A free publication serving the people of the Ocala area

ocala DownTown

Volume 17 Issue 12 December 2026



On Wednesday, November 11, 2026, President Donald Trump marked Veterans Day with a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and remarks at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, joined by First Lady Melania Trump, Vice President JD Vance, and Second Lady Usha Vance..



President Trump paid tribute to service members across 250 years of American history, thanked veterans for defending freedom, and pledged ongoing support for those who served.

My Christmas Story

TomL

My Christmas story…

I tell it every year because it was real!

I was a very little boy playing games out by the rail road tracks. I jump off a hill and landed on a broken beer bottle. I was hurt bad I could see everything inside my ankle bone, I had cut my tendon almost all the way through. The boy that was with me piggy back me to the paved road and there I laid on the ground. Lucky for me the Fire Chief Mr Land lived near by. He jump in his truck loaded me up, wrapped me up and took me home. He could see I was badly hurt bad and there was no transportation.

My parent worked at the Boca Raton hotel about a hour and a half away. My Grand mother was taking care of us sort of. So the chief took me to the nearest clinic in Hollywood Florida about 45 minutes away. They took me right in and started on me. They saved me from being crippled for life. They slowly pulled my tendon into place and put staples in it sewed up my leg and said don't walk on It for eight weeks. It was November near Christmas time. There I was during Christmas break.

I always look forward to the Christmas Parade. We lived the second block from A1A which ran through town of Dania, we lived in a wood frame house with old slide up windows. My brother and sister were allowed to go to the parade But I could not but I could hear the Fire Engine that Santa always road on. I sat in the window and listened very sad. Finally I heard the Fire Truck and I could barely hear the kids cheering.

I thought boy that sounds like fun! Pretty soon the sound got louder and louder and then I could see the flashing lights. Santa and half the kids in town came to my house, Santa got off the Fire Truck came in the house and gave me a candy cane. Patted me on the shoulder and said Merry Christmas and left. I was the happiest little guy in the world at that moment! I never told anyone but Santa did sound a little like the fire chief!

That is not the end of the story some years later when I was a teenager the Fire Chief son Skip swung out on a rope swing and got run over by a boat he was drowning in a canal and I went in and got him he was under water and unconscious, he had swallowed some water but I got him out and he started throwing up and revived! An hour later he was totally OK. I never told the fire Chief!

Just recently Skip found me and called me



"The Presidents's Own" United Staes Marine band is the primary musical ensemble that provides music for the President of the United States and performs at White House events, including ceremonies and concerts honoring veterans.

Holidary Closures

Governor Ron DeSantis Announces Additional State Office Closures for the Holiday Season

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.— Today, Governor Ron DeSantis announced that state offices will be closed on November 25, December 23, December 24, and December 31 in celebration of the holiday season.

"The First Lady and I want to thank Florida's state employees for their hard work and dedication to serving the people of our state," **said Governor Ron DeSantis.** "As we celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas, we hope they have the opportunity to spend quality time with family and loved ones. We wish all state employees a happy, healthy, and blessed holiday season."

These additional closures are in addition to regularly scheduled state holidays on November 26 and 27, December 25, and January 1.



CEP Chamber News

Matt McCormick, IOM, CCE



Downtown Ocala: Building on Our Momentum

By Matt McCormick, President & CEO, Ocala Metro Chamber & Economic Partnership

There's a lot happening in Downtown Ocala, and if you've spent any time around the Square lately, you've likely noticed. From new restaurants and the restoration of historic buildings to investments in hospitality and infrastructure, downtown continues to evolve while maintaining the character that makes it such an important part of our community.

The recent opening of First Avenue Bar & Bistro in the former La Cuisine location is a great example. A familiar downtown space has a new chapter, bringing fresh energy and another dining option to the heart of our city. Just a few blocks away, local developer Bryan Caracciolo is working to restore the historic Lodge building, preserving a piece of Ocala's history while creating an opportunity for something new.

We're also seeing significant investments that will help support downtown's continued growth. The opening of the city's second downtown parking garage provides additional capacity for visitors and businesses, while the planned AC Hotel by Marriott will bring new hospitality opportunities to the area.

Each of these projects tells part of a larger story about the confidence people have in Ocala's future.

At the Ocala Metro Chamber & Economic Partnership, our work centers on three things: attracting new businesses, helping existing businesses grow, and creating opportunities for entrepreneurs. Downtown Ocala reflects all three.

Whether it's a small business owner opening their first storefront, an established business looking to expand, or an investor recognizing the potential of a historic property, each contributes to the strength of our local economy. Through our business services, entrepreneurial resources, networking opportunities, and advocacy efforts, the CEP works to create an environment where businesses of all sizes can succeed.

And while new investment is exciting, supporting the businesses already here is equally important. We know that small business ownership comes with challenges, and a thriving downtown depends on more than new buildings and ribbon cuttings. It depends on customers walking through doors, strong partnerships, and a community committed to supporting local businesses.

As Ocala and Marion County continue to grow, downtown will remain an important part of our identity and our economic future. It's often the first impression visitors have of our community, a gathering place for residents, and a reflection of the entrepreneurial spirit that makes Ocala such a great place to do business.

At the CEP, we're proud to work alongside the business owners, community leaders, and partners who are helping move our community forward. Our role is to support that momentum and help ensure the opportunities created by growth extend throughout Ocala and Marion County.

As we head into the holiday season, I encourage you to spend some time downtown. Visit a favorite restaurant, explore a new business, or do a little holiday shopping with one of our local retailers.

Every investment matters, whether it's a multimillion-dollar development or a purchase from a locally owned business. Together, they're helping write the next chapter of Downtown Ocala.

And from where I sit, there's plenty to look forward to.



Medicare Advantage

True Health Partnership Can Start Here

Talk with a North Orlando area Medicare expert.



Are you new to Medicare or rethinking your options? I'm here to answer your questions. Guide you to the right plan. And support you at every step.

Together, we are so much more.SM

I'm **Christine Calvert**, local Licensed Insurance Agent.

Experience: Specializing in Medicare.

"Going beyond the expected to help you navigate Medicare is what I do."



Questions? Let's talk.
Christine Calvert
352-572-8510 (TTY 711) 5 days a week, 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.
ccalvert@guidedmedicare.com
medicarehealthplus.com

Reminder: You may be eligible to enroll in a Medicare Advantage plan right away if you meet certain criteria, such as moving, retiring, losing coverage and more.

