

# NORTHEAST JOURNAL

Good People ∞ Good Places ∞ Good Things Happening

St. Petersburg, Florida

January/February 2024

Est. September 2004



Mallory Dimmitt, CEO of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, on an expedition into "wild" Florida.

## Meet the Seventh-Generation Floridian Working to Save Our Wild Spaces

Janan Talafer

Old Northeast resident Mallory Lykes Dimmitt admits to having a "big audacious goal" – permanently protecting millions of acres of natural, wild Florida from development. It's a task that might seem impossible, but as CEO of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation, Dimmitt is committed to making it happen. "We

are acting now for future generations," Dimmitt said. "We may not be able to protect every acre, but we can protect as much as we can, as fast as we can."

I met with Dimmitt in her new spacious office at The Factory St. Pete, a burgeoning creative arts destination in the Warehouse Arts District. A beautiful mural of a great blue heron and a Florida black bear mark the entryway to her new

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## Bob Preston: The Legend Who Photographed Our City's 'Golden Era'

Will Michaels



Combat photographer Bob Preston at Nagasaki atomic bomb devastation. He was only two years out of high school at the time, image circa 1945.

Bob Preston was a student at St. Pete High when Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941. The professional photographer who worked on the school yearbook was soon drafted to serve in the Army. With no formal training in photography, Preston stepped in to take over as yearbook photo editor. After graduating in 1943, he too joined the Army. When asked what experience he had, he said, "Photography!"

Preston was assigned to the Army Signal Corp as a combat photographer, eventually ending up with General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in the Pacific. According to his daughter, Patricia Preston Mastry, Bob Preston was there when MacArthur fulfilled his famous promise, "I shall return," wading from a landing craft to the Philippine

Continued on page 24

## Get Fit and More with St. Pete's Healthiest Secret



Coach Tii Wood is an Army veteran, personal trainer, and group fitness instructor for Healthy St. Pete.

Abby Baker

The average price of a gym membership in St. Pete is \$30-50 a month. A local personal trainer can run you up to \$90 an hour. But the cost to join Healthy St. Pete programs and workout classes? \$0.

When the city of St. Pete launched Healthy St. Pete in 2015, it was only a small initiative to bring more health programs to Pinellas. Now in 2024, Healthy St. Pete is its own division of the St. Pete Parks and Recreation Department. Every month, the city-funded program holds free workout classes, mental health seminars, inexpensive races, and even sells produce – for cheap – out of 12 locations around the city.

Meagen Young, health program supervisor for St. Pete's Parks and Recreation Department, says the program has changed each year depending on public interest. "I don't know how many other park and recreation departments get such special, specialized programs like this one," she said. "It speaks a lot of the city."

Most people know Healthy St. Pete for its free workout classes. At any given time, you can click on the website to find free yoga, kickboxing, aerobics, and more to get folks up and moving in a more active lifestyle. "Every action you take counts – even just trying a program or a class once counts," Young said.

However, in the last eight years the program has grown into an umbrella of five focus areas: physical fitness, healthy eating and nutrition, healthy minds, healthy aging, and kids and teens. "Since we started in 2015, health seems to be more of a general topic of focus," Young said. "We had a lot of data that needed to be addressed."

Continued on page 14

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

### The Very Best You

Have you seen the clip that's floating around these days where Ernie from Sesame Street forgets that he's special?

This time of year, it seems most everyone wants to do things differently. As we become inundated with messages of renewal, and resolutions to change our ways, we're encouraged to shed the past year like an old skin, too worn to keep.

But something new doesn't have to come at the expense of the old. I think the new year is a chance to acknowledge what you've learned and, as a good friend reminds me, to simply "release what no longer serves you."

Because New Year's resolutions really shouldn't be about becoming something different. I think they should be about honoring who you are. Reclaiming and reaffirming the very best things that make you, you.

And so, in that spirit, this issue honors pioneers, trailblazers, and people who've found that just being themselves is the very best thing to be. You'll read about artists recommitting themselves to their creative passions, a Ukrainian soprano celebrating her muse, an idealistic urban farmer bringing food to the people, and a photographer who spent a lifetime showing the best, and sometimes worst, of us. From folks who help us hop off the couch, to a woman who finds a new way to feed over a hundred needy people a week, the inspiration to be "new" isn't new at all. It's inside us all along. If only we have the courage to let it out.

Do yourself a favor and Google that Ernie clip. It might remind you of the most important thing of all: you.

Have a story you'd like to share? Email me anytime at [editor@northeastjournal.org](mailto:editor@northeastjournal.org).



~ Shelly

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# Lawn and Order: A Guide to Artificial Turf and Other Ground Covers

Jon Kile

Whether it's for ease of maintenance, saving water, or avoiding pesticides and fertilizers, homeowners have many reasons to ditch a traditional lawn. St. Pete's sandy soil has always presented a challenge in keeping a perfect lawn and property owners have adorned their yards with alternatives since the first neighborhoods were platted.

But the rising use of artificial turf has brought up some old questions when it comes to how we cover our yards. Artificial turf seems to offer a perfect solution: a green, almost-natural looking lawn, that is durable for kids and pets to play on, without the mowing, watering, or chemicals. But recent questions about artificial turf presented to a St. Pete City Council committee revealed that turf isn't necessarily greener, environmentally speaking.

The city codes concerning yard cover are written to avoid two primary unintended consequences: excess runoff that causes flooding and negative impacts on water quality in Tampa Bay (caused by fertilizers and decaying yard clippings running into storm drains). Permeable surfaces that allow water to seep into the ground are critical for flood control, replenishing Florida's aquifer, and preventing saltwater intrusion underground. Historically, what is permeable and impermeable seemed like a simple question. Roofs and pavement that cause runoff are impermeable; areas with vegetation and exposed soil are permeable. Many residents will be surprised to learn that shell and rock beds are also considered impermeable, as they simply contain too much hard surface that causes runoff.

