Year For Florida Tourism: Florida Welcomes 143.3 Million Visitors In 2025

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—

Governor Ron DeSantis announced preliminary estimates from VISIT FLORIDA indicating that Florida welcomed 143.3 million visitors in calendar year 2025: another record-setting performance for the Sunshine State. In the fourth quarter of 2025, an estimated 33.5 million visitors traveled to the state, making it the highest fourth quarter visitation on record.

Preliminary estimates show that domestic travelers accounted for 91.5 percent of all visitors in 2025, with 131.1 million Americans traveling to Florida. Overseas visitation reached 9.3 million, while Canadian visitation totaled 2.9 million, consistent with historical trends where Canadian travel represents approximately two percent of total visitation. Florida also experienced continued growth from key international markets, with strong increases from Latin American countries such as Brazil and Argentina, as well as European markets including the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands. Brazil is now the second-largest international source of visitors to the state. VISIT FLORIDA remains focused on expanding international visitation through strategic marketing efforts.

Florida continues to be the #1 domestic travel destination in the United States and a top choice for international visitors.

“Florida continues to set the standard as the top travel destination in the nation, welcoming millions of visitors while delivering real economic benefits for our residents,” said Governor Ron DeSantis.

“Through strategic investments in infrastructure, public safety, and environmental stewardship, we are ensuring that Florida remains a place where families can vacation with confidence and where our tourism industry can continue to thrive.”

“Florida tourism continues to lead the nation,” said Bryan Griffin, President and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA. “Florida’s tourism success is a result of the people and businesses in our state who offer the world’s greatest vacation experiences, attractions, lodging, and dining options. VISIT FLORIDA is proud to play our part to represent our state and keep our destinations top of mind for travelers in a crowded and dynamic market.”

“As the #1 domestic travel destination, families and vacationers know that Florida has set the gold standard for the tourism industry,” said Secretary J. Alex Kelly, Florida Department of Commerce. “This new milestone is the direct result of strategic investments in our communities that promote job growth, bolster small businesses and fortify infrastructure—cementing Florida’s place as a travel destination, both nationally and internationally. Governor DeSantis has made Florida the premier destination for travelers looking to experience all Florida has to offer.”

Key highlights from VISIT FLORIDA’s fourth quarter and calendar year 2025 preliminary visitation estimates are below. Final figure confirmations are expected as data becomes available throughout the spring.

Q4 2025

• Preliminary estimates indicate that 33.5 million total visitors (in person-trips) traveled to Florida in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2025, a +0.6% increase from Q4 2024 and a record high for a fourth quarter.

• In Q4 2025, Domestic visitation is estimated at 30.31 million, and international visitation is estimated at 3.2 million.

• Domestic visitors accounted for 90.5% of total visitors, while international visitors accounted for 9.5%.

• Total enplanements at 19 Florida airports totaled 27.4 million in Q4 2025, up by +2.8% from Q4 2024.

Calendar Year 2025

• Preliminary estimates indicate that 143.3 million total visitors (in person-trips) traveled to Florida in calendar year (CY) 2025, a +0.2% increase from CY 2024.

• Domestic visitation accounted for 91.5% of total visitation in 2025, up slightly from 91.4% the previous year, while overseas visitation made up 6.5% and Canadian visitation made up 2.0%, in line with historical visitation records.

• Domestic visitation is estimated at 131.1 million in 2025, an increase of +0.3% from 2024. Overseas visitation is estimated at 9.3 million, with Canadian visitation at 2.9 million.

• Florida saw growth across all top 5 overseas origin countries year over year. Brazil grew 10.4% from 2024, Argentina grew 17.8% and Spain entered the top 10 origin countries with 10.4% growth in visitors.

• Preliminary estimates indicate an air/non-air split for domestic visitors of 35.8% / 64.2% in 2025, with a smaller share traveling to Florida by air than in 2024.

Travel trends indicate that finding value shapes the contemporary tourists’ travel choices. According to a recent Marketing Effectiveness Study, travelers to Florida who are aware of VISIT FLORIDA’s marketing efforts express that Florida offers good value for money by an additional 23 points as opposed to those who are not.

Flags at Half-Staff in Honor of Marjory Stoneman Douglas Remembrance Day

On February 14, 2018, the 17 innocent lives of Alyssa Alhadeff, Scott Beigel, Martin Duque Anguiano, Nicholas Dworet, Aaron Feis, Jaime Guttenberg, Christopher Hixon, Luke Hoyer, Cara Loughran, Gina Montalto, Joaquin Oliver, Alaina Petty, Meadow Pollack, Helena Ramsay, Alex Schachter, Carmen Schentrup, and Peter

Wang were taken when a murderer opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Students, teachers, and faculty showed great courage in the face of danger on that fatal day. The sacrifices of these heroes, as well as the brave actions of first responders, will never be forgotten.

In memory of the lives lost at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, I hereby direct the flags of the United States and the State of Florida to be flown at half-staff at all local and state buildings, installations, and grounds throughout the State of Florida from sunrise to sunset on Saturday, February 14, 2026.

Governor Ron DeSantis Appoints Jolene Sheive to the School Board of Osceola County

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Governor Ron DeSantis announced the appointment of Jolene Sheive to the School Board of Osceola County.

Jolene Sheive Sheive is a Broker at Legacy Realty of Central Florida and is the Owner of Stadium Place Administration. Active in her community, she serves as a Planning Commissioner for Osceola County. A resident of Osceola County for over 20 years, Sheive has served as a member of the Osceola County Association of Realtors, the Osceola Chamber of Commerce, and the Osceola County Education Foundation.

Governor Ron DeSantis Appoints Terrance “Blake” Iverson to the Baker County Board of County Commissioners

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Governor Ron DeSantis announced the appointment of Terrance “Blake” Iverson to the Baker County Board of County Commissioners.

Terrance “Blake” Iverson Iverson is the Owner of Hometown Electrical. Active in his community, he currently serves as the President and Pastor for the Firm Foundation Youth Ministry, Inc. Iverson earned his electrician’s certification from the Jacksonville Joint Apprenticeship.

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