HealthSpring

We do not offer every plan available in your area. Currently we represent 10 organizations which offer 25 products in your area. Please contact Medicare.gov, 1–800–MEDICARE, or your local State Health Insurance Program to get information on all of your options. HealthSpring products and services are provided exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of Health Care Service Corporation, a Mutual Legal Reserve Company. Image(s) may have been created or enhanced using artificial intelligence tools. © 2025 Health Care Service Corporation. All Rights Reserved.
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Todd Belknap

Executive Director of the Veterans Helping Veterans USA



HELPING VETERANS COPE WITH PTSD DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season can intensify Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to sensory overload, family conflicts, disrupted routines, and painful reminders of past loss or trauma.

WHY THE HOLIDAYS TRIGGER PTSD

Sensory Overload: Bright lights, loud music, crowds, and fireworks can spark hypervigilance and panic.

Family Pressures: Gatherings may force contact with toxic relatives or heighten feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Disrupted Routines: Changes in sleep, travel, and eating schedules stress the nervous system.

Anniversary Reactions: The calendar date of a past event or seasonal cues can prompt unexpected emotional responses and flashbacks.

COPING STRATEGIES

Plan Ahead: Develop a "Before, During, and After" strategy for events, including a clear exit plan. Most agree that consciously opting out of traditional events or avoiding specific triggers helps protect emotional well-being.

Set Boundaries: It is okay to politely decline overwhelming invitations, limit alcohol use, and step away for quiet self-checks.

Create New Traditions: Redefine the season in a way that feels safe and comfortable rather than forcing old expectations.

Grounding Techniques: Use deep breathing or sensory exercises (such as the 5-4-3-2-1 method) when feeling overwhelmed.

Have a peaceful and joy-filled Christmas!

Source:

https://news.va.gov/54878/helping-veterans-cope-ptsd-holidays/

Fort King Festival

Saturday, Dec. 5 & Sunday, Dec. 6 | 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. |FREE admission

Experience 1800s Florida at the Festival at Fort King in Ocala.

Step back in time at the Festival at Fort King, a two-day immersive event in Ocala, Florida, celebrating 19th-century life and history. This family-friendly festival features historic-themed crafts, interactive games, hands-on workshops, living history demonstrations, artisan vendors, delicious food and drinks, and much more.

Perfect for history buffs, families, and cultural enthusiasts, the Festival at Fort King offers a unique opportunity to explore Florida's past in a fun and engaging way.

Student Day

This year's festival will feature a students-only day on Friday, Dec. 4. Open to all ages and schools, the Student Day will feature demonstrations, hands-on activities, and unique opportunities to learn about the history of Fort King. Cost is $3 per student, however space is limited and registration is required.

Reenactor & Demonstrator Applications

Interested in being a demonstrator or reenactor for this years' event? Fill out an application online to let us know you are interested. We are always looking for:

- Historic Homesteading Demonstrations
- Historical Reenactments
- Artillery Demonstrations
- Animal Programs
- Fort King Archaeology Talks
- Artist & Author Exhibitions

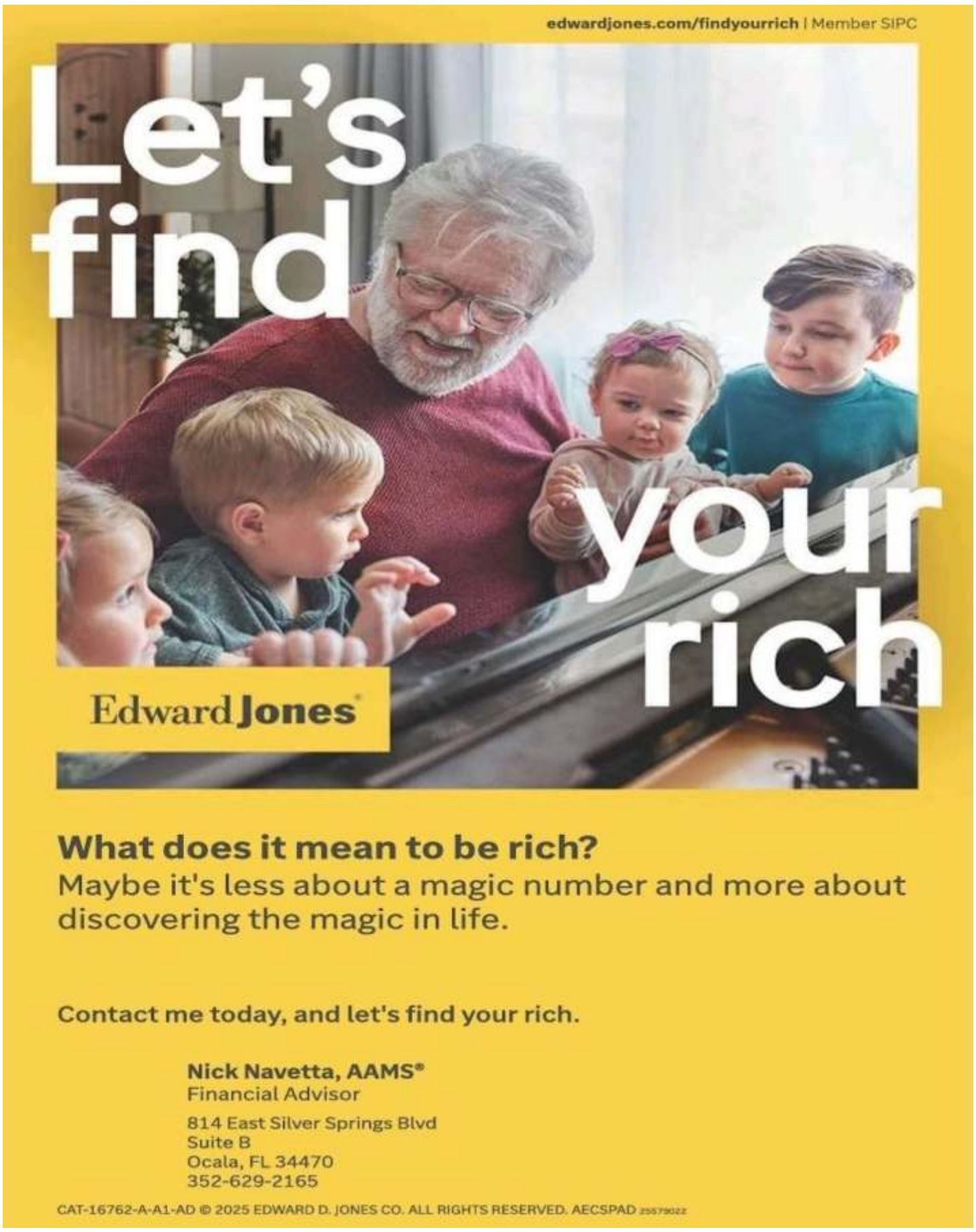
Craft and Food Vendor Applications

Interested in being a craft or food vendor for this years' event? Fill out an application onlineto let us know you are interested. We are always looking for:

- Leather Products
- Time period weaponry, hand forged knives, flint knapped items
- Hand knit/woven items
- Traditional ceramics
- Metal working
- Pioneer toys and games
- Handmade musical instruments
- Food trucks

Festival Parking Information

Free shuttle parking is available at the Duke Energy power line field, approximately a quarter mile east of the fort. The field is located between NE 43rd Avenue and NE 44th Avenue on the north side of E Fort King Street. Free shuttles and trams will be running continuously throughout the event for pickups and drop-offs. An ADA tram will be available for handicapped or disabled guests.



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tloury@att.net

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



Taxes and Chaos 2027

By TomL

As we wrap up 2026 I am looking back at what work and what did not. The political season has not stop. Discussions are going on about who was at fault, what was done wrong or not done at all. Who cheated in the election? I was disappointed in the out come but we let it happen! I wrote for years in this newspaper that we are asking for trouble, when I heard the amount of foreign money going to colleges in our country and the amount of students from foreign countries and what the professors were teaching. Some were here to steal our secrets. Some were here to disrupt our American way of life. I think about the Million NO Billions that was spent we are no better off financially or politically, they are still asking for money no matter how much you gave they want more.

Let's talk about asking for money locally. The Board of County Commissioner's… their job is to run our county and save us money, instead they have raised our taxes to the maximum allowed every year for years, no matter how many new people moved in and are paying taxes, they want more, raising the value of our houses so they can raise our taxes and the Insurance companies jump on that because they raise the replacement value which is inflated by the our Commissioner's. I grant you they probably need the money but they need to tax the right people, tax the people moving in with an impact fee. Someone ask how many impact fees are there? They have schools, Fire services / EMS,Transportation /roads and now there will be more because they will have to make up the differences of taxes lost. Normally they assess Developers / home builders for new construction across Marion County. It should not work that way, but I guess the people who buying or building themselves has to pay what the county accesses.

The question everyone is asking are they going to tax us? The answer is yes but it will be controlled chaos! I hope the new Governor will look at the Mortgage insurance issue! If fixed that would be a great happening!

When you take out a loan to build or buy a house you must insure it for the amount of the loan. It should stop there! No one should have the legal right to increase your insurance or tact on any other charges!



Newspaper Deadlines

Editorial & Ad Copy for January

Seniors Voice & Ocala DownTown
Noon, December 23rd
Lady Lake Magazine & Village Spectator
12am, December 30th

Seniors Voice of Ocala/Ocala Downtown
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FairTax

How would the FAIRtax make higher education more affordable?

Many American families believe that it is important to enable children to get a college degree. However, the cost of that higher education has become a major problem. For the 2025-26 academic year, the average published tuition and fees are approximately $11,950 at a public four-year university for in-state students and $31,880 for out-of-state students. Tuition for a private nonprofit four-year institution is $45,000 and for a public two-year colleges in-district is $4,150. Over four years the financial burden can be enormous, especially when more than one child attends college.

The FAIRtax Act, H.R. 25, offers a fundamentally different approach to education. Instead of taxing Americans when they earn money and then requiring them to pay tuition with what remains after federal taxes, the FAIRtax would repeal income and payroll taxes and replace them with a national retail consumption tax. Most importantly for students and their families, qualifying tuition would not be subject to the FAIRtax.

H.R. 25 provides, "(4) Education and training.- -The term education and training' means tuition for primary, secondary, or post secondary level education, and job-related training courses."

"(D) Education and training.- -Education and training shall be treated as services used to produce, provide, render, or sell taxable property or services."

The FAIRtax recognizes education for what it really is: an investment in human capital rather than ordinary consumption.

It is important to note that more people are attending schools to learn a skilled trade such as training to become a plumber, electrician or other well-paying and essential occupations. Tuition to these schools is also exempt under the FAIRtax.

Under today's tax system, tuition generally must be paid with after-tax dollars. A parent earns income, federal income tax is imposed, Social Security and Medicare taxes are imposed and only then can the remaining money be used for a child's education. Suppose a family needs to pay $25,000 in tuition and has an effective income and payroll tax burden of 20 percent. To have $25,000 available after taxes, the parent must earn $31,250. Since the FAIRtax eliminates the income and payroll taxes from the paycheck, the parent needs to earn $25,000 to pay a $25,000 tuition. That effectively makes education considerably less expensive to purchase.

There is another important benefit that is specifically significant for nonprofit educational institutions. H.R. 25 defines qualified nonprofit organizations to include organizations operating exclusively for educational purposes and provides that property and services purchased by qualified nonprofit organizations are eligible for the legislation's business purpose exemptions. This creates the potential for universities and other schools to operate with lower tax-related costs. Since the FAIRtax eliminates payroll taxes, universities and other schools will no longer be required to pay the employer half of Medicare and Social Security, lowering a major component of the cost of these labor-intensive institutions.

Tax policy should encourage educational investment rather than penalize it. The FAIRtax does exactly that. It allows Americans to earn money without federal income and payroll taxes and then permits them to invest those dollars in qualifying education without imposing any tax on tuition. The result is a tax system in which education receives uniquely favorable treatment. Families can devote more of what they earn to tuition, educational institutions can operate without many of the federal tax costs, and students are encouraged to invest in improving their skills and productivity.

For more information, go to FAIRtax.org



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If you would like to know more about us call TomL 352-804-1223

Sunset Songs Series

Selwyn Birchwood

Date:12/11/2026 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Location: Citizens' Circle

The Sunset Songs Series brings free monthly concerts to Citizens' Circle in Downtown Ocala from 7 to 9 p.m., showcasing a vibrant mix of genres from professional touring and emerging artists. Now in its third season, the series fosters community connection, supports downtown businesses, and offers a relaxed atmosphere to enjoy live music. Come early for dinner, grab a bite from on-site food trucks, and enjoy beer and wine available for purchase through our beverage partner, the Ocala Outreach Foundation. Bring a chair, invite friends, and settle in for an evening under the open sky—free and open to all.

Dec. 11 - Selwyn Birchwood

Selwyn Birchwood is an award-winning Orlando-born guitarist, lap steel player, songwriter, and vocalist celebrated as one of the most original voices in contemporary blues, blending deep blues with psychedelic rock, funk, and Southern soul into his signature "Electric Swamp Funkin' Blues." After winning the 2013 International Blues Challenge, he launched a critically acclaimed career highlighted by his Alligator Records debut *Don't Call No Ambulance* and subsequent albums including *Pick Your Poison*, *Living In A Burning House*, and his latest, *Exorcist*, produced by Grammy winner Tom Hambridge. Known for his electrifying live performances, Birchwood has played major festivals worldwide and continues to push the blues forward with blistering guitar work, soulful lap steel, and thought-provoking songwriting—all with a mission to make audiences both dance and think.

Sea-Suns Greetings

America 250 Florida Launches "Sea-Suns Greetings" Celebration to Cap Off Semiquincentennial Year

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—To cap off our nation's Semiquincentennial year, America 250 Florida has launched "Sea-Suns Greetings from Florida," a statewide celebration highlighting Florida's unique role in American traditions. From seasonal harvests of citrus, strawberries, and oysters to award-winning state parks and historic sites, Americans hitting the road this holiday season can find their own "Floriday."

"America's 250th anniversary has been a year to honor our nation's founding and Florida's place in that story," said Governor Ron DeSantis. "This final holiday activation gives residents and visitors one more opportunity to experience Florida's unique heritage and the traditions that continue to define our state."

Building on the events held throughout the year, including Florida's award winning exhibit at the Great American State Fair in Washington, "Sea-Suns Greetings from Florida" brings together communities and destinations across the state to showcase the state's distinctive traditions, which began well before the revolutionary era. Florida holds a special place in the nation's holiday observance story. In 1539, Hernando de Soto's expedition marked the first Christmas in what is now the continental United States while encamped near present-day Tallahassee—more than seventy years before English colonists celebrated in Virginia.

Centuries later, Florida became a destination for winter travelers seeking relief from northern cold, with grand hotels and railroad lines bringing visitors south long before the rise of modern theme parks. Florida's frontier Christmas customs—including citrus garlands, palmetto and magnolia decorations, popcorn strings, and Florida pines in place of northern firs—remain alive in communities today, alongside the longstanding tradition of placing a bright orange among Christmas decorations.

"Florida's history is America's history, and that includes the Christmas traditions that began here centuries ago," said Secretary of State Cord Byrd. "As we close out America 250 Florida, we are proud to help Floridians and travelers connect with the places and customs that make our state's holiday season distinct."

"America 250 Florida has given us a full year to highlight our state's role in the American story," said Bryan Griffin, President and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA. "Our holiday activation invites residents and travelers to get out and experience Florida's holiday traditions firsthand—from historic sites and Main Street celebrations to the Capitol and welcome centers across the state. Sea-Suns Greetings is our way of encouraging people to explore Florida and see what makes this time of year special here."

"Florida's roads and welcome centers serve as gateways for residents and visitors exploring the state," said Jared W. Perdue, P.E. "We are pleased to partner on this holiday activation so travelers can discover Florida's seasonal events and traditions as they move throughout the state."

From life-size postcards inspired by Mid-Century Florida at Florida's four Welcome Centers to a dedicated "Floridays Trail" featuring destinations throughout the state, the celebration will offer a warm welcome to residents and returning visitors alike. Planned celebrations include:

- Lighting of the First North American Christmas in Tallahassee, and
- The Florida Department of State will honor the Hernando de Soto Winter Encampment, the first known observation of Christmas in North America, at Mission San Luis.

Florida State Parks will also celebrate the season with events across the state, including holiday festivities at Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, Suwannee Lights at Stephen Foster State Park, and a host of Manatee Viewing Locations across Central Florida and the Big Bend. The season will culminate with traditional "First Day Hikes" as Florida welcomes 2027 and America's 251st Year.

In partnership with Florida's Department of State, VISIT FLORIDA will also highlight historic and locally organized festivals celebrating the season in rural communities and small downtowns across Florida. These celebrations will include open houses, boat parades, and locations to purchase Florida-made products to gift a loved one this holiday season.

"Sea-Suns Greetings from Florida" is made possible by America 250 Florida partners, including the Florida Department of State, VISIT FLORIDA, the Florida Lottery, Florida Citrus, the Florida Department of Transportation, Florida Power & Light, Tampa Electric Company, Florida State Parks, and Florida's local tourism destination partners.

A full list of participating events and destinations will be available at America250FL.com in the coming week.

What is Going On In Our Skies!

I ask AI or SI what is going on in our skies and why is there mysterious things happening. There is more than what the Penitgon is telling us.

Recent events, reports, and updates regarding the skies over the United States include government transparency measures, mysterious lights, and modernizations to aviation infrastructure:

UFO and UAP Reports

Government Declassifications: Following calls for transparency, new government documents regarding Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.

Pilot and Official Accounts: Discussions surrounding high-speed or unconventional aerial objects continue to draw public attention, with recent interviews touching on past and ongoing military and federal observations of fast-moving, non-aerodynamic objects.

Mysterious Lights and Viral Sightings

· Austin, Texas Sightings: Social media and local platforms recently circulated nighttime footage from Austin, Texas, capturing faint, slow-moving lights over the city skyline that sparked widespread online speculation about unidentified objects.

· New York and New Jersey Beams: White, circular beams of light were spotted dancing across cloudy skies near New York City and Jersey City, NJ, capturing social media attention before receiving local explanations.

· Fireball Surges: Astronomers and tracking networks like the Global Meteor Network note that automated camera arrays and rising public use of digital tools have led to an increase in reported and documented fireball and meteor sightings across the country.