On the surface (pun intended) artificial turf seems permeable. It's true that new, clean artificial turf will allow water to penetrate into the soil. But without maintenance, it will clog like an air filter. This is just one of a few environmental strikes against artificial turf outlined in a memorandum prepared by Stetson Law for the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council that examined its impact and how other



*Artificial turf is becoming a more popular option, but does it meet city code?*



*Rocks and shells can cause additional runoff and are considered impermeable according to city code.*



*St. Pete city codes allow up to 45% impermeable surface in private yards.*

municipalities have regulated it.

First, in the sun, artificial turf heats up. Any parent of young children can attest that playgrounds covered in artificial turf are great for keeping sand and wood chips out of kids' shoes, but they also create a significant heat island effect that grassy or mulched areas do not. This can increase the amount of energy required to cool homes. And while artificial turf doesn't require fertilizer to remain green, it is a petroleum-based product and represents fields of potential microplastics destined for local waterways. The lack of a root system can also lead to erosion along waterfronts. Artificial turf also doesn't support microorganisms, which break down organic and inorganic products on the surface.

But that doesn't mean you can't install artificial turf.

Some artificial turf, combined with native and Florida-friendly vegetation, can create a beautiful, functional, low maintenance, durable, environmentally safe yard. All told, the benefits of artificial turf are recognized, but the negatives mean that its use is limited

like other options, including paved areas, shells, rock, and non-organic mulch. Your front yard can still have up to 45% of its surface covered in impermeable material (if you live on a corner, the ratio is 25%; ADA structures for disabled access are exempted from the ratio). Impermeable materials are not allowed as ground cover in the right-of-way. Commercial properties and residential properties with three or more units have a different set of codes.

Residents can find all the details and definitions of the rules at [stpete.org](http://stpete.org); search for City Code 16.40.060.2.1.2. The city website also offers advice for avoiding the most common yard complaints that lead to code violations: overgrown yards, inoperable vehicles, property disrepair, and improper outdoor storage (aka: junk). Don't expect a code inspector to go walking down the street with a tape measure, calculating ratios of groundcover. But there are instances in which all matter of ground cover has been cited and property owners are required to comply – in some cases, footing the bill to tear up new landscaping. It pays to do your

research before you settle on a surface.

If you've decided to keep your lawn, remember to refrain from using fertilizer from June 1 through September 30. You're sending money down the storm drain and causing algae blooms in the bay. And if you must fertilize in the dry season, use a product designed for slow release.

If this all seems inordinately confusing, it isn't. Residents have been subject to impermeable surface ratios (ISR) long before artificial turf hit the market. Many cities, like Boston, have banned artificial turf, citing toxic compounds, gas emitting VOCs, heavy metals, and other carcinogens. Orlando requires a permit to install it and limits its proximity to water. Other cities regulate everything from drain rates to permeability ratings, and blade height, making St. Pete's codes seem elementary and easy to follow.

If you decide that artificial turf is right for you, make sure the installer and your landscape designer are aware of the codes, as most violations are the result of well-intentioned yard improvements and are easy to avoid. ●



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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.]




**Cindy Cockburn** was born in NYC and has lived in St. Pete for 10 years. As owner of C.C. Communications for over 20 years, she worked with a variety of clients, from the mayor of St. Petersburg to the Mahaffey Theater & Vinoy Resort. As a freelance reporter, she has worked for many local and national publications, and is the author of two Frommer's Guides to Florida.




**Mary Fletcher** was a *St. Petersburg Times* advertising graphic designer for 20-years. She is president and designer for The Florida Aviation Historical Society; was the Board secretary of Flight 2014; and piloted for the Civil Air Patrol search-and-rescues and Sundown Patrols. Mary is active in the Ninety-Nines and the Florida Suncoast Chapter.




**Laura Flint**, a Tennessee native, moved to St. Pete in 2017. After obtaining her master's in literature, she began a career in youth sports and recreation. For Preserve the 'Burg, she began spending time with volunteers, planning events, and writing about the special places and neighborhoods in St. Pete. Laura lives in south St. Pete with her husband and two children.




**Amanda Hagood** teaches courses in environmental humanities at Eckerd College. She also contributes to *The Gabber Newspaper*, *Creative Loafing Tampa Bay*, and *Bay Soundings*.




**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.




**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]




**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]





# A True Taste of Fresh Food in the City at 15th Street Farm

M. Shakelford Burns

Just four blocks north of Tropicana Field lies nonprofit 15th Street Farm, a half-acre of organic fruit, vegetables, and edible flowers growing in the heart of the city. According to founder Emmanuel Roux, their mission is to “develop more agricultural production in the Tampa Bay area and immediate vicinity,” adding that “the role of urban farms is to be a nature oasis and an education facility to enable people to reconnect with nature and to understand where their food comes from.”

Roux’s life accomplishments include time working with the UN in Geneva, a stint serving in the French Navy, opening the first sushi restaurant in St. Pete, and pioneering the trend of flavored pasta in the US. For the past 13 years, however, Roux’s passion has been growing over 100 different vegetables including lettuce, radish, cabbage, bok choy, kale, onions, moringa, mulberries, papaya, mangoes and more. He follows organic growing methods and focuses on restorative agriculture methods.

Helping people to start their own gardens is also another part of his mission. The farm is tended by volunteers and organic farm workers. