

# NORTHEAST JOURNAL

Good People ∞ Good Places ∞ Good Things Happening

St. Petersburg, Florida

January/February 2023

Est. September 2004

Courtesy of the City of St. Pete



Mayor Ken Welch enjoys the colorful display panels during the ribbon cutting for the new Sunken Gardens History Center.

## History Comes Alive at Sunken Gardens

Janan Talafer

Kathy Turner Lee remembers hollering to her mother, “Going over to the gardens,” as she ran out her front door on 18th Avenue and to a side gate that led into Sunken Gardens. In the 1950s and ‘60s, Sunken Gardens may have been one of the most famous roadside attractions in Florida, but to Lee, the four-acre tropical oasis was just the family business that her grandparents, George and Eula Turner, Sr.,

founded decades before. It was like an extension of her own backyard.

“The gardens were a big part of my childhood,” Lee recalls. “My brother and I would run around by ourselves and no one thought anything of it.” She spent hours immersed in exotic tropical plantings that lined winding hexagonal pathways, so lush and thick that it was impossible to see through them. In the winter, kerosene grove heaters, also known as smudge pots, would be set out to

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## Our Piers Through the Years Celebrating a City Landmark

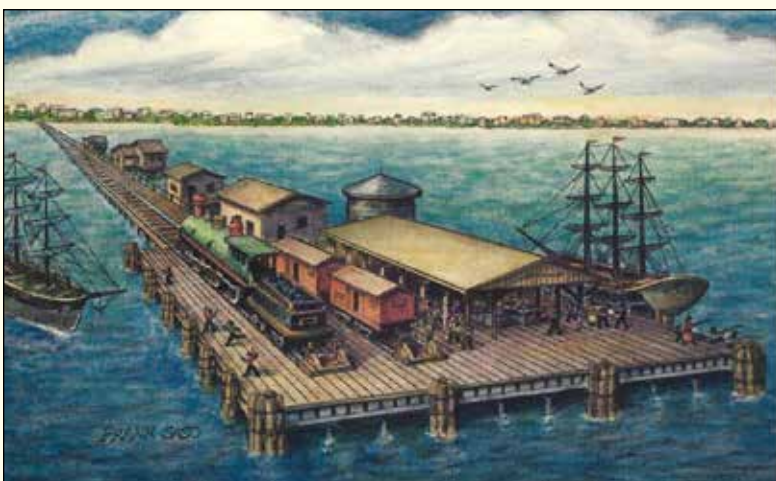
Will Michaels

Piers and St. Petersburg are virtually synonymous. The city was founded by John and Sarah Williams and Peter Demens in 1888. The Williams owned the land and had visions of a great city. Back then, in order to be a great city a railroad was required. Peter Demens, owner of the Orange Belt Railway, agreed to route his fledgling railroad to the new city in exchange for a prime share of the anticipated new downtown real estate. Part of the deal was that he would extend his railroad tracks out over a pier reaching water 12 feet deep to allow cargo exchange between ships and the train. (Demens probably did not know how shallow Tampa Bay was – it took three thousand feet of pier to reach that depth.) Demens’ Pier also included a bathing pavilion to attract tourists, and fishing was advertised.

### The Railroad Pier

From the very beginning, the piers were constructed with both tourism and commercial exchange in mind. Over time, the piers simply became

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“St. Petersburg Railroad Pier – 1889. Illustration courtesy of The Bank of Tampa.” The Railroad Pier was built by Peter Demens of the Orange Belt Railway.

## No Car, No Problem Getting Around Is Getting Easier

Jon Kile

Getting around the bay area without a car keeps getting more interesting. We have scooter and bike rentals, a seasonal ferry, trolleys, and even an old-fashioned streetcar. Now, St. Pete boasts an innovative way to whisk residents and visitors through some of the city’s most vibrant neighborhoods. Of course, I’m referring to the new SunRunner, the Bus Rapid Transit Route (BRT) that takes riders from downtown to St. Pete Beach.

Spend more than a few minutes with someone in our house and you’ll start hearing about how much we love the new SunRunner. I’ve been accused of being on the PSTA payroll, but I assure readers that the only thing PSTA has given me is a ride. Great cities have solid public transportation systems, not just as a last resort, but as a viable and reliable way for visitors and locals to get around. And



The Kile family enjoying the view from the Cross Bay Ferry

while I might not do it every day, I like that we can now travel any or all of the distance between St. Pete Beach and Ybor City without a car. And instead of being a traffic headache, it’s downright pleasant. But is it practical? It’s the details that make it work.

The Cross Bay Ferry has become a familiar sight making its journey from Straub Park to Tampa’s Riverwalk during the winter tourist season. These boats are almost always full, and there’s a plan that hopes to make the service permanent, year-round. Thanks to local government subsidies, the \$12 (\$8 seniors, \$5 students) one-way fare is probably cheaper than the cost of gas and parking. Once you get to Tampa, you can take the once-beleaguered, now

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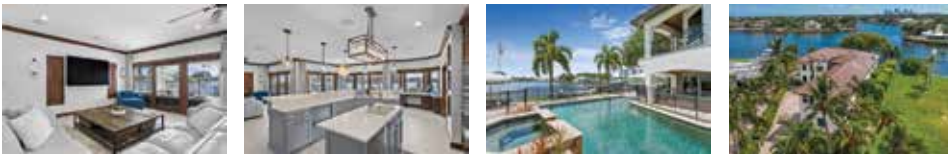
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

### Love Stories

On December 23, my wife and I were looking forward to a cozy weekend of family gatherings, wrapping presents, and getting ready for a trip to Puerto Rico for the New Year. But life had other plans. That morning we woke to find that our 4-year-old Frenchie, Maui, couldn't move his back legs.



Maui is about as active a dog as you can imagine. He's no "apartment pet," as folks like to call the breed. And he is, of course, much loved. We sprang into action, managing – with the help of several dedicated vets and despite the holiday timing – to get him in immediately for emergency back surgery at a pet neurology hospital. We brought him home that Monday with the knowledge that while his prognosis is good, there will be a long road to recovery. It's a huge blessing that we work from home and were able to take this on; Maui's recovery depends on both of us, working together as a team to care for him round the clock.

As I edited this issue, it got me thinking. Many of the stories in this edition are about teams: husband-and-wife teams, brother-sister teams, teacher-student teams, even a basketball team. And of course, the team that is the community you build, whether it's in a tropical paradise or a culture of art.

I'm taking these stories to heart as we start another year. One person can certainly make a difference, but no one does it entirely alone. To be alive is to make connections, to help shoulder burdens, to light a spark in others. Louisa May Alcott wrote that "you need two flints to make a fire." She was talking about anger, but it's also true of love – the heart of so many of the stories we tell. And I and the whole team here at the *Northeast Journal* look forward to lots more of those in 2023.

~ Shelly

*Have a story you'd like to share?*

*Email me anytime at [editor@northeastjournal.org](mailto:editor@northeastjournal.org).*

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# Will Michaels Honored by the Tony Jannus Society



The *Northeast Journal's* longtime contributor and resident historian, Will Michaels, was honored by the Tony Jannus Society at their annual banquet, Saturday, November 12 at the Vinoy Hotel.

The Special Award was presented to Will, president of the nonprofit Flight 2014, Inc, in recognition of his instrumental efforts to bring the Benoist Airboat back to St. Petersburg through a life-size monument at the St. Pete Pier, near the

exact spot of Tony Jannus' famous flight in 1914. Will is one of five people to receive this prestigious award since the Society was founded.

In addition to preserving the legacy of Tony Jannus, the Tony Jannus Society also offers financial assistance to college students pursuing studies in aviation and conducts an annual essay contest for high school students to encourage careers in aviation.

Congratulations, Will! ●

~ Mary Fletcher

# Your Guide to Yard Oddities in Old Northeast

Jon Kile

Strolling around the Old Northeast, you'll see a wide variety of ferns. But some ferns might surprise you from one day to the next – or even one moment to the next. One is the *pleopeltis polypodioides* or "resurrection fern." The other, *mimosa pudica*, looks like a fern, but is actually a perennial. Both exhibit strange behaviors.

The resurrection fern is unique for a number of reasons.



This resurrection fern is in its dry stage - but it's still alive!

First, it's an epiphyte, or air plant, which means it grows not in the soil, but on the sides of trees and houses. It gets its name because during dry periods, this plant will wilt and turn brown, losing up to 97% of its water. It will appear dead, but it isn't. Just 24 hours after a good rain, the resurrection fern is bright green and looking quite alive.

These plants are all over the neighborhood. If you've got an old oak tree, there's a pretty good chance you have some resurrection fern. But if you just can find any, wander over to the north side of 17th Avenue between Locust and Cherry. A low oak branch that will almost make you duck has a nice patch of resurrection fern.

The *mimosa pudica* might be a little more elusive. This plant has a variety of interesting nicknames. Here in the south, it's called the "touch me not." But other regions might call it the "sleep plant" or the "shame plant." *Pudica* is Latin for shy or bashful. It gets these names because its delicate fine leaves will fold up right before your eyes when they're disturbed.



The light green portions of the "touch me not" plants seem to be more reactive than the dark ones.

Scientists believe this is a defense mechanism from animals and insects that try to eat it.

The *mimosa pudica* is found in yards as ground cover, but will also grow in planters. It is easiest to find when its purple flower is in bloom. There's a good example in the right of way near the alley on the east side of Oak Street, between 17th and 18th Avenues. Just give them a gentle brush with your fingers and they'll gently fold inward. ●

Got a funky tree or plant you want to see in the *Northeast Journal*? Reach out to [jkilewrites@gmail.com](mailto:jkilewrites@gmail.com).

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## MEET THE WRITERS

We would like to sincerely thank and introduce our contributors. The time and talent they dedicate to writing about good people, good places, and good things happening is what makes the *Northeast Journal* the quality publication that our readers have come to expect and love. Join our team by contacting editor@northeastjournal.org.

**Abby Baker** is a Tampa-based journalist for local media. She currently lives in Seminole Heights, but writes stories about Gulfport and St. Petersburg communities. When she's not on deadline, she likes to paint, travel and spend time with her two very chubby cats.



**M. Shackelford Burns** is a writer and photographer originally from the northeast of Scotland, now resettled and happy to call the fair city of St. Pete his new home. After a 32-year career as a professional cameraman and filmmaker, he is now pursuing his lifelong dreams of writing, playing music, and eating fresh fruit daily.



**Jeannie Carlson** is a correspondent for Tampa Bay Newspapers, Inc. as seen in *Tampa Bay Times*, *TBNWeekly.com* and *Beach Beacon*; an adjunct English professor; and a writer at *Examiner.com* ("Swedish Cooking with a Southern Accent"). She has been a resident of and inspired by the ONE since 2000. [JeannieCarlson.com]



**Rick Carson** has lived in St. Pete since 2001, after a career journey that took him from national politics to the innkeeper of a B&B – from the cesspools of Washington to cleaning guestroom toilets (ask him if there is any difference). [rickcarson1@gmail.com.]



**Jonathan Kile** moved to St. Pete in 2001. A rare genetic condition forced him to give up a career in sales in favor of a full-time position as father, husband, and writer. He blogs about his family travels and advocates for awareness of vascular Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome at *dontmakemeturnthisvanaround.com*. He's on the board of literary nonprofit Keep St. Pete Lit.



**Monica Kile** has lived in St. Pete since 2003, when she came for a master's degree in Florida Studies from USF St. Pete. She has served as Executive Director of Preserve the 'Burg, OLLI at Eckerd College, and the Suncoast Tiger Bay Club, and the Special Projects Director at the Florida Humanities Council. Monica guides historic and cultural tours throughout Florida.



**Lynn Lotkowitz** spent years in radio in New York, and in business development/management at *Florida Trend Magazine*. She volunteers and enjoys traveling internationally.



**Will Michaels** is retired as executive director of the History Museum and has served as president of St. Petersburg Preservation and vice president of the Dr. Carter G. Woodson Museum of African American History. He is the author of *The Making of St. Petersburg*. [wmichaels2@tampabay.rr.com]



**Samantha Bond Richman** relocated to the Old Northeast in 2014 after living in Tampa for 28 years. She owns Sam Bond Benefit Group, a downtown insurance agency. She and husband Tim enjoy fishing, golf, and supporting family-oriented charitable causes.



**Cathy Salustri** writes about Florida. The *New York Times* featured her book, *Backroads of Paradise*, a travel narrative retracing the 1939 WPA Florida driving tours. Her next book, tentatively titled *The Florida Spectacular*, is undergoing edits. She and her husband live in Gulfport and own *The Gabber Newspaper*. Find her at *greatfloridaroadtrip.com*.



**Brandy Stark** is an artist, writer, and educator who lives in Crescent Heights. She is known for her hand-wrapped wire metal sculptures, fascination with local ghost stories, lore, and legends, and her immense love of all things pug. When not working, she spends time with her pug pack, pocket pets, and bearded dragon.



**Janan Talafer** A long-time Snell Isle resident, Janan was the editor of the *Northeast Journal* for many years, and still enjoys writing about people and places in St. Petersburg. She loves swing dancing, blues music, and gardening, even when the weeds threaten to overtake the yard. [janantalafer@gmail.com]



**Shelly Wilson** is (almost) a Florida native who tries very hard to love her state in the summer. She has been a writer and editor for 20 years, recently at the *Gabber Newspaper*, and now as the new editor of the *Journal*. She loves to read, travel, kayak and share great stories. She lives in St. Pete with her wife and an obstinate dog. [wilson.raechelle@gmail.com]





# Wayne Atherholt: The Man Who Made St. Pete an Arts Destination



Brandy Stark

St. Petersburg is a city of the arts thanks, in part, to the long-term efforts of one man: Wayne Atherholt. A steady presence in the artistic circles of the state, Atherholt has worked at many of the local arts powerhouses of the area, from the Dali Museum to the Morean Arts Center. He has interacted with the Smithsonian Institute Affiliates program, and undergone accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums, where he also served as a peer reviewer. And, if that is not prestigious enough, he served on the boards for the Florida Association of Museums and Foundations.

For the past eight years, Atherholt also held the title of the Director of the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs in St. Pete. This made him, quite literally, the top advocate for the local art scene and earned him the unofficial title of "arts czar." His job duties include overseeing the city's Arts Advisory Committee and Public Arts Commission, as well as multiple project committees in public arts. But after a long career in the arts, Atherholt has decided to retire.

"I've spent over 35 years of my career in the museums and tourism industries – all in Florida – with the last 20 years split as an art museum director and with the Kriseman administration here in St. Petersburg," he said. "And the primary thing that I focused on was making St. Petersburg a city of the arts, visually impactful, cutting edge and international in importance."

Atherholt's first taste of working in the St. Pete cultural world came in 1989 with his job as the Director of Marketing and Public Relations for the Dali Museum. In his eight years there, he more than doubled museum attendance, aiding in branding the museum and working to bring in more international traffic. He produced brochures and tour guides in German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Japanese, and oversaw the creation of the museum's website.

It was Atherholt's experience at the Dali that he utilized in his philosophy of making St. Pete an arts destination, particularly working to start and fund the popular SHINE Mural Festival.

"SHINE was designed to visually create a 24/7

museum with international artists hanging on the walls right alongside our local muralists," he said. "This became an opportunity to create revenue streams for the artists whose murals were highlighted and allowed them licensing fees, location fees, and merchandising."

Atherholt was also the director of the Morean Arts Center from 2011 to 2014. This was a transitory period for the Morean, and under his leadership the center eliminated six million dollars in debt. Atherholt expanded programs and brought the St. Pete Clay Company in as another campus for the MAC. It was here that he was brought into the fold of the mayor's office.

"One day, I was invited to lunch with Deputy Mayor Kanika Tomalin and Chief of Staff Kevin King," he recalls. "I had worked with Kanika in my capacity of CEO of the Morean and met Kevin once. We were discussing the importance of the arts in this area. After about 45 minutes of chatting I realized this was more than just a casual lunch with me trying to be helpful and said, 'This is a job interview, isn't it?'"

Atherholt took to his time as mayoral advisor quite readily, working to expand the scope and role of the city's arts alliance, more than doubling the city's art collection, and contracting with non-profits to achieve the Kriseman administration's arts and culture goals. St. Pete became known as one of the top arts destinations in the southeast, hosting five distinct arts districts and two emerging arts districts. Atherholt also worked hard to expand grant programs for arts organizations, now nearing \$2 million dollars in the most recent fiscal year. He's spent countless hours as a consultant to the city's arts organizations.

"I believe I've contributed a lot over the years, from being involved with starting First Fridays and the Looper, to creating a destination focused on museums in the international markets," he said. "I think that my time in the city is best reflected in what you see publicly: more museums, more street art, more murals, more artist opportunities, and far more public art than ever before."

The most profound change, he says, is that "the city now [has] more of a reputation for art than it does for being a retirement center – that's a huge shift for a

relatively short period of time. I'm happy that when most people mention St. Petersburg, they think of the arts."

Now, as the city's arts culture moves into 2023 and beyond, Atherholt has started to shift into his own well-deserved retirement. "We've moved up to Harrisburg, PA (my mother is 30 minutes from there) and we have an RV in the Poconos already," he said.

Atherholt looks forward to doing some writing, spending time with his five dogs, and "perhaps helping a museum or two should the opportunity present itself." He anticipates exploring "fabulous restaurants, charming cities and towns, and mountains," and notes that there is "just enough sunshine" there to mix with the seasons, and that they are within driving distance of the Jersey Shore.

Atherholt also hopes to spend some time travelling. He's already been to 35 countries and holds a dual citizenship with the United Kingdom. As a professed devotee of all things Scottish, travel plans include "bouncing back and forth over there."

Though he has worked hard to expand the arts, Atherholt says there is more work to be done in St. Pete. He hopes that future plans include more affordable housing, which, he adds, "is being addressed and is in good hands."

For the artists, Atherholt says he would like to see "some type of stipend paid to artists in some form or capacity. I also think there is an opportunity for another niche museum or two – perhaps contemporary art, perhaps pottery. And I think expanding the endowment for the arts, to benefit all of the city's organizations, is vital. I know there is an angel somewhere in St. Pete who will consider it in their estate planning."

As he shifts gears into retirement mode, one of his concluding thoughts is how much he "enjoyed very much just 'being' in St. Pete – by that I mean not attending anything special for work, just living in the moment, perhaps grabbing a drink at a bar that included art and running into people I know," he said. "It was also very special talking with artists and especially in their studios. They're incredibly wonderful human beings and sharing this space and time with each and every one of them truly has been a joy." ●

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# Helping Immigrants in a Nicer Florida

Lynn Lotkowitz

Since I retired seven years ago, volunteering with new English learners has been my passion. I've participated in several international programs through Global Volunteers in Cuba, Romania, and Greece, practicing conversational English with students. And, until they closed their doors in December 2021, I had many great experiences volunteering with students from all over the world in ESOL classes for immigrants at the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center at Mirror Lake in St. Petersburg.

After much research, I recently connected with Dr. Maya Lane, president and founder of NicerFL, Florida Newcomer Immigrant Educational Center, Inc. Dr. Lane manages programs in Hillsborough, Pinellas, Sarasota, and Manatee counties with the mission of "helping immigrants overcome personal, professional, and cultural challenges of integration through individual tutoring and mentoring." The program has combined about 100 students and 40 tutors.

Dr. Lane's focus and dedication to this nonprofit is impressive. She encourages independence and imagination from volunteers, making it a challenging and fun experience. Dr. Lane, who immigrated from Bulgaria, understands the isolation and uncertainty these students face. Her background is teaching English for the last 30 years in public schools and colleges, including USF. She has an agreement with USF Tampa where the students can do internships with NicerFL, and she is hoping to partner soon with USF St. Pete and St Petersburg College.

I've been volunteering at the Pinellas program since it opened about six weeks ago. It's a welcoming environment, free to students of all ages, and the current group of students are from Russia, Ukraine, and Hungary.

The two students I'm currently tutoring, Sofiia and Alexander, are from Ukraine and have been in the United States about two months. They speak some English from classes they took in Ukraine but are eager to improve their language skills and enter the workforce as soon as possible. We work on increasing their vocabulary, do mock interviews, and just get to know each other. Recently we talked about Halloween, Easter, and Thanksgiving traditions. We text once or twice a week to plan for what we will focus on in our next session and discuss what's important to them.

As a volunteer, I especially enjoy the format as it allows for some creativity. Each session is about what the student wants help with, not the tutor following a preset lesson plan. Because each student has different needs, each tutor tailors their session to that group or individual. Some just need to be pointed in the right direction – how and where to get a driver's license or apply for a social security card. Others have little or no English. Meeting at the Barbara S. Ponce Library has the added benefit of offering students an opportunity to use the library facilities like computers, printers, and reference materials.



Founder Dr. Maya Lane works with students at NicerFL.



Above left: NicerFL volunteer Ellie Wojtowicz and students. Above right: Ukrainian student Sofiia proudly displaying her new Florida driver's license.



Sofiia and Alexander tell me they found out about NicerFL via a Ukrainian Facebook group and were introduced to Dr. Lane who invited them to participate in the weekly conversation class. Sofiia says, "Our tutor teaches us new vocabulary and helps us with assimilation in many ways like where to grocery shop, buy furniture, and important little things. In our free time, we enjoy most going to Treasure Island to watch the sunset." Both Sofiia and Alexander are eager to assimilate in every way. Their goal is to improve their English, understand our culture, and to be part of the greater St. Petersburg community.

"What is so impressive about America is the scale of everything," Sofiia says. "The United States is so big, with different time zones and such varied job opportunities. The most difficult thing is waiting for working documents as we are eager for employment. Everything else is clear to us."

As a tutor, working with NicerFL has been rewarding in so many ways. It puts a real face on what we see in the news every day. Sofiia and Alexander are so appreciative and positive about the time we share, and thank me several times at the end of each class. I often leave with tears in my eyes. I am appreciative of the insight and understanding I have gained about their country and its people. And I am happy to be small part of making this monumental change in their lives a little easier.

When my fellow volunteer Dale and I spoke recently, he was on his way to donate furniture to one of his students. Dale tells me, "I try to put myself in their shoes. Tutoring the Russian immigrants I work with is one of the highlights of my week and I am moved by their life experiences." He tells me he hopes after each session they feel they've learned a little more English and feel more optimistic about their new life in the United States.

NicerFL volunteer and St. Petersburg resident Ellie had this to say about the program: "Each week the experience of tutoring immigrants impressed upon me how lucky I am to learn from them. While they are building vocabulary, I am equipped with lessons in empathy, the immigration system, and the expansion of my worldview. I support young adults on the job hunt by reviewing resumes, and engage children with games of charades, memory matching, and 'I Spy.' I am proud to participate in the community this program fosters."

Volunteer Linda from South Pasadena agrees, adding, "The refugees I've been working with are from Ukraine and Russia at the beginner level. My students are resilient and determined. It's a rewarding and inspiring experience."

These newcomer students want to learn but are often dealing with personal and employment obligations and cannot attend other scheduled classes available in the county. Others, especially the beginning speakers, may struggle in large classes. The NicerFL program offers a good alternative – an easy, welcoming environment that sets the stage for a successful learning experience. ●

Learn more about volunteering or donating at [nicerfl.org](http://nicerfl.org). The program is currently looking for classroom space in St. Petersburg and welcomes new partnership opportunities.



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# Art for the New Year

*Brandy Stark*

Now we come upon the months of love and luck – of the Irish! We’ve got a sampling of some of the new and original art to discover in St. Pete in the new year.

## Galleries

**ArtLofts:** *Valentwe’en 2023: Kiss of Death*. 10 5th Street South, second floor. Opening reception February 11, 5-9 pm; 12-4 pm Saturdays and by appointment through February 28. Brandyb Stark132@gmail.com.

This marks the 8th annual holiday combining concepts of second Halloween with gothic romance. This year, the show features those sexy, powerful, and predatory paranormal creatures: vampires! The opening reception is during Second Saturday Artwalk. Be sure to come attired in your best vampire costume and support the local arts scene!

**Arts Education Center:** *The Warehouse Arts District presents Cinematic Dance: Dance Like the Stars in Your Favorite Movies*. 515 22nd Street South. February 4, March 4, and April 1, 5-7 pm. \$60 per workshop or \$150 for the whole series. Info@wadastpete.org or 727-256-0821.

Calling all dance lovers for this short series based on film choreography. There are three two-hour dance workshops that include brief screenings of popular movies (examples include *Singing in the Rain* and *La La Land*), followed by dance lessons to learn the choreography. All skill levels welcome.

**Studio Public House:** *More or Less*. 2950 Central Avenue. Visit website for hours at [thestudiopublichouse.com](http://thestudiopublichouse.com) or 727-873-6992.

Twenty-four artists are split into two groups: 12 representing the concept of “more,” and 12 representing concepts of “less.” The show space is also a restaurant serving fun, artistic food!

## Art Centers

**Morean Art Center:** 719 Central Avenue. Various events. [Moreanartscenter.org](http://Moreanartscenter.org) or 727-822-7872.

*Wonder in the Wild: Photographic Works by Curtis Anderson Jr. + Stefan Jennings Batista*. Both artists are graduates of the Ringling College of Art and Design and their works speak to the pursuit of meaning and



*Agueda Sanfiz's The Other Pandemic gallery talk focuses on the artist's experience with the loss of her sister in 2020.*



*Nneka Jones painting on blown glass disc at Florida CraftArt.*



*Tom Kramer's Forever Changed (The Palladium Series) explores images created at the Palladium Theater featuring the interchange between the dancers and lighting technicians.*

the connection between nature and a higher power. “Both artists strive to achieve balance while touching on themes of identity, mental health, a sense of meaning and belonging within the unknown.”

*Agueda Sanfiz: The Other Pandemic*. January 19, 6 pm. This free gallery talk focuses on the artist’s experience with the loss of her sister in 2020. Though

a heavy topic, the Morean notes that “each frame is imbued with love and tenderness, drawing us, the viewers, into her story of how to celebrate a life while even while mourning its loss during epic times.”

*Tom Kramer: Forever Changed (The Palladium Series)*. This exhibit explores images created at the Palladium Theater in downtown St. Petersburg, featuring the interchange between the dancers and the lighting technicians over a period of four days. It highlights the COVID era, which hit the arts community particularly hard. Tom Kramer, who passed away in 2022, created this last series to anticipate how the people in the images will interact. His works can be found in the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg.

**Florida Craftart:** *Clearly Collaborative: Masters of Craft Meet a Master of Glass*. 501 Central Avenue. January 27–March 11. 727-821-7391, [Floridacraftart.org](http://Floridacraftart.org).

This exhibition of original glass and multi-media sculptures was created through an exceptional collaboration between nine multi-media master artists/makers and established glass master Duncan McClellan. Collaborations include crafters Sue Shapiro (ceramics), Nneka Jones (fiber), and John Mascoll (wood).

## Events

**Museum of Fine Arts:** *60th Diamond Anniversary Gala, “A Night to Remember.”* February 11, 7 pm. Tickets are \$250 each. [Stuartsociety.org](http://Stuartsociety.org) or email [RSVP@StuartSociety.org](mailto:RSVP@StuartSociety.org).

On November 29, 1962, the Stuart Society was formed, named after the founder of the Museum of Fine Arts, Margaret Acheson Stuart, and the guild worked to support the Museum of Fine Arts. This year they present a 1960s-themed gala with a 17-piece orchestra, gourmet food, celebrity impersonators, a DJ, and more. Celebrity designer, Ian Prosser, of Botanica Design Studio, will transform the museum into a ‘60s scene.

**Williams Park:** *The 10th Annual Localtopia*. 350 2nd Avenue North. February 18 (rain date February 25). 10 am-5 pm. [localtopia.keepsaintpetersburglocal.org](http://localtopia.keepsaintpetersburglocal.org)

This year’s event hosts 300 local businesses and is the largest gathering yet, including a wide assortment of artists, local small businesses, food, music, and more. ●

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hugely popular, TECO Line Streetcar and go all the way to Ybor City, exploring stops in Channelside and Sparkman Wharf along the way.

Boats are great, but can we get excited about a bus? Over the past year it would be hard to miss the lane changes and new platforms along 1st Avenues North and South that are part of PSTA's new SunRunner, which launched in October. By now, residents might know that the new Bus Rapid Transit route can get them from downtown to the beach in 35 minutes (a journey that used to take an hour on the Beach Trolley).

More significant than the quick ride to the beach is that trips to the Edge District, Kenwood, and Grand Central take less than 10 minutes from downtown. It's designed like light rail; buses pass every fifteen minutes, so there's never a wait. The dedicated lane means the bus bypasses traffic and the platform speeds the boarding process for everyone, particularly those with mobility challenges. The new route is free for the first six months and ridership has been beyond expectation. But here are a few things people might not know about getting around – and out – of St. Pete.

Bringing your bike is getting easier. Typical buses have bike racks on the outside front of the bus that can hold two bikes. But the SunRunner buses are different. The bike racks are *inside* the bus and feature a contraption that locks on the front wheel to lift the front of the bike vertically, securing it and saving space. If the racks are full, just stand with your bike, New York-subway-style. The Cross Bay Ferry also welcomes bikes, so you can bring your own wheels to the Riverwalk.

Paying for your bus ride is simple. As mentioned, the SunRunner is free through mid-April, but you don't have to worry about exact change to ride any bus. A transit app called Flamingo allows users to load money into the app. Just scan your phone



The SunRunner makes getting around part of Pinellas easier without a car.

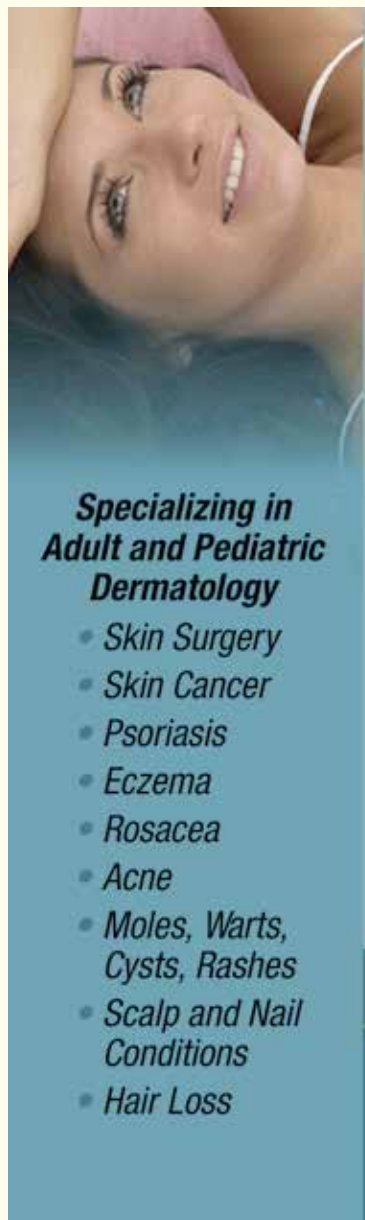


The Kile family made an early morning inaugural ride on the new SunRunner.

when you board and the fare is deducted from your Flamingo account. Once you hit \$5 for the day, your rides are free. The app works in Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Hernando counties. It's easier than calling an Uber. You can stay connected, too. The SunRunner has free wi-fi and each seat has a USB charging port.

Yes, the SunRunner's closest stop to the Old Northeast is down at 5th Street and 1st Ave North. For some of us, that's a 10–15-minute bike ride away. Another option is the bus running up and down Fourth Street. Like the SunRunner, Route 4 runs at 15-minute intervals during peak times. Route 38 running up Beach Drive will take you past the Northeast Publix all the way to Tyrone Mall and leaves once each hour.

The TECO Line Streetcar running between Downtown Tampa and Ybor City is now free.



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Jon and Anna catch the SunRunner to dance classes at the YMCA.



Provincetown III pulls up for the Cross Bay Ferry ride.

Heading to the beach? Yes, you can bring your beach chairs, coolers, and anything else you can carry with you. You'll get there faster and save time and money not trying to park. Also, you can bring your pet on PSTA buses, as long as they're in a carrier.

But, do these rides really replace the car in real life? During COVID, my family downsized to one car. For a while we were able to stagger our kids' activities so that all the running around could be done with one vehicle. But eventually we hit a regularly scheduled conflict, for which the SunRunner is the perfect solution. Now we frequently use it to get to the YMCA for dance classes. It typically takes us 15-20 minutes to get to the YMCA by car. Using a combination of SunRunner and bicycles, we've made the trip in as quick as 28 minutes. Is buying and insuring a second car worth saving 10-20 minutes a dozen times a month? To some it might be, but now we have the choice. Our ballerina thinks riding the SunRunner to dance is a special treat.

Another example of its usefulness came when we had visiting family. We parked (for free using the ParkMobile app) in the SouthCore garage (1st Avenue South and 1st Street), had coffee at Craft Kafe on Central, bought books at Tombolo out at 22nd Street, visited art galleries in the Warehouse Arts District, and then stopped at Dr. BBQ on the way back. Without the SunRunner we would have needed two cars and great luck with parking.

St. Petersburg is in danger of being a victim of its own popularity. Changing the way people get around, reducing the burden of parking on businesses, and giving people a reason to leave their home or hotel without their car is the key to smart growth. Perhaps one day we'll have a commuter ferry like the one we rode from Hingham to Boston, that carried tourists, but catered to businesspeople.

Public transportation has long been the Tampa Bay Region's weakness. It took years of planning to win the federal and state grants that got the SunRunner off the drawing board. St. Pete has joined 26 other US cities with Bus Rapid Transit, including Austin, Cleveland, Albuquerque, Chicago, Nashville, and San Antonio. More than just a good system, it offers an example of what's possible if we embrace different solutions to old problems. ●

Find more about the SunRunner and other local public transportation at [psta.net](http://psta.net), or the ferry at [thecrossbayferry.com](http://thecrossbayferry.com).

**More than just a good system,  
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# Remembering St. Pete's Long-Lost Trolleys

Monica Kile

As my husband and daughter ride their bikes to the closest SunRunner stop every Tuesday evening (see cover article in this issue), I find myself lamenting the loss of St. Petersburg's streetcar system, a line of which once ran from Coffee Pot Bayou to downtown, along Locust Street, passing our house on 17th Ave NE. I frequently come across references to the trolley, or streetcar line (terms used interchangeably here in St. Pete and elsewhere), when I'm researching historic homes in newspaper archives. Proximity to the line was a popular selling point for houses, and phrases like, "three blocks from car line" abound in old real estate advertisements. (In a wonderful example of how life comes full circle, current real estate ads similarly mention their proximity to the SunRunner line!)

St. Pete's streetcar system was born in 1901 as the St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway Company, the brainchild of early St. Pete businessman F.A. Davis. A successful publisher of medical journals in Philadelphia, and a risk-taker by nature, Davis moved to St. Pete in 1897 and founded the city's first electric company, followed later by the famous "electric pier," a precursor to today's municipal pier. (For more on the history of the pier, see Will Michael's cover story.) Proposing a trolley line in a city of fewer than 2,000 people seemed foolish, but the first line opened on New Year's Day in 1905. The original line ran along Central Avenue, turned south at 9th Street, and continued down to 11th Avenue South. Later that same year, the route was extended to Tangerine Avenue (today's 18th Avenue South), before heading out to Gulfport, then known as Veteran's City. By 1913, a line ran straight down Central Avenue to Boca Ciega Bay, which real estate developers happily used as transportation for the droves of tourists interested in buying property in the Sunshine City.

Both the Tangerine Line and the Jungle Line became tourist excursions in their



Horses, trolleys, cars on Central Avenue in the early 1900s

Courtesy of Florida Memory

own right, traveling through the exotic, dense Florida foliage where passengers could pick oranges directly off the trees. Fishermen were known to string their catch on the front of the trolley on the way back to town to show off the day's catch, adding to St. Petersburg's image as a city of leisure.

By 1915, a line ran north along 9th Street to 34th Avenue North, as well as through the North Shore development (today's Old Northeast) to Coffee Pot Bayou. Despite the demand for the streetcar line, it went bankrupt in 1919 prompting the city to take it over as a municipal service in 1920. Throughout the next decade the line was popular

enough that some trolleys were standing-room-only during peak hours, but the Great Depression and the increasing affordability of personal cars and gas-powered buses caused a decrease in ridership in the 1930s.

The line enjoyed a surge in use during World War II, when the city was full of military trainees and the rationing of gas and rubber impacted the availability of buses. Over 100 trolley operators were employed by the municipal streetcar line during WWII, including 14 women, but the future of the line was bleak. Post-war, as new neighborhoods were designed around automobiles, the city noted a steep decline in trolley use. In 1947, the city council voted to phase out the streetcars; within six months, most had been taken out of circulation. The final trolley ran through St. Petersburg's streets on May 7, 1949. Its windows were draped in black crepe, and it bore a sign that teased "Not Dead, Just Retired."

Will those streetcars ever come out of retirement? Not likely. The infrastructure for the streetcar lines has long since been removed. But the 21st century versions – bus rapid transit and light rail – offer tantalizing visions of a future where residents (including my husband and dancing daughter) can board public transit within just a few blocks of their house. ●

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# Ball in the Family

Abby Baker

Back in the summer of 2020, a group of pre-teen boys in St. Petersburg were absolutely cooped up, unbelievably bored, and itching for something to do amidst the pandemic.

Seventeen-year-old Jonathan Shields' little brother called a friend to organize a casual basketball workout, headed by Shields, a St. Pete High School student who played for the school. A friend called a friend, and another, and eventually Shields found himself at the head of a team of 12 younger kids at Denver Park in Shore Acres.

"It was just something to do," Shields said. "My 10-year-old little brother had a ton of energy, so my mom had the idea to put together an outdoor workout with nine of his friends." It started out as a casual outdoor workout, coached by Shields and his friend Tim Reilly. "But then I was like, 'Hey, these kids are pretty good,'" Shields said, laughing.

The team members are all ages 13 to 15. Signing up to play in an Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) team is only about \$100 per tournament, so registration fees and jerseys are an easy split. And so, the St. Pete AAU Basketball Team was born in the summer of 2020. Though the two older founders have since gone off to college, they return home and coach the league without fail. "It was crazy – the kids clicked right away," Shields said. "We had a real family feel; it was sad how fast the first summer went. But we always come back together."

## The Team

Fourteen-year-old Zack Spinazzola has played in other AAU leagues before, but this one is close to the heart. "It's like all my best friends, and when we get together, it's family," he said. "Jonathan trusts me a lot, and when there's something he needs to tell the whole team, he tells me to tell them."

Though ninth-grader Spinazzola is one of the boys who had experience, not all the team members did. Jake Starling, another ninth-grader who joined the



"It's like a family, being with the kids," said coach and college student Jonathan Shields (back row, second from left).



Jonathan Shields, left, and Jake Starling



The team practices in Denver Park, in Shore Acres.



This St. Pete-based AAU Basketball team re-groups every summer when coaches Jonathan Shields and Tim Reilly get home from college.

impromptu camp when it originally formed, says this team is what fueled his love of basketball. He wants to eventually attend Florida State University, and he hopes to continue playing basketball there.

"I kind of fell in love with it; it's the only sport I do now," Starling said. "I love the pizza and swim parties we go to, too." Starling's mother, Bekki, added that the experience has been a win-win for the kids and the coaches. "They take these boys up to Orlando, and they're just great with them," she said. "They play against much older kids. Some of them have beards."

## Next Up: A Championship?

Talk to any of the boys on the team, and they're bound to bring up their near-championship status in the first 10 minutes. The team has made it to the championship game but has yet to get that big win.

According to Shields and the team, that's the goal for 2023. "I'm ready to regroup and have fun, and win that championship," Spinazzola said. "We're so, so close."

In addition to their summer reunions, the kids went to visit Shields at his college basketball game in Chicago last year. Reuniting – and for some kids, seeing snow for the first time – was an unforgettable experience. "It made me happy to see him," Spinazzola said. "It always does."

They have the heart, and the skills. The only thing this team needs, they say, is a better home court.

"Someone please help renovate Denver Park public court," Shields said. "Kids fall and get stitches – it's been the same since I was seven years old. If someone knows someone at the mayor's office, we'd love to see some renovations here." ◆

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# THE DATZ CUBAN

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# Living Color: Celebrating St. Pete's Murals in the Northeast



Tom Stovall is responsible for some of the largest public art works in Pinellas, like these murals at the Northeast Water Reclamation Facility.

Aaron Tullo is the local muralist responsible for this monster of a watch.

Abby Baker

Drive over St. Pete's downtown district atop I-275 N, and you'll look down on a city painted with murals, street art, and zany signage, all caressing the Sunshine City in a trendy blanket of art. But what about the neighborhoods surrounding downtown?

The Historic Old Northeast and nearby neighborhoods are becoming more colorful every day, as murals pop up on walls and in unexpected places, such as the Northeast Water Reclamation Facility.

Zippering by this new public art, it's easy to forget the intricate – and sometimes goliath – works were created by people, oftentimes local. In a sea of talented artists, here's a few whose creations you may recognize.

## Reclaiming the NE Water Reclamation Plant

St. Pete muralist Tom Stovall is responsible for some of the largest public art works in Pinellas. But he never really got in on the downtown mural explosion, mainly because he doesn't want to paint "flat walls." The two mangrove and sky-wrapped water reclamation tanks at the Northeast Water Reclamation Facility are his handiwork.

"Doing something that large, I had to do something that was detailed, but not too detailed," Stovall said. "I could still be there painting."

He completed the work essentially alone and finished his wildlife-themed pieces in 2018, after several months of circling the domes. One tank holds seven million gallons, the other, 10 million. While it was a challenge, to say the least, Stovall had some experience – he painted the Crescent Lake water tower in the '90s. And he's not done yet. He's currently painting the Dunedin Curlew water tower.

## Music & Murals

Some might say St. Pete-based artist Cecilia Lueza is in her blue period. Her "Music & Me" piece, a towering blue vision painting the Music and Me childhood education center took two weeks to complete. The sweeping lines and childlike whimsy enveloping this piece were intentional, the artist says.

"My style is the result of my lifelong fascination with the visual effects of color and the natural world. Most of my murals are designed to activate the walls with swooping color blends or undulant shapes that evoke brightness and positive energy," said Lueza.

Music and Me is a place for children, but anyone can drive by and admire the bright blue creation at 1507 4th St. N.

"Each mural conveys a different feeling, depending on the circumstances under which they were created. It's always good feelings," Lueza said. "This mural, in particular, warms my heart because it is inspired by children, music, and innocence."

## Watch it

A head-turner for sure, the vintage pocket watch endlessly floating on the Hess Fine Art and Old Northeast Jewelers building is a local staple. Unbeknownst to many, the giant timepiece was one of the first few murals that artist Aaron Tullo created.

Its old-fashioned renderings and ingrained details are akin to the types of watches that Old Northeast Jewelers specializes in.

## Angels and Demens

"It's one of my favorite murals that I've done," said St. Pete artist Derek Donnelly. "It never got a lot of attention for some reason." Hard to say why, considering Donnelly's "Angels and Demons" piece (coloring the wall of Cut-Ups Hair & Nail Salon at 2601 9th St. N., St. Pete) is surreal with a historical background.

In 2017, the Crescent Heights Neighborhood Association commissioned Donnelly, known as Saint Paint, to create a mural, but gave him complete control over the concept. After two weeks of painting, St. Pete's Peter Demens was resurrected.

Demens, the man Demens Landing Park is named after, is a founding father of St. Petersburg. Once upon a time (the 1880s), Demens was a Russian exile who opened up this piece of Florida with his Orange Belt Railway. He now lives on in Donnelly's street art, and the local artist merged Demens' face with an Indigenous woman.



"Angels and Demens" is a homage to St. Pete founder Peter Demens and the Indigenous people that lived on this land long before development.



"Music and Me" was created with artist Cecilia Lueza's signature blue hues.

"Normally, I do eye candy, but this one is a little conceptual; there's a deeper meaning behind it," Donnelly said. "This one is probably more 'me' than the pieces that people know me by."

The native St. Pete artist is known for many of the city's works, including the Sirata Beach Resort mural, the purple octopus "Champa Bay Odyssey" mural at Countryside Mall. He also made history by painting a mural, licensed as an NFT, in the first-ever US home to be sold as an NFT in Gulfport.

As for the now six-year-old "Angels and Demens" piece, it's still one of Donnelly's favorites. "A lot of people don't know the history of St. Pete," Donnelly said. "I think it's important. I've never lived anywhere else; I've been a '727' area code [even] back when it was all '813.'" ♦

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# NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF COMMUNITY ... 1911-2011

## ST. PETE'S JEWEL ON TAMPA BAY

Rick Carson, editor • rickcarson1@gmail.com

### Roaring '20s Candlelight Tour

The 24th Annual Candlelight Tour of Homes in the Historic Old Northeast on Sunday, December 11 was the most popular tour to date with approximately 1,600 guests enjoying the six homes all built in the 1920s. The Roaring '20s-themed tour featured houses ranging from classic Craftsman bungalows to a Mediterranean Revival home in Granada Terrace.

The annual event is one of the most popular home tours in the Tampa Bay area because it features homes in a neighborhood known for its dedication to historic preservation and the holiday decorations that often wow attendees. "You can't beat the combination of beautifully restored historic homes all decked out with seasonal charm," said Nick Bell, President of HONNA. "There's a tangible sense of pride in the Historic Old Northeast, and it's very apparent in the homes featured on the tour."

The Candlelight Tour committee began working on the 2022 event in late summer, selling ads, recruiting homes and volunteers, and charting a communications and advertising strategy. "It definitely takes a



village – or in this case a neighborhood – to produce the event," Nick said. "We had over 120 awesome volunteers who devoted a great amount of time to making the tour successful. Our objective is to provide our guests with a complete experience of a fun afternoon and evening in the Old Northeast as well as educating the public about the history and architecture of the neighborhood." Of course, without the willingness of the homeowners to open their homes and the labor of love getting their homes ready for the event, none of this would even be possible. Many thanks go out to the homeowners! And extra thanks to Westminster Palms for being "tour central" and for the hospitality and refreshments their residents provided to tour guests.

The "complete experience" this year expanded beyond the six classic homes to include a block party with food trucks and

vintage autos and live musical performances at each of the homes. Because of the popularity of the tour, lines can form at the homes. Having live music helped entertain the guests while they waited to enter the residences. Post-tour feedback has been very positive, with many guests saying they enjoyed the additional tour activities.

A portion of the proceeds from the tour benefit a local organization chosen by the HONNA board of directors each year. This year's beneficiary was CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse). A majority of the remaining funds will be used to help replenish the Old Northeast's beautiful canopy of tree-lined streets.

Ideas for the 2023 silver anniversary tour are already being floated, and the committee will be keeping its eyes open for potential tour homes. "We believe it's an honor to have your home featured on the tour," Nick explained, adding that "it showcases the love and dedication required to renovate and maintain homes built when St. Pete was still wet-behind-the-ears. And it promotes one of the most beautiful neighborhoods in the city."

~ Sharon Kantner

### Very Special Holiday Homes

HONNA thanks all the homeowners who participated in the home decorating contest by gloriously lighting up the Old Northeast. Winners' photos are on our website!

#### Best Lighting

Chuck and Kathy Prather  
215 5th Avenue NE

#### Most Entertaining

Lydia and Paul Ladwig  
415 15th Avenue NE

#### Best Holiday Message

Aaron Jamison  
516 17th Avenue NE

#### Kids Favorite

Vickie and Chris Webber  
157 12th Avenue NE

### Quarterly Meeting

HONNA's final quarterly meeting of the year was held Monday evening, November 14 at Westminster Palms. HONNA members voted on the slate of candidates for next year's board of directors. After receiving a report from our police department liaison (lock your cars!), we heard from Dean Hay, the city's urban forester and sustainability coordinator. He addressed three significant subjects impacting the neighborhood's beautiful tree canopy: St. Petersburg's tree inventory program; the urban forestry committee's new Citizen Forester program; and tree planting opportunities via the Community Services Neighborhood Partnership matching grant. A Q&A session followed.



At its December board meeting, the following officers were elected: Nick Bell, president (top left); Anna Broshears, vice president (bottom left); Sarah Conrad, secretary (bottom right); and Kerry Converse, treasurer (top right).