Aviation Infrastructure

· Air Traffic Control Overhaul: The Trump Administration has pushed forward with a major $12.5 billion investment project—known as "Modern Skies"—aimed at rebuilding and modernizing the U.S. National Airspace System with next-generation technology to replace aging legacy systems

Refrigeration and Cyber Incidents (Late 2026)

· Military Base Outages: In August 2026, six U.S. military facilities across five states (including two Army bases, three Air Force bases, and a naval station in Newport, Rhode Island) experienced unexplained refrigeration outages currently under investigation by military cyber investigators.

· Federal Warning: The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the FBI, and the Pentagon issued warnings after similar overseas cyberattacks targeted commercial and grocery store refrigeration systems (such as massive incidents in France and Europe) by manipulating internet-facing cooling controllers.

· the U.K. has instructed its citizens to stockpile food, water and cash for a possible massive disruption, the Pentagon has only advised military bases to plan to operate off the grid for up to 90 days. American civilian leaders have been left out of the loop.

How much could it cost to have dehydrated food, smoked meat, maybe a case of canned meat, canned potatoes, canned vegetables 55 gal barrel of water, fire wood, lamps and lamp oil! You want something that won't spoil if electric freezers go down. Ammunition for hunting game!

It probably would not hurt to be prepared, if nothing happens then donate your extra supplies to the hungry!

Amendment Passed

By TomL

I am happy the amendment 3 passed. Our county Commissioners are suppose to run the county and save us money. In my opinion the most important thing in the county and keeping the tax payers happy and prosperous. Instead they took the maximum raise in taxes allowed for growth and gave a lot of pain to the tax payers! Don't get me wrong they need the money for growth, but they need to charge the people moving here. Not the builder, not the developer the people who want to become permanent residents. Impact fees! Not new businesses the new residents for the first five years. It does not cost them a penny to come here and ruin our economy but they ruined the placed they came from. First thing they do is complain about the roads, police, schools, EMS, Fire Dept, garbage pickup. They are spoiled from all the infrastructure that they had where they came from.

Example I live on a dirt road and I have for 56 years. A man drove done a dirt road an bought a house, now he is complaining about the neighbors ruining the road or he wants it paved it. Those of us with a thousand feet of road frontage don't want to pay $200 a foot to pave it. Luckily it is a dead end road so the county does not want to spend any money on it because it needs thousands of feet more right away!

Connect with your community



What say you?

Email: TLoury@att.net

China vs United States

By TomL

All the event leading up to Friday the 13th. Someone brought us to our knees for a short time. Our RADAR did not work. I think other event were sabotages!

Making the freezers shut down on military bases and ruin the food on a large scale. China buying land. China controlling the meat packing.

Fires across our continent. Threats over Taiwan.

Black outs in different parts of our country. Test? Microsoft went down.

Spying on the United States for secret information on AI or SI.

Sending spy balloons across our country.

Sending students to our colleges to learn and steal our secret & disrupt our life and us inviting them and excepting large amounts of money for the colleges..

Today more disruptions in the banking world. People can't get into their bank with their smart phone.

China giving Russia help against Ukraine and much more.

What we have in our country is we fight for freedom they fight because they are made too. Trump is negotiating with China and Russia right now.

The election: the news media says millions of Trump voter stayed home on Election Day. Trump fills stadiums some time three times a day in different parts of our country and they think Trump supporter did not show up…I don't believe that. What if they did show up and there is no record of them voting nation wide? Is it another computer glitch? What happens moving forward? We must figure it out and fix it! We are suppose to be an intelligent race. We are running around with smart phones, smart cars, development of AI or SI and WE CONTINUE TO DO STUPID THINGS.,

Where do you think we are headed. No more freedom to do anything?

I ask AI or SI about the all the airports shutting down. Their answer was unidentified flying objects, I'm sure it was a joke but what if it was Iranian drones testing our defenses and then retreating. I was shock by the fact that SI could joke! (Maybe they weren't?) Would the pentagon tell us? They are doing drills to learn how to survive 90 days with no electricity water or food probably with supplies they already have but they are not warning us to stock up. There are a lot of un answered questions.

All it would take is a brilliant mind, AI / SI a computer and secret access to our grids? Figure it out guys!

Marion County Impact Fees

By TomL

I Googled what were impact fees in Marion County?

First I read about a person disgusted about impact fees and ask how many Impact fees are there and how many more will he get. When the money runs out they make it up with an impact fee!

Google says…

What does Impact Fees Fund in Marion County

· **Education & Schools:** Collected to build new public school facilities and add wings or expansions to existing schools required by population growth (governed via Ordinance 24-06). Funds cannot be used for general school maintenance or repairs.

· **Transportation & Roads:** Allocated exclusively for new road construction, capacity expansions, and roadway improvements necessitated by development (such as adding turn lanes and intersection upgrades under Ordinance 25-18), rather than fixing existing potholes or routine road maintenance.

· **Fire Services & EMS:** Used to fund capital needs for Fire Rescue and Emergency Medical Services—including purchasing new fire stations, emergency vehicles, and life-saving equipment required to service new homes and businesses (Ordinance 25-17).

How They Work

· **When they are paid:** Collected prior to the issuance of a certificate of occupancy (or when building permits are pulled, depending on the specific fee category).

· **Who pays them:** Assessed on developers and homebuilders for new construction across unincorporated Marion County and participating municipalities.

If you would like, I can look up the **specific current rate schedule** for a particular type of building (such as single-family residential vs. commercial) or check how fees apply inside a specific city like Ocala.

Publishers note: All fees for building residents housing should be paid by the "NEW COMERS!" They should not be paid by the Builder!

Donalds Transition Site

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DonaldsPress@donaldstransition2026.com

Donalds Transition Website Now Open to All Floridians Who Want to Serve

TALLAHASSEE, FL — The Donalds-Avila Transition Team today announced that its official transition website is now open for anyone who wants to apply to serve in the incoming administration.

Governor-elect Byron Donalds and Lieutenant Governor-elect Bryan Avila are looking for talented, mission-driven people from every corner of Florida to help carry out the agenda voters approved this month.

Through the website, Floridians can:

Apply for positions across state agencies and the Executive Office of the Governor

Volunteer for boards and commissions

Share ideas on how to keep Florida the freest, safest, and most affordable state in the nation

"Florida's best days are ahead, and building this administration starts with our greatest strength: our people," said Governor-elect Byron Donalds. "We want the hardest-working, most committed people in this state on our team. If you're ready to serve, we want to hear from you."

Applications are being accepted on a rolling basis. Interested applicants are encouraged to apply early at DonaldsTransition2026.com

RIT Earns Second Place

Ocala Fire Rescue RIT Earns Second Place Overall and Top Incident Commander Honors at Pinellas County Firefighter Invitational

Ocala Fire Rescue's Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) delivered an outstanding performance at the Pinellas County Firefighter Invitational, earning second place overall among some of Florida's most highly trained firefighter rescue teams and receiving recognition for the competition's Top Incident Commander.

Over the three-day event (Nov. 2-4), teams completed a series of scenario-based challenges designed to test the specialized skills required of Rapid Intervention Teams. RIT members are trained to locate, access, and rescue firefighters who become trapped, lost, or injured during emergency operations, making the discipline one of the most demanding responsibilities in the fire service.

Demonstrating teamwork, technical proficiency, and operational readiness, Ocala Fire Rescue completed the competition in 5 minutes, 26 seconds, securing a second-place finish overall. Captain Nicole Kopolovits was also recognized as the competition's Top Incident Commander.

Ocala Fire Rescue extends its congratulations to all participating teams whose commitment to firefighter survival shone throughout the competition, especially OFR department members:

· Firefighter James Boutwell
· Driver Engineer Micah Day
· Captain Nicole Kopolovits
· Captain Jagger Maguire
· Firefighter Jeff Saunders

"I am proud of our Rapid Intervention Team's performance and professionalism throughout this competition," said Fire Chief Clint Welborn. "Their success reflects the commitment to excellence that characterizes Ocala Fire Rescue."

Ocala Fire Rescue extends its gratitude to the Pinellas County Firefighter Survival & Rescue Training Team and the Florida Rapid Intervention Operations Group for organizing an outstanding event centered on firefighter safety and preparedness.

OFR Station #8 Ribbon Cutting

Ocala Fire Rescue to Celebrate Station #8 Ribbon Cutting and Push-In Ceremony

(OCALA, FL.) Nov. 6, 2026 – Ocala Fire Rescue will celebrate the opening of its newest fire station, **Station #8**, with a ribbon-cutting and traditional apparatus push-in ceremony on **Monday, Nov. 9, at 10 a.m.** The event will be held at **2251 NW 45th Terrace, Ocala, FL 34482,** and is open to the public.

The new station represents Ocala Fire Rescue's continued commitment to providing timely, high-quality emergency services to the City's growing northwest region. Station #8 will enhance the department's ability to respond to emergencies and support the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors throughout the area.

As part of the inaugural ceremony, firefighters will participate in a traditional push-in ceremony for the two apparatus that will serve from Station #8. The fire service tradition dates to the era of horse-drawn fire equipment, when firefighters manually pushed apparatus into the station after returning from calls. Today, the ceremony symbolizes the beginning of service and the official welcoming of apparatus into their new home.

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FROM THE DESK OF

Congresswoman Kat Cammack



Cammack Votes to Pay Combat-Wounded Veterans in Full, Backs 60-Bill Package for Veterans and Their Families

House Veterans' Affairs Chairman calls it the most comprehensive veterans package in a decade

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Kat Cammack (FL-03) this week voted on legislation that would end a decades-old penalty on combat-wounded veterans and protect the benefits of Gold Star spouses.

On Veterans Day, the House passed what House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost calls the most comprehensive veterans package in a decade: more than 60 veterans-focused measures to expand health care access for rural veterans, cut red tape at VA, and ensure surviving spouses aren't penalized for finding love again.

Right now, a surviving spouse who remarries before age 55 forfeits survivor benefits. The Love Lives On Act ends that penalty, letting them keep those benefits and restoring TRICARE coverage if a later marriage ends.

"We owe veterans, active duty servicemembers, and their families a debt we will never be able to fully repay," **said Congresswoman Cammack**. "For too long, we've walked back our promises to these brave men and women even after they've kept theirs. If you lost your husband or wife in service to our country, you shouldn't have to choose between finding love again and keeping the benefits your family earned, and if you're wounded in combat and medically retired, Washington shouldn't dock your pay. It is fitting the House is acting on these important bills as we observe Veterans Day, and I will keep fighting every single day for veterans in North Central Florida and around the country."

Beyond the Star Act and the Love Lives On Act, highlights of the package include:

Benefits for veterans and survivors

- · Raises monthly pay for veterans with the most severe service-connected disabilities, the first significant increase in decades
- Boosts survivor payments an extra 1% a year for three years
- Guarantees surviving spouses of veterans lost to ALS the full survivor benefit, no matter how long the illness lasted
- **Health care**
- Expands suicide and overdose treatment and speeds up admission to VA residential treatment programs
- Extends VA's community suicide prevention grants for three more years
- Locks in community care access standards for eight years, so veterans far from a VA hospital keep their options
- Puts a lactation space in every VA medical center
- **Claims and accountability**
- Stops VA from denying a claim because a veteran missed a single exam
- Lets the Board of Veterans' Appeals decide appeals that raise the same issue together, under a three-year pilot
- Sends military sexual trauma claims to a specialized team
- Gives veterans one VA phone number to call, with call centers in every time zone
- **Families and caregivers**
- Extends health coverage for family caregivers six months after the veteran passes away or leaves the program, with help getting back to work
- Lets spouses and dependent children receive a VA headstone, whatever the date of death
- **Jobs and education**
- Raises GI Bill housing pay for student veterans studying online or training in apprenticeships
- Expands VET TEC tech training to fields like artificial intelligence and semiconductors

These reforms are backed by more than 30 veterans and military family organizations, including the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Military Officers Association of America, TAPS and Gold Star Spouses of America.

Earlier this week, the House also passed the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act (H.R. 8552), which raises VA disability compensation and survivor benefits on December 1 to keep pace with the cost of living.

Cammack's Push to Crack Down on Prison Cellphones Gains Ground at FCC

New rules would give correctional officers additional tools to disrupt criminal networks, protect communities, and stop inmates from coordinating crimes behind bars.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Kat Cammack (FL-03), a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, which oversees the FCC, today welcomed a major win in her push to shut down contraband cellphones in prisons. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Brendan Carr announced the agency will vote next month on final rules that, for the first time, would allow state and local correctional facilities to use targeted cellphone-jamming technology. The Order will be voted on at the FCC's November 19 Open Meeting.

Rep. Cammack has worked the issue on multiple fronts. She met with Chairman Carr on the issue and met several times with Florida Department of Corrections leaders to work through the threat contraband phones pose inside the state's prisons and find a resolution. Last year, she joined Congressman David Kustoff (TN-08) and other colleagues in a letter urging Chairman Carr to advance the rulemaking and give correctional institutions additional tools, warning that inmates have used these devices to orchestrate criminal activity from behind prison walls.

"Contraband cellphones turn prison cells into command centers. Inmates use them to order hits and run criminal enterprises from behind bars," **said Congresswoman Kat Cammack**. "That threat lands especially close to home in our district, which has roughly 15 state prisons and correctional institutions, more than any other congressional district in America. Giving our correctional officers the ability to shut these phones off will save lives and cut the crime being run from the inside. We worked this issue directly with Chairman Carr and with Florida's Department of Corrections leaders, and I'm grateful the Chairman is moving on it. Now Congress needs to finish the fight and make this authority permanent."

"The criminal use of contraband cell phones is a growing crisis that demands immediate action to maintain public safety and keep our officers and institutions safe," **said Florida Department of Corrections Secretary Richard Comerford**. "Florida is thankful for the leadership of FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, Representative Kat Cammack, Governor Ron DeSantis, Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier, and all of our correctional partners for recognizing this security threat and working to counteract this criminal enterprise."

Contraband cellphones remain a widespread problem in correctional facilities nationwide. A 2024 study found that prison authorities recovered more than 25,000 cellphones in a single year, with two participating facilities each recovering more than 6,000 devices. While the FCC has authorized other technologies to combat contraband phones, it has never before allowed jamming.

Under the proposed final order, jamming would be an option for state and local correctional facilities, and no facility would be required to use it. Facilities pursuing jamming must meet technical standards and pass testing to show the system does not cause harmful interference outside designated areas. Jamming would be limited to a Commission-authorized containment area where wireless device use is already prohibited. Wireless carriers, FirstNet, public safety coordinators, and 911 authorities would receive advance notice of on-site testing, and nearby communities would be notified before deployment.

The FCC will also seek public comment on additional measures to close loopholes that allow contraband cellphones to operate on other frequencies, strengthen protections for public safety communications, and explore potential "quiet zones" around correctional facilities.



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

Bilbie





***Fuchsia** 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.

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FROM THE DESK OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL UTHMEIER



Attorney General James Uthmeier Proposes the Safe Screens Act to Protect Minors on App Stores, Social Media Platforms, and AI Chatbots

Attorney General James Uthmeier proposed the Safe Screens Act, legislation that requires age determination and parental consent before minors download or buy apps, imposes protective design defaults on social media accounts for ages 14–17, and bars AI chatbots from providing minors features that simulate companionship, encourage harm, generate sexual content, or claim to be human.

"Parents deserve real control, and companies must design for safety, not addiction," **said Attorney General James Uthmeier**. "Florida already prohibits social media accounts for anyone under 14, and the Eleventh Circuit just upheld that law. The Safe Screens Act goes further. If you invite Florida's children onto your platform, you have a duty to keep them safe."

"Attorney General James Uthmeier is a visionary when it comes to protecting children in Florida," **said Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd**. "He steadfastly keeps their safety and security as a top priority. It takes the power and determination of an Attorney General to keep large social media and gaming companies from exploiting and endangering our children. They need to do the right thing, and James Uthmeier is going to make sure they do."

"As a former prosecutor, current college president, and a proud father, the safety and security of our students will always be my top priority," **said Polk State College President Anastasios Camoutsas**.

App stores still let minors download apps with weak age checks. AI chatbot operators and platforms do not consistently determine the age of the account holder. Default settings for teens 14 to 17 maximize engagement through infinite scroll, public "like" counts, late-night access, and cosmetic filters that fuel body-image problems. AI chatbots simulate companionship that encourages isolation, generate sexual content, and claim to be human. These kinds of designs that target and knowingly harm children and teens must stop.

The Safe Screens Act would:

1. Require age determination and parental consent. App stores and similar marketplaces must determine the user's age, link minors to a parent's account, and obtain parental consent before a minor downloads or buys an app from a covered platform. AI chatbot operators and platforms must determine account holder's age. Operating systems must apply age-appropriate restrictions at the device level based on the user's age. All age determination must use commercially reasonable, privacy-protective methods.

2. Set protective design defaults for social media accounts ages 14 to 17. Quiet mode must block access from 11 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. year-round, plus 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on academic-year weekdays. Muting notifications is not enough. Platforms must hide like, comment, and reaction counts by default; only a verified parent may enable them, with a 30-day opt-out prompt. Cosmetic-procedure filters are disabled. Use is limited to 2 hours daily and 60 hours monthly, including messaging and long-form content, with pauses at 60 and 90 minutes and notice every 15 minutes. Autoplay and infinite scroll are off by default with parent-only enablement. There are prompts for a non-personalized feed every 3 days that teens cannot dismiss. Platforms may not recommend teen accounts to unconnected adults or allow messaging from those adults. Child sexual exploitation reports receive human review within 48 hours, with a one-strike rule for adult offenders.

3. Protect all minors from harmful AI chatbot features.

Chatbot operators may not provide minors features that simulate companionship through personification, emotional engagement, user-data retention, unsupervised therapy, sexual content, or other deceptive features; encourage self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, or illegal activity; generate, describe, or facilitate sexually explicit conduct; suggest the chatbot is a real human; prioritize validation or engagement over user safety or guardrails; or encourage isolation or discourage help from appropriate adults.

4. Provide strong, uniform enforcement.

Knowing or reckless violations are unfair practices under section 501.1736, Florida Statutes. Up to $50,000 per violation. The Attorney General's Office may stop violations, seek damages, impose fines, and maintain a public website to track incidents. Remedies apply equally to covered app stores, social media platforms, and AI chatbot operators.

The Safe Screens Act puts parents back in charge, ends the engagement-at-all-costs model for minors, and holds corporations accountable when they fail.

Attorney General James Uthmeier Announces 281 Arrests in Undercover Operation Targeting Child Predators and Human Trafficking

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — Attorney General James Uthmeier and Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd announced 281 arrests in a seven-day, multi-agency undercover operation targeting child predators and human trafficking. Those arrested face 488 new charges, including 198 felonies.

"Predators who target Florida's children will be hunted down and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," **said Attorney General James Uthmeier**. "Those who came to Polk County expecting to sexually abuse a child, found cuffs instead. Thanks you our law enforcement partners and prosecutors who put the time into this operation and put these predators behind bars where they belong."