Nick moved to the Old Northeast in 2019 after visiting St. Petersburg and falling in love with its "big little city" atmosphere and its appreciation of historic neighborhoods. He and his partner, Devin, renovated a 1929 Colonial Revival home, the fourth historic home they have renovated in four different cities. Nick is now retired, but spent 25 years doing marketing for Silicon Valley companies. He has always taken an active position in civic matters and neighborhood associations in the various cities he has called home. In

addition to assuming the presidency, Nick is responsible for the association's communications, including HONNA.org, and serves on the Preservation committee and Candlelight Tour of Homes committee.

Anna and her husband, John, moved to St. Petersburg in 2016 when they bought and restored an historic Mediterranean-style home. Prior to the Florida move, she worked for 30 years at the Indiana University School of Medicine where she taught residents and medical students cytopathology. In addition to serving as HONNA vice president, Anna is chair of the Events committee and co-chair of the Candlelight Tour of Homes committee. She also serves on the board of the Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) and leads the CONA Codes Advisory Group.

Sarah was born and raised in St. Petersburg and completed her BS at the University of Florida. She spent time in Seattle, central Florida, and Washington, DC before falling in love with the unique, quiet charm of the Old Northeast and deciding to return to St. Pete in 2021. She is now a stay-at-home mom and can often be found walking her two young children around the neighborhood. Sarah is excited to help with neighborhood events and hopes to bring more family friendly activities to the ONE. She also is anxious to help promote the many benefits of becoming a HONNA member and increasing residents' involvement in our historic neighborhood.

After retiring from his job of 20 years as an Environmental Engineer for the City of Nashua, New Hampshire, Kerry and his partner, Jerry, moved to St. Petersburg in early 2022. Kerry first visited St. Pete about 10 years ago and fell in love with its character and vibe. Originally from western Massachusetts, Kerry has lived in the Boston area, New York City, and New Hampshire prior to moving here. He joined HONNA when he arrived and worked with neighbors and HONNA's Board to successfully resist a developer's desire to destroy the historic home next to his for a parking lot.

### Residents Prove You Can Fight City Hall – and WIN!

Well, perhaps not exactly fight City Hall, more like convince them to do the right thing when the odds are stacked against you. That's what happened December 7 during a six-hour Development Review Commission (DRC) hearing at City Hall when the DRC denied Belleair Development's desire to build a Panera Bread drive-through and demolish an historic home to pave the space for a parking lot on the 2800/2900 blocks of 4th Street N.



### HONNA Board Elects Officers

The HONNA board of directors for 2023 is Nick Bell, Anna Broshears, April Cabral, Sarah Conrad, Kerry Converse, Ben DeLozier, John Johnson, Onnie Jordan, Charleen McGrath, Doug O'Dowd, Robin Reed, and Kimberley Wolfe.



The struggle finally came down to that critical DRC hearing on December 7. What the DRC, the city's planning department and Belleair did not see coming was the amazing presentation prepared by the residents with the aid of HONNA board members. In addition to the formal presentation led by Angelina Emanuel (a retired assistant fire chief from Denver), the City Council chamber was filled with approximately 30 ONE residents who came to make sure their concerns were heard. Angelina and fellow presenters meticulously pointed out how city codes, the City's Comprehensive Plan, the 2050 vision plan and the Historic Old Northeast neighborhood plan all require commercial development to integrate with the neighborhood and to preserve St. Pete's special neighborhood character, especially historic neighborhoods like the Old Northeast. Read the full story at honna.org.

~ Nick Bell



### Another Successful Neighborhood Cleanup

We had a much cleaner waterfront park and neighborhood this round on November 5 thanks to our 24 volunteers of all ages who collected 105 pounds of trash!

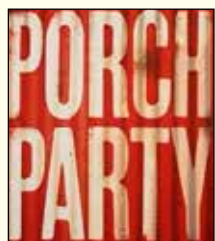
Most of it was small, plastic items that don't weigh very much, so while it was a "light" load there were lots of filled bags. We appreciate all the help to keep our neighborhood beautiful and clean. And a special thank you to the Keep Pinellas Beautiful and Waterfront Parks Foundation for their help with this event. Now that we're in a new year, look for the next cleanup date to join in.

~ Doug O'Dowd



### Holiday Party and Porch Parties

It wouldn't be the holiday season in the Historic Old Northeast without the annual HONNA members party at the Old Northeast Tavern on Monday evening, December 19. About 100 revelers turned out to enjoy pizza, salad, soft drinks and cookies, and the cash bar. It's always a great time to gather informally and share stories from the year and talk about what to expect in the neighborhood in the coming year. As usual, attendees were generous with their donations to HONNA's Candlelight Tour-benefitting organization. This year CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse) requested \$25 gift cards so their clients could use them to select Christmas gifts for their children. Party attendees contributed \$750 worth of gift cards. The party was one way to thank HONNA members for their support of our neighborhood organization. If you aren't a member, it's easy to join and help raise up the neighborhood we love (honna.org).



HONNA will kick off its more social side with the new year's first Porch Parties. We make it easy and fun for neighbors to get together the

third Friday of most months. Friends and neighbors gather at a resident's home between 7:30-10pm to catch up, meet new Old Northeast residents and reconnect with ones we've missed seeing. On Friday, January 20, our hosts will be Susan and John Arsenaunt, 245 7th Avenue NE. On February 17, the hosts will be Hugh and Deborah Gelch, 116 13th Avenue N. Light refreshments and water will be provided, but guests are encouraged to BYOB. For more information, visit HONNA.org/events.



### Residence Receives "Beautification Home of the Year" Award

The home of Nick Bell and Devin Carrillo was honored December 13 with the "Beautification Home of the Year" award at the 55th Annual City Beautification Awards ceremony held at the Sunken Gardens.

Nick and Devin bought the two-story brick Colonial Revival home at 106 14th Avenue NE in 2019. They renovated the interior, added a pool and period-appropriate wrought iron fence around the perimeter, and completely re-landscaped the property. The City Beautification Awards Program is an activity of the St. Petersburg City Beautiful Commission.

The commission's mission is to enhance and safeguard the beauty and sustainability of natural resources and city landscapes, thereby enriching the quality of life for St. Petersburg residents. ●

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Auguste Rodin, *Eve*, first modelled c. 1881, this cast 1968 (Musée Rodin 9/12), Bronze, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of B. Gerald Cantor Art Foundation, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



# Family Ties: Studio Grand Central Brings It Home

Jeannie Carlson

With just 43 seats, Studio Grand Central could be considered a little theater, but “intimate” and “engaging” are better descriptions for this unique venue, home to the Off-Central Players theater company, a “professional arts organization committed to providing instruction, development, and theatrical storytelling for St. Petersburg’s diverse community.”

The building located at 2260 1st Avenue South was home to the Andi Matheny Acting Studio for 10 years until siblings Ward Smith and Karen Riffe bought it in February 2021. The property, already complete with theater seating and lighting, had come on the market just a month before. The brother-and-sister team had been talking about the prospect of starting up a theater in downtown St. Petersburg for several years before it became a reality – even if the timing was terrible. Karen’s husband, Danny, was ill and ultimately passed away in June 2021. Running the studio has turned out to be part of the healing process for Karen.

“Deep inside, I was acting on something that I still can’t quite grasp,” Karen writes in a moving blog on the theater’s website about starting the Studio. “That life does go on and must go on even amidst the very worst of times... [Studio Grand Central] is a great way to stay busy and distracted. Sometimes, I’m lucky enough to get so into it, I’m actually having fun and forget for a few minutes about the despair. Maybe it is not the best time or the worst time, just the right time.” For the brother-and-sister team, it seems this may have always been in the cards.

“I am the ‘show’ and Karen is the ‘business,’” says Ward about how he and his sister collaborate to make this new enterprise work, though technically they both have roots in local performance. Their dad was Hugh Smith, an on-air broadcaster on Tampa Bay’s WTVT – Fox Channel 13. Growing up with a father who was a local celebrity, Ward had many opportunities to be on the set where his dad worked. Being exposed to television as a young boy, Ward decided that “this is how the magic is done.” He recalls thinking that any time he was at his father’s place of work, he just might bump into movie star John Wayne. After all, “John Wayne came out of the same box, [a television set], as my dad did,” says Ward.

The acting bug really got hold of Ward while he was at Leto High School in Tampa. Vince Petti was Ward’s teacher and mentor there, and convinced Ward that he had what it took to make a life in the theater.



Photo by Lara Jackson, courtesy of Studio Grand Central

The cast of Big Break’s Youth Stage production of The Wizard of Oz in March 2022

“Stay in the building” is the quote Ward remembers most from Vince. That meant even when it wasn’t possible to be in a production as an actor, to stay in the building doing whatever support work was available. Following Vince’s advice made it possible for Ward to learn the technical and managerial aspects of running theatrical productions. Assimilating all that knowledge has paid off in the running of their theater, and picture of Vince graces a wall in Studio Grand Central as a tribute.

When his sister refers to Ward as “The Talent,” she is spot on. Ward began his 35-year career as an actor in the US Army doing USO shows. With 50 stage

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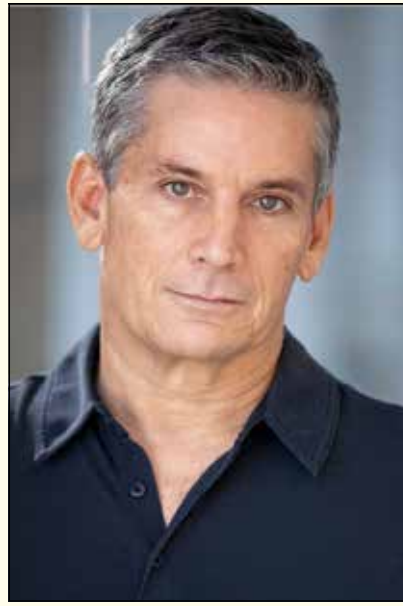
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A scene from the Studio's first production, Rasheeda Speaking

Photo courtesy of Studio Grand Central



Ward G. Smith

Ward now lives on 5th between 1st and Bay, “just on the line between Old Northeast and Downtown,” and Karen also lives in the area. They recently moved their mom into the Westminster, so work and family are all close by.

Six months after Karen and Ward bought Studio Grand Central, they opened the curtains on their first production in August 2021, *Rasheeda Speaking*. The play opened to good reviews, and they were in business.

Selecting plays for this intimate theater takes a good deal of forethought. It’s a type of IKEA-thinking adapted to theater. Ward refers to the space as his “sandbox.”

Ward’s approach as producing artistic director is to have very few “dark nights” when the theater isn’t open, so he’s amenable to whatever keeps his

“calendar with lots of squiggles on it.” He produces musicals, comedies, and dramas “as long as it fits in the space,” he says.

To fit in the space, productions must feature small casts and have the potential for scenes to work in the contained area. But most of all, Ward says he chooses “a work that speaks to an issue without being heavy-handed.” Playwrights, he says, can be local, unknown, or world-renowned – so long as the play meets the criteria.

Ward and Karen must be doing something right, however, because after only one year in business, the company’s production of *Something Clean* was nominated for awards in five categories by Theater Tampa Bay, including Best Ensemble, Best Actress, Best Lighting, Best Play, and Best Director (Ward). Going up against “heavy hitters” in professional theater in Tampa and St. Petersburg made it no small feat to be recognized in this way – a welcome addition to the Bay area’s theater scene – and only blocks away.

As Karen writes, “Ward and I are beyond excited to be right here, right now – working on this together. As Ward says, it is not a ‘Mom and Pop’ shop but ‘Brother and Sister,’ with way more tales to tell. Stay tuned.” ●

Early 2023 productions include, *Heathers: The Musical* January 27-29, *This is Our Youth* February 9-19, and *Native Gardens* in March. Call 727-202-7019 or visit [studiograndcentral.com](http://studiograndcentral.com) for more information.

productions to his credit, he is a member of AEA (Actors Equity Association). As a member of SAGAFTRA (Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists), Ward appeared in episodes of *Zoo*, *Nashville*, *Let’s Stay Together*, *Burn Notice*, *Army Wives*, *MacGyver*, and *The Right Stuff*. Add to that touring nationally as a stand-up comedian and a more recent position as the former artistic director at The Heather Theater in Tampa.

Knowing how much being introduced to acting at an early age impacted him, Ward opened an education wing to Studio Grand Central in the form of Big Break Youth Stage. Katie Calahan is the Education Program Director there for children ages 5 to 17. Ward likes the idea of contributing to the next generation of actors. “I am looking forward to employing [kids from his education program] in the future,” he says.

But it’s not all about performance at the Studio. A visual arts component – “The Gallery @ Studio Grand Central” – was part of Karen’s dream. “When Ward and I talked about a studio, it always included a visual art gallery space,” she writes. “I love a theme and the idea of displaying art to coincide with the ideas within a play. By combining these art forms in one space and with one theme, (hopefully), we create an even more interesting experience for the audience. And equally as important, it makes the Studio a place for all kinds of local artists to participate.”

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The original 1940 entrance in an historic photo



Original 1940's Turner's lettering was uncovered in renovation, now the History Center entrance.

approved a referendum ballot and voted for a one-time tax increase, making it possible for the City of St. Petersburg to purchase Sunken Gardens, safeguarding its future forever.

This past fall, Sunken Gardens celebrated the completion of a new History Center showcasing the attraction's interesting and quirky story. Colorful floor-to-ceiling display panels with photos, newspaper articles, and other items of interest are now on display in a small historic 1940s building that once served as the entrance to Sunken Gardens when it faced 18th Avenue.

With funding from the Florida Division of Historical Resources,

protect the fruit trees and plants when a dip in temperature threatened to bring frost to the area.

It was during this era that St. Pete's reputation as a tourist destination was in full swing and no visit to the city was complete without a stop at the gardens.

Birds from around the world were part of the attraction. There was the original flock of pink flamingos, as well as peacocks and two aviaries, including one that visitors could walk through. Dozens of blue and gold macaws, toucans, parakeets, cockatoos, myna birds, and roseate spoonbills dazzled visitors. Beauty pageants were common too, as were visits from celebrities like baseball greats Yogi Berra and Casey Stengel, and comedians Jonathan Winters and Danny Thomas.

When she wasn't roaming the gardens, Lee would explore the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant next door. The building had closed in the mid 1960s and the Turner family bought it, eventually turning it into a new garden entrance, along with the "world's largest gift shop" and the famous King of Kings wax museum depicting the life of Jesus. But before renovations began, it was a great big empty place for Lee to roam around.



An early souvenir guide



Making history come alive

In 1972, Lee's father sold his share of the family business to his brother Ralph, who took the gardens to the next level with even more unusual exhibits.

The gardens began breeding macaws, which were hand-raised and trained to skate, paint, and even play basketball during the popular bird shows. African pygmy goats, squirrel monkeys, and miniature kangaroos also entertained visitors, as did popular alligator-wrestling shows.

But unfortunately, by the mid-to-late 1980s, attendance at Sunken Gardens and all Florida roadside attractions began to dwindle as Orlando's Disney World became the most prominent tourist destination in the state. For nearly a decade the Turner family tried unsuccessfully to sell the venue to potential buyers, who envisioned an odd assortment of new developments – everything from townhomes to a nudist resort. Finally in 1999, St. Pete residents

Penny for Pinellas, Sunken Gardens Forever Foundation, and the City of St. Petersburg, Sunken Gardens staff worked with consultants to renovate the 440-square-foot building and bring it back to its former ambience, complete with colorful hexagonal floor tiles, beautiful tile roof, and large windows.

Jennifer Tyson, education and volunteer coordinator for Sunken Gardens, spearheaded the History



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A new orchid exhibit area is part of the History Center renovation.

Center project, working with the Turner family and Sunken Gardens volunteers to accomplish the enormous task of organizing artifacts and researching the history, dating all the way back to the beginning when George and Eula Turner first planted fruit trees in their backyard and later welcomed customers to Turner's Papaya Farm. (Read more about George and Eula's nearby historic home in Monica Kile's article "Inside and Underneath the Historic Home of Rachel and David Wein" on page 30.)

Lee had a big hand in helping bring the History Center to fruition. In 2018, after she retired from the Pinellas County School System, she finally had the time to look through a treasure trove of boxes she had inherited from her dad. Inside was a fabulous find: hundreds of old photos, family memorabilia, newspaper clippings, postcards, and promotional posters, all related to the gardens. She even found a few outstanding gems, such as love letters between her grandparents, George and Eula, excerpts of which are now included on the History Center display panels.

Like a detective, Lee was relentless in her quest to make sure that whatever was written about the gardens would be historically accurate. She went to

courthouses in Tampa and Clearwater to research early tax records and to local libraries to look at maps and read hundreds of old newspaper articles. "I was just trying to make sense of everything we had," says Lee. "And as I looked into the history more deeply, my ancestors became more real. I had known a little of their story, but I learned so much more about them, and that changed my experience of coming to the gardens as a child." One of the many interesting details she was able to clarify: Her grandfather purchased the garden property in 1911, not 1903. "It didn't change the story, but it was fun for me to discover," says Lee.

Last October, Mayor Ken Welch was among local officials who attended the new History Center ribbon cutting. In addressing the crowd, he commented that "as we change and grow as a community, the authenticity and the history of our city becomes even more important. The historical assets of our city must be preserved and maintained and that's why this history center is so important." ●

*For anyone who enjoys learning more about St. Pete's early history, a trip to the new Sunken Gardens History Center is worth it. Learn more at [sunkengardensfoundation.org](http://sunkengardensfoundation.org).*

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# Folk Art: A Love Story



Folk art is a passion for Tash and Emily.



Old Northeast residents Tash Elwyn and Emily Kieine have been collecting folk art for 30 years.



The angel that started it all

Cathy Salustri

It started with an angel. No, not a real angel – a folk angel. More accurately, a folk-art angel. Emily Kieine met Tash Elwyn at Emory University. “We had no money,” Emily recalls. “He was a cold caller for Ray Jay, and I worked for a nonprofit [Atlanta Preservation Center].” Emily was headed toward the world of historic preservation – in St. Petersburg, she’s known for her work with Preserve the ‘Burg – and Tash was still wet-behind-the-ears in the finance world (he’s still with Raymond James, now as vice president).

The one thing they knew about each other? “We liked art,” Emily said. They still do. As nearly starving students, they bought what art they could afford. When you see their home in the Old Northeast today, the idea of Emily and Tash as destitute college students seems laughable, but Emily says it’s true – they were broke.

“We couldn’t even eat turkey sandwiches, because we had no money,” she says of their co-ed days. However, for Emily’s birthday one year, Tash wanted to find something meaningful that he could afford. Enter a Baptist preacher, some of the best music from the ‘80s, and a trip to Summerville, Georgia.

In the early ‘90s, folk art “was becoming a thing,” Emily says. Folk art can encompass a broad range of media but is generally considered art that is unique to a certain culture, region, or community, and steeped in their histories and traditions. Folk artists themselves were becoming more widely known: In 1983, R.E.M. filmed the music video for their message-heavy single, “Radio Free Europe” at an artist’s studio in Summerville. The video included the band wandering through a bicycle tower in the artist’s garden. The following year, they asked that same artist to create the cover art for “Reckoning” (I.R.S. Records). The year after that, the Talking Heads released “Little Creatures” (Sire

Records), and the same artist created the cover for that album. That artist was Reverend Howard Finster.

Finster, a Baptist preacher who held tent revivals, started creating folk art in 1976. The story goes something like this: While painting a bicycle, some paint on his finger looked an awful lot like a person’s face, and Finster said at that moment a voice told him to “paint sacred art.” He was 60 years old. Before he died 25 years later, he would take that directive from on high and create more than 45,000 pieces of folk art – 46,991 pieces, to be exact. Finster showcased his work in Summerville studio, called Paradise Garden. Although he died more than two decades ago, Paradise Garden remains (paradisegardenfoundation.org) a tribute to the artist and “outsider,” or self-taught, art.

Today, folk art and outsider art can get pricey, but not nearly as pricey as a Monet or even a Duncan McClellan. “We’re not collecting Rembrandts or Dutch masters,” Emily says of the folk art in her home. “[Folk art has] become more collectible over time, but it’s still attainable to buy it.”

In the early ‘90s, it was even more so. “Southern, self-taught folk art was attainable,” Emily says. “It was in the ether.” So, for Emily’s birthday, Tash made a four-hour round trip from Emory to Summerville.

“He went to Howard Finster’s Paradise Garden and bought me the angel,” Emily says, referring to a small – less than a foot tall – angel sculpture in her living room. Tash paid \$50.

“There was a woman I knew that had a big one,” she remembers, and adds that Tash knew she wanted to have an angel sculpture like that one day. “That’s how I knew he loved me and how I knew I loved him,” she says, smiling.

Fast forward to now: They’re no longer broke college students, but they still seek out folk and outsider artists. “It’s kind of fun to have something together,” she says.

Today, their home is a tribute to those artists. It’s not the largest private collection – that honor likely goes to the House of Blues at Disney Springs in Orlando – but it’s impressive. Between their Old Northeast home and a home in Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, they have roughly 100 pieces of art. Every

piece they own comes from Southern artists. Tash and Emily know the story of each one. That’s largely due to Tash, Emily says.

With this type of art, there’s much to love, but one of the chief things about it the genre are the artists themselves. “That’s why I love it: the people who make it,” Emily says. “If you are driven to make art, then you can’t stop making art.”

Tash, though, enjoys drawing artists into conversations about their work, and the artists are often more than delighted to talk about it. “He’s more patient than I am,” Emily says of her husband.

Today, they could afford far pricier work, but their hearts remain with folk and outsider art. They could afford far pricier work, but their hearts remain with folk and outsider art. “I just love that it’s interesting, it’s textual; you can feel the person who made it,” Emily says. “I love the energy behind it. They’re trying to get this message across through their artwork.”

And, of course, among all the art they’ve collected throughout the South, the angel from 30 years ago still has a place of honor in their home. “To this day,” Emily says, “I’m still touched.”





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tourist attractions and amenities for residents. Shipping activities were relocated to Bayboro Harbor, adjacent to the current site of the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg Campus. The Railroad Pier was located just south of today's new St. Pete Pier. That area today is one of our signature downtown waterfront parks, Demens Landing.

The Railroad Pier and the Orange Belt Railway were eventually acquired by railroad magnate Henry B. Plant. Plant also had his own shipping interests, and those that were not a part of his system paid a special fee to use the pier. Some thought this wrong, including boatbuilder D.F.S. Brantley. In 1896, he built another pier named after himself to compete.

### The Brantley Pier

The Brantley Pier was 1,500 feet long, and a horse-drawn flat car was used to shuttle goods and passengers from the water's edge to and from moored ships at the pier's head. It also boasted a 34-room bathing pavilion, which proved highly popular. The Brantley Pier began the tradition of the downtown 2nd Avenue Northeast piers.

### The Electric Pier

In 1906, the Brantley Pier was replaced by the Electric Pier. This pier was developed by Frank Davis who owned the St. Petersburg Electric Light & Power Company and the St. Petersburg & Gulf Electric Railway, a streetcar utility. Davis used his ready access to electric power to line the pier with hundreds of electric lights. He also extended his streetcar operation all the way down the pier bridge, which stretched 3,000 feet into Tampa Bay. In the years before World War I, the Electric Pier became a major tourist attraction and a symbol of the new city of St. Petersburg.

### The Municipal Recreation Pier

The Electric Pier was succeeded in 1913 by the Municipal Recreation Pier. This was the first pier to accommodate automobiles. Various amenities were located along the pier approach, including an indoor swimming pool called the Spa, and the adjacent Spa Beach, an aquarium, a history museum, and a dance hall and banquet facility. Additional public facilities added through the years included a sandwich shop and tennis courts. Of note, a hangar was built in 1914 for the World's First Airline.

The location of a hangar on the pier approach at first may seem curious. However, the airline used "airboats" or what are now called seaplanes. On New Year's Day, 1914, pioneer pilot Tony Jannus flew the first flight of the world's first airline from the Central Yacht Basin by the pier across the bay to Tampa and back. Later, additional hangars were constructed for other seaplanes. (The new Pier includes a full-size sculpture of the first airliner, the Benoist Airboat, located west of the first airliner, the Benoist Airboat, located west of Doc Ford's restaurant.) The Great Hurricane of 1921 damaged the wooden Municipal Pier. While it was repaired, it was eventually replaced by the Million Dollar Pier.

During the era of segregation, African Americans were not welcome at the piers. They were restricted from use of Spa Beach, and a modest, ill-kept beach was designated for their use at Demens Landing. Today's Pier pays homage to the hard-won civil rights of African Americans with the *Bending Arc* floating net sculpture. The artist, Janet Echelman, titled the sculpture drawing upon Martin Luther King's words, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

### The Million Dollar Pier

Opened in 1926, the Million Dollar Pier with its Casino building at the east end was also a major tourist attraction for the city and a popular gathering space for residents. The pier extended 1,452 feet into the bay including the pier head, and accommodated a 100-foot-wide, two-lane bridge and a streetcar line that delivered passengers right into the Casino. The Casino included an observation deck, bait houses, and the WSUN radio station. The pier was called the "Million Dollar Pier" because that is almost exactly what it cost to build – \$998, 729.18 to be exact.

Despite the name, no gambling was allowed at the Casino, which served instead as a large gathering and entertainment area. Designed in the most popular architectural style in St. Petersburg in the 1920s, the Million Dollar Pier incorporated Spanish, Italian, and Moorish elements, rounding out the city's Mediterranean Revival style heritage. A solarium for nude sunbathing was constructed on the pier approach in 1930, and in 1954, a Senior Citizens Center was established with the help of Evelyn Rittenhouse and Doc Webb of the celebrated "World's Most Unusual Drug Store." (Rittenhouse was also a founder of the world-famous Kids and Kubs Senior Softball League, who still play at North Shore Park.) The Million Dollar Pier was demolished in 1967 due to deterioration and a desire on the part of some city leaders to see a modern replacement.

### The Inverted Pyramid

The Inverted Pyramid, with its radical, forward-thinking structure, was built on top of the 1926 pier head. It was designed by noted architect William Harvard, Sr. Use of an Inverted Pyramid shape at the pier head maximized building square footage as one ascended up its five stories and maximized the bay view from the shoreline. Completed and opened to the public in 1973, the iconic design continued the tradition of an over-water public gathering place and tourist attraction in downtown St. Petersburg for four decades. Associated with the Inverted Pyramid Pier was the tall ship *HMS Bounty*, which wintered for many years in St. Pete until it sank during Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

The new St. Pete Pier succeeded the Inverted Pyramid Pier opening in 2020. Its history is now in your hands. ●

*Historian Will Michaels was a member of the 2010 Pier Task Force and the Pier Alliance which developed options for renovating/replacing the Inverted Pyramid. He is also the chair of the Pier and Parks Committee for CONA. Find more Pier history in his book The Making of St. Petersburg.*



The Electric Pier. Note the street car at the end of the pier on the left.



The Municipal Pier was the first pier to accommodate cars.



The Casino at the head of the Million Dollar Pier



The HMS Bounty docked near the Inverted Pyramid Pier



The Inverted Pyramid Pier



The new Pier's history has yet to be written.



## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR



**Jim Strubbe**  
Cherry Street NE

**How long have you lived in St. Pete and where are you from originally?**

Here for 35 years; originally from Chicago.

**Favorite place to visit in St. Pete?**

North Shore Park

**Most interesting, enjoyable, or exotic vacation?**

Patagonia. We rented a car and drove north from the bottom of South America. Passed only three cars the entire day. And then we came to the Andes and the most spectacular mountains I have ever seen.

**Top two places in the world on your bucket list?**

The Dolomites and the Balkans

**What famous person, current or past, would you like to meet and why?**

I would like to meet someone from 20,000 years ago and see what their life was like and how they viewed the world.

**Favorite sport, recreational activity, or hobby?**

Gardening – being outside and watching things grow.

**A great movie you'd recommend or current TV series you are watching?**

*Pulp Fiction* is a weird and violent film, but very interesting.

**If you were a dog, what breed would you be?**

A mutt

**Tell us about a situation or a person who has inspired you.**

Travel has always inspired me; especially being off the beaten path.

**Current book you've read and would recommend?**

*Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari

**Tell us about an accomplishment, current or past, of which you are proud.**

Being a Special Forces Medic when I was in the service.

**Something people might not know about you?**

I'm not tall.

**What do you do for a living?**

**Or, if you are retired, tell us about your career.**

Trying to retire. Maybe by the time you read this.

**Tell us something about your family and pets.**

My wife, Tonya and I, and our two dogs, Buster and Toby. (Sweet dogs, but not good dogs.)



**Tonya Strubbe**  
Cherry Street NE

**How long have you lived in St. Pete and where are you from originally?**

Here for 35 years. I was raised about 25 miles outside Tuscaloosa, AL.

**Favorite place to visit in St. Pete?**

One of my very favorite places to go is the James Museum and I love Sunken Gardens. Although since my neighbors, Lauren and Luke, have put in a pool...

**Most interesting, enjoyable, or exotic vacation?**

My favorite trip was Gorilla Trek in Uganda's Bwindi Forest.

**Top two places in the world on your bucket list?**

Looking forward to seeing Scandinavia, also Thailand and Vietnam.

**What famous person, current or past, would you like to meet and why?**

I'd love to have tea with Eleanor Roosevelt. I imagine we'd laugh, and I'd listen a lot.

**Favorite sport, recreational activity, or hobby?**

I piddle with art, my piano, and reading. If I'm in the mood, I also like cooking.

**A great movie you'd recommend or current TV series you are watching?**

The TV show, *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*.

**If you were a dog, what breed would you be?**

A Great Dane

**Tell us about a situation or a person who has inspired you.**

My friends, whose quiet acts of kindness continually blow me away.

**Current book you've read and would recommend?**

*The Signature of All Things* by Elizabeth Gilbert

**Tell us about an accomplishment, current or past, of which you are proud.**

The opportunities that I've had to interact with kids at SPHS Library.

**Something people might not know about you?**

I moved to St. Thomas with no job and bought a sailboat without knowing how to sail.

**What do you do for a living?**

**Or, if you are retired, tell us about your career.**

Retired librarian at SPHS

**Tell us something about your family and pets.**

My husband, Jim, is a saint! My dogs, Buster and Toby, definitely are not.



**Bud Comstock**  
18th Avenue NE

**How long have you lived in St. Pete and where are you from originally?**

Bought in March of 2022 as a second home. My early life was in the Midwest, but

I moved to a suburb of Boston and spent most of my school years there. My other home is in Kittery, ME.

**Favorite place to visit in St. Pete?**

The Vinoy is a wonderful place, full of history and charm. Stayed there for the first time 20 years ago and keep going back. Now I live down the street.

**Most interesting, enjoyable, or exotic vacation?**

I cruised the French Polynesian islands on a 55-ft catamaran with nine other people, two of whom were friends. After a week I figured out I'm not much of a sailor and jumped ship at the Bora Bora Four Seasons for the final four days.

**Top two places on your bucket list?**

Tough choice as there are many, but Japan and Norway are right up there. Very different places, but so interesting. Norwegians are supposed to be the happiest people in the world. Be interesting to find out why.

**What famous person would you want to meet and why?**

Tom Brady seems like an interesting guy, down to earth, who must have so many great stories. We also share the love for the Triple Crown horse races.

**Favorite sport, recreational activity, or hobby?**

I do love boating and occasionally fishing. Nothing better than to be on the water on a beautiful day! Oh, antique cars are a close second and a hobby of mine.

**A movie you'd recommend, or TV show you're watching?**

*Better Call Saul* was a favorite and I was sorry to see it end this year. *Mortal* is kind of supernatural thriller set in Norway. Didn't get much notoriety, but was actually well made.

**If you were a dog, what breed would you be?**

Probably a German Shepherd. I had one growing up and they are great pets.

**Tell us about a situation or person who has inspired you.**

A good friend's son had a very serious brain aneurysm at 13. No one thought he would survive. He did survive and the two formed a non-profit organization years later, Daniels Music Foundation, that has been very successful. Their focus is disability awareness and spreading the healing power of music. Amazing story.

**Tell us about an accomplishment of which you are proud.**

As a single parent, I helped raise a son who has turned out to be a bright, caring, and nice person.

**Something that people might not know about you?**

Twenty years ago, I founded a live music production company and put on concerts with such bands as Peter Frampton, Journey, Disturbed, Three Doors Down, Poison, Godsmack, Dickie Betts, and many others.

**What do you do for a living?**

**Or, if you are retired, tell us about your career.**

I was on the sales/marketing/management side of things for companies in various industries such as industrial components, intellectual property, metal distribution. Now I'm volunteering and on some boards for different organizations.

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# Inside and Underneath the Historic Home of Rachel and David Wein

Monica Kile

Who doesn't love to peek inside other people's homes? My husband knows I'm far more likely to join him to walk the dog at *night*, when I can see into people's lighted living rooms and kitchens. There's something about getting a glimpse into other people's lives; seeing their choices in paint colors, art, and books. Whether they're watching PBS or Bravo. The best is when I see a kitchen that's messier than mine (a rare occurrence).

I'd been wanting a look inside the home of David and Rachel Wein (rhymes with Queen) ever since I'd learned that it had been built by George and Eula Turner, the founders of Sunken Gardens, and is one of the handful of houses in the city that has a basement. An acquaintance from the world of parenting in St. Pete, I bumped into Rachel while out walking our respective dogs, and I mentioned my interest in her house. After she told me that the Turner family used to divvy up the daily proceeds from the popular roadside attraction in the basement, I dropped some not-so-subtle hints about how much I'd like to go inside.

So, one recent December day, Rachel generously invited me over for a cup of coffee. I pretended to check my calendar and then ran right over.

Remember that feeling of satisfaction I mentioned when I see a kitchen that's messier than mine? That didn't happen at Rachel's. Rather, it was like walking into an issue of architectural digest, and then having coffee with its brilliant and fascinating editor. Instead of gloating over my superior housekeeping skills, I walked out questioning all my life's choices. I kid, but Rachel Wein and her husband, Dr. David Wein, just might reduce George and Eula to the second most interesting couple to live in the home. And their house is a perfect blend of modern design and historic ambience.

Built in 1950 for George Turner Sr., directly across the street from the original front gate of Sunken Gardens, the home's proximity to the popular attraction means it benefits from a unique geographical quirk. The road that it sits on, 18th Avenue North, dead ends behind Sunken Gardens' parking lot, meaning cars can't use it as



a thru-way to 4th Street. But the charming gate that borders the parking lot means that pedestrians *can*. This shaded, quiet nook of a street feels, as Rachel told me, "both secluded and urban. It's so close to so much, but also tucked away and hidden." The Weins three kids can ride their bikes safely on the quiet street, and their parents can slip through the gate for a quick bite on busy 4th Street.

Remember that basement I mentioned? It was even cooler than I'd expected. I've never actually been in a basement in St. Petersburg, not even the most famous one, in the Snell Arcade. We all know the reason we don't have basements: flooding! But the Wein's basement has never had water in it, and it was full of all the things I keep in my *garage*, which prevent me from keeping my actual car there. It's fitting that George Turner, a plumber who drained a series of sinkholes to create Sunken Gardens, built a home with a dry basement.

The Wein's basement is said to have been used for counting and dividing the day's take from Sunken Gardens. George Sr. and his wife died roughly a decade after building the house, and ownership first passed to their daughter and later, to their grandson Jim, the child of their son Ralph. Jim and his two brothers had taken ownership of the Gardens in 1979, and I suspect it was these three brothers that were divvying up the

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day's proceeds. It certainly felt like Fort Knox in the cement block basement, a perfect place to count money. I couldn't help but think that it also would serve as a great deterrent to my misbehaving kids. But I digress.

When the Weins bought the house about a decade ago they wanted to brighten it up and add a workspace for Rachel. They vaulted the ceiling in the living room and added a 400-square-foot detached office next to the main house. Combined with Rachel's impeccable taste, honed during her years at the University of Florida's School of Architecture, the subtle changes made a world of difference in the look and feel of the home. The living room is light and airy, and the mid-century furniture adds to the sleek, yet warm aura.

Rachel works from the detached home office. She likes that she has to walk outside and into a different building each day – a nice separation between her work and personal life. She may work from home, but that work is anything but local. Rachel is a strategic advisor to large owners and operators of real estate, mainly "essential retailers," a phrase we are all familiar with after pandemic shutdowns. Think grocery stores and other "everyday necessities operators." She travels extensively – New York, Chicago, even Hawaii. Previously she worked for Ernst and Young (now known simply as EY) in their global real estate practice, where she advised large owners and operators on commercial real estate strategy. Her undergraduate and graduate degrees in architecture, paired with an additional graduate degree in finance, prepared her well for the work.

When she's not on the clock, Rachel invests her volunteer time in the Tampa Bay International School, a Spanish-language immersion school that two of the Wein children attend. She notes that the "diversity and social justice mission of the school is very important to us." The school also happens to be the only school in Pinellas County that offers Jewish studies as an optional part of the curriculum for the elementary and middle grades. The Weins firmly believe that language and cultural experiences are a gift that you can give to your children, and the school reflects those values.

David Wein is the kind of person you hope to meet at a neighborhood porch party, and not through his line of work. Since 2007 he's been the Chief of Emergency Medicine at Tampa General Hospital. The past couple of years have presented a unique challenge, with David skillfully overseeing the COVID



400 sq foot addition Rachel's home office

response in the hospital's ER, a monumental task for which no one had a road map. He has tried to balance his professional endeavors with community activity, serving on numerous local COVID task forces at schools and a skilled nursing facility.

Rachel and David strike me as the kind of couple you'd meet in Manhattan or Boston, with their impressive resumes and stylish home. But they love living in St. Petersburg's Old Northeast neighborhood. So much so that when their neighbor demolished his home after it was crushed by falling laurel oak trees during Hurricane Irma, the Weins jumped at the chance to buy the empty lot next door. They recently hired Storyn Architecture to design a home for their family next door, thinking they would ultimately build it several years from now. But Rachel told me that the design was "so beautiful that we couldn't help but build it now." They expect work to begin next year.

The Weins were very intentional with the design of the new home, using elements that would be "in keeping with the neighborhood, but most specifically this block." On the other side of the lot sits a mid-century home designed in 1957 by renowned local architect William Harvard, for George Turner, Jr. The Weins wanted to honor the mid-century heritage of the block, but keep with the more traditional feel of the neighborhood. Rachel notes that the home will have a traditional roof, and feature stucco, terrazzo, and wood elements. She says, "It's our intention to be in keeping with today's aesthetics, but to be respectful of the history of the neighborhood. Most specifically, we want to be in context with this street, the Turner family, and Sunken Gardens."

I am certain George and Eula Turner, hard-working entrepreneurs with a sense of the importance of beautiful surroundings, would be thrilled with the family that now calls their house home. Rachel and David Wein continue the Turner's tradition of improving their corner of the world, both aesthetically and through their contributions to the community. I appreciate Rachel's generosity in satisfying this looky-loo's curiosity about her unusual home. Maybe everyone else in the neighborhood could do me a favor and just leave their drapes open at night. ●

Read more about George and Eula Turner and the history of Sunken Gardens in this issue's cover story by Janan Talafer.

# ST. PETE

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# “Living my best life in St. Pete”

Downtown St. Pete resident Michael D. was suffering from leg and foot pain from peripheral neuropathy, “I was in extreme pain and aside from a handful of daily pills, I was out of options.” Then he met St. Petersburg’s Dr. Matthew Mann.

Pain is often seen as just another inevitable experience in life, but most people expect it to be a brief transition phase while recovering from an injury. Unfortunately for some people with peripheral neuropathy, the painful sensations of burning and tingling never seem to end. Often, after suffering through years of shooting and stabbing sensations, the pain eventually fades to numbness. While that may seem like a relief, it is at this point when the balance problems and risky injuries begin.

St. Pete retiree, Michael D. was dealing with one of the most painful stages of peripheral neuropathy. “I was in constant pain that just made me want to cut my feet off. When the burning started 15 years ago it was mild. Over time I grew used to the annoying nature of the mild burning and just let it go. About 5 years ago the pain started to really increase and I finally talked to my doctor who referred me to a neurologist. She sent me to a pain specialist to find relief. I tried medications like Gabapentin, and it did nothing to help the pain. My doctors told me there was nothing else they could do and that this was something I would have to live with. I just couldn’t imagine living the rest of my days feeling like my feet were on fire.”

Peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves from poor circulation in the hands or feet.

Poor blood circulation reduces the delivery of nutrients to the nerves and causes nerve degeneration. As peripheral neuropathy progresses, lack of blood flow to the feet results in numbness leading to an increased risk of falls, scrapes, and cuts. Lack of good blood circulation also slows the healing of minor cuts increasing the risk of dangerous infections, the worst case scenario being the possibility of an amputation.

Michael had given up on finding a solution. “I didn’t know anything about acupuncture and how it could help me, but a conversation with my neighbor led me to Dr. Mann at St. Petersburg Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine. I tried many other options that did nothing so I honestly did not have much hope that acupuncture would help me either, but the pain was unbearable. My dream of enjoying retirement in beautiful sunny St. Pete was fading away. That picture I had in my head started to come back in focus after starting treatments with Dr. Mann. The pain has decreased so much that I can now sleep peacefully through the night. That was impossible before I started getting acupuncture.”

Dr. Mann, DAOM AP, explains that “acupuncture is incredible at improving blood flow and helping to stimulate the nerves to prevent them from completely dying. We focus on using acupuncture and integrate different modalities such as Chinese herbal medicine



and ATP Resonance BioTherapy into our treatments for peripheral neuropathy depending on what will benefit the patient most throughout their care. All these techniques assist in improving blood flow to the hands and feet to nourish the local tissue and help repair the nerves.” The number of treatments needed to allow the nerves to recover will vary from person to person and is determined by performing a detailed neurological and vascular evaluation. As long as the nerves have not been completely severed or have greater than 85% nerve damage, St. Petersburg Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine offers hope where there once was none.

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# PEOPLE AND PETS

Calling all residents of the Old Northeast, Snell Isle, Venetian Isles, Crescent Lake, Crescent Heights, and Downtown!  
 Email your HIGH-RES digital photo to [editor@northeastjournal.org](mailto:editor@northeastjournal.org). Please include your name, address, phone number, and pet's name.

Photos by Brandy Stark unless otherwise noted.



Elizabeth with Hedley and Sinclair  
 Crescent Heights



Fawnia Schultz (Old Northeast) and Tiffany Vickert (Kenwood)  
 with Eleven, Rio, Helix at Jannus Landing



Joe with Ozzie  
 Ekeko Gallery on 9th Street North and 1st Avenue



Kevin Mort with Hildi and Charlie  
 26th Ave N, Crescent Heights



Grettal and Rudy  
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ONE residents Slater and Alessandra with Eve  
 Jannus Landing



Kristi with Baby  
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# Prix Preview: Something for Everyone at St. Pete's Biggest Race

Samantha Bond Richman

Springtime in St. Petersburg comes early. Trees, flowers, and everything green throw their pollen to the wind like confetti, heralding the season's arrival. Snowbirds head back north; humidity is on the rise. And the intense sound of "angry bees buzzing" signal yet another springtime tradition: IndyCars and their high-revving engines making practice runs. The trucks, trailers, and roadway detours downtown, along the bayfront, and around Albert Whitted Airport mean just one thing... it's time for the Firestone St. Petersburg Grand Prix, presented by RP Funding. This year's racing, and myriad other events, take place March 3-5.

For those new to the sport and rusty on the French language, Grand Prix literally means "grand prize," so the term is applied to a great many types of races. The race visiting St. Petersburg is the first in a seasonal series of races to determine the American open wheel racing NTT IndyCar 2023 champion. So, the winner of the Grand Prix here is not the winner of the be-all-end-all grand prize, which may be news to those less familiar with the sport. There are in fact 17 races in the 2023 schedule, between March and September, to determine the overall champion.

The highly competitive sport is guided by a point schedule applied to success of drivers and their teams (it takes a village). Fastest one to complete 100 laps gets 50 points, second fastest gets 40, third gets 35, and so on. The points carry toward the championship title, and the 2023 season finale Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey. The 2022 series champion, Will Power and his Penske team, will return to defend their title. Competing drivers hail from 11 different countries, furthering the competitive spirit of it all.

In addition to a passion for their sport, IndyCar racing is also serious about sponsorships. Every available space will be plastered in the colors, names, and logos of products and services directed at the racing spectators. Even the cars in the race are like



Family fun at the St. Pete Grand Prix



St. Pete Grand Prix

or access corporate seats in the shaded grandstands. Some fortunate fans even watch from the comfort of their boats in Tampa Bay. There are practice rounds and other exciting races on the 1.8-mile track in the days leading up to the big race, so ticketed events in the fenced spectator areas span three days. The atmosphere is part high-energy sporting activity, part street fair, and to a great degree, one big party.

While there are far too many race-related events to list, they include a very special event presented by local nonprofit Kart 4 Kids, benefiting the award-winning Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital here in St. Petersburg. Since 2012, a group of local, big-hearted race fans combined a love of IndyCar racing with the desire to raise funds for the hospital to honor former local driver, Dan Wheldon, who died in 2011 at 33, while racing in Las Vegas. The race is a "Pro-Am" format pairing professional IndyCar drivers (generous with their time) and amateur drivers (generous with their wallets) on a competitive driving team. As in years past, the 2023 Kart 4 Kids ProAm will be held on March 1, a few days before the actual Grand Prix, at Anderson Race Park in Palmetto in super-fast, 70 mph go-karts. The Kart 4 Kids race begins with what is known as a LeMans-style start, where the waving of a green flag signals the drivers to literally run in a foot race to their carts! The professionals drive the first portion of the race, followed by the amateurs, then the professionals finish the race with heart-pounding excitement to the end. To date, the nonprofit group has raised over \$1 million dollars for the children's hospital.

The Firestone St. Petersburg Grand Prix is just one of the reasons our area continues to grow in popularity as more visitors discover the wealth of entertainment and the variety of activities locals enjoy. Whether you're a race fan or not, springtime here does not disappoint. ●

Learn more about the Grand Prix events at [gpstpete.com](http://gpstpete.com). More about the ProAm, including ticketing and an online auction of race memorabilia, at [kart4kids.org](http://kart4kids.org).

## Over the Hills of Snow!

It may have been the coldest Christmas in decades, but the winter vibes came early to St. Petersburg with the city's Snowfest celebration on Saturday, December 3, in North Straub Park. From 9 am to 2 pm, kids of all ages enjoyed dashing through the "snow" on toboggans, perusing the arts and crafts tents, food trucks, and more. A week later, kids flocked to the park to meet Santa, while residents and tourists alike admired the city's traditional holiday lights display. The *Northeast Journal* hopes you and yours had joyful celebrations — and pulled out your sweaters!

Photos by M. Shakelford Burns



Katie and Grace laughing all the way.



Jay toboggans in St. Pete.



Annaliese has a blast in the snow.



Kids of all ages got a glimpse of snow in St. Petersburg.



Santa takes a pic with the Johnson family.





## LIVE Artist Shows January 2023

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CHEVAL**



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**JAN 20-21**

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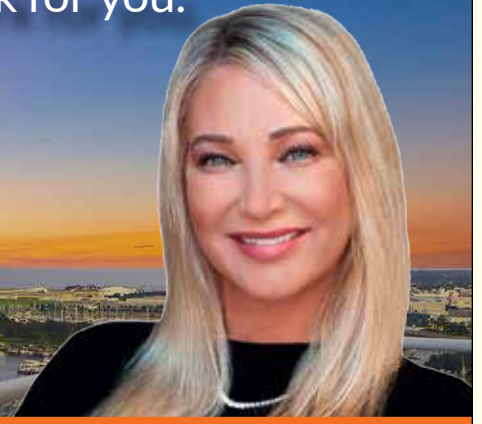


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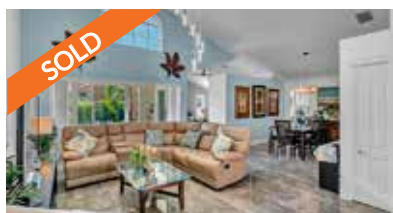
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