"These predators are out there, online, trying to groom and violate our children," **said Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd**. "Last week we found and charged 31 child sex predators. The things that these predators say to children are vile, disgusting, and not fit for anyone except trained detectives to read. And even seasoned, trained detectives are repulsed. These predators need to be locked up and stay locked up and away from children. I ask parents to please be involved with their children and monitor their online activity. We cannot prevent predators from reaching out to our children, but we can educate our children and be proactive in catching a predator before they are able to groom or violate our kids.".



FROM THE DESK OF
GOVERNOR DESANTIS



Governor Ron DeSantis Highlights Florida's Leadership in Advanced Air Mobility During Historic "Flying Car" Demonstration in Tampa Bay

TAMPA, Fla.— Governor Ron DeSantis highlighted Florida's leadership in transportation innovation as "flying cars" officially take to the skies through the first in a series of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) flight demonstrations led by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). As part of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) *Electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing (eVTOL) and AAM Integration Pilot Program (eIPP)*, this series of demonstration flights marks a major milestone in Florida's nation-leading efforts to transform how people and goods move throughout the state—especially above some of Florida's most heavily traveled roadways.

"This morning, history was made in Tampa Bay with Florida's first Advanced Air Mobility electric aircraft demonstration flights," **said Governor Ron DeSantis.** "From the first commercial airline flight over Tampa Bay in 1914, to today's AAM demonstrations along that same historic route, Florida has long been a launchpad for new ideas that shape the future of transportation. I'm proud that Florida is a place where groundbreaking transportation technologies can be developed and deployed. Thanks to strategic investments, education partnerships, and policies that promote innovation, we're ensuring that Florida continues to lead the way in aviation and aerospace."

"More than 100 years ago, Florida helped launch the commercial aviation industry, and now Florida is paving the way for the future of flying cars," **said Florida Department of Transportation Secretary Jared W. Perdue, P.E.** "The work we are doing today will revolutionize the way people and goods move around the state, and this flight series will serve as an important step forward in our efforts to take highways to the sky."

"Florida has the routes, the operators, and the infrastructure this industry needs to scale," said **BETA Technologies Founder and Chief Executive Officer Kyle Clark**. "Earlier this year, we flew high-cadence operations along the I-4 corridor with Republic Airways, up to nine legs a day, with energy costs under $17 per leg. Our ALIA aircraft was built to move people and goods faster, more reliably, and at a fraction of the cost of conventional aircraft. The eIPP lets us keep flying, gather the operational data, and prove out the case for routine commercial passenger service alongside experienced operators."

"Florida is leading the way in embracing electric air taxis and the opportunities they will create for residents and visitors alike," said **Joby Aviation Founder and Chief Executive Officer JoeBen Bevirt**. "It's exciting to see the state turn that ambition into action, and we're proud to work with FDOT as we plan to fly our aircraft across the state, from Tampa Bay and Orlando to the Space Coast. These flights will give communities a firsthand look at how quiet, electric vertical flight can transform everyday travel, beginning on the route where commercial aviation was born."

This flight demonstration is one of many in Florida's "Future of Flight Series," which serves as a key fact-finding mission for the FAA as they develop the regulations, infrastructure, and operating procedures that are necessary to safely deploy flying cars for commercial use. This series of demonstration flights is supported by a robust portfolio of partners in Florida's eIPP, including Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) such as Joby Aviation and BETA Technologies, as well as many academia partners, local municipalities, and airports around the state. Florida's eIPP flights, including those in the Future of Flight Series, will collect data in key focus areas such as noise, airspace integration, and more that will help guide important decisions about this emerging new mode of transportation at the national level.

Today's demonstration flight paid homage to Tony Jannus' historic journey between St. Petersburg and Tampa in 1914, which was the world's first commercial airline flight and served, at the time, as the next era of transporting people and goods across Tampa Bay. Now, more than a century later, thousands of spectators witnessed history in the making with two "flying cars" taking off from Albert Whitted Airport in St. Petersburg, flying in formation over Tampa Bay, and landing at Signature Aviation at Tampa International Airport, ushering in yet another new era of transportation.

While today's flight honored a pioneering moment in aviation history, it also marked a step forward in Florida's transportation future by showcasing how these aircraft can safely and efficiently connect communities throughout Florida. These flight demonstrations will be among the first to utilize Florida's Aerial Highway Network, a first-of-its-kind system that takes highways to the sky through dedicated aerial corridors that connect major hubs throughout the state. Following along the Interstate 4 (I-4) corridor, the most heavily traveled corridor in Florida, the Future of Flight Series will offer real-world demonstrations on how AAM can bypass roadway congestion and completely revolutionize the travel experience for Florida's residents and visitors in this part of the state.

For more information about FDOT's AAM initiatives, visit suntraxfl.com.

Governor Ron DeSantis Awards $100 Million to Protect Florida's Water Quality and Supply

CRYSTAL RIVER, Fla.— Governor Ron DeSantis awarded $100 million across 45 projects to restore and protect Florida's water resources. Funded through the Springs Restoration and Alternative Water Supply grant programs, these projects will protect and restore Florida's iconic springs while expanding alternative water sources and promoting water conservation.

Today in Crystal River, I was proud to announce $100 million for springs restoration and alternative water supply projects throughout Florida," **said Governor Ron DeSantis.** "These strategic investments will build on the progress we've made in protecting our natural resources and improving water quality in communities across Florida, so that we can leave this state to God better than we found it."

"Year after year, Governor DeSantis has demonstrated a firm commitment to protecting Florida's waters," **said Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Alexis A. Lambert**. "We will continue to work cooperatively with local communities to secure the sustainable clean water supply that is critical for Florida's future."

The Springs Restoration Grant Program supports communities by funding projects that support both improvements in water quality and spring flow. $50 million in funding will be awarded to 23 projects aimed at restoring Florida's world-renowned springs through wastewater upgrades and other enhancements that will collectively reduce Total Nitrogen by more than 55,000 pounds per year.

Since the program's inception in 2019, the legislature has appropriated $385 million in funding, including today's awards. To date, funds committed by the Alternative Water Supply Grant Program will result in over 400 million gallons of water per day when projects are fully online.

A full list of Water Quality and Supply Grant projects selected for Fiscal Year 2026-27 can be found at ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov/Grants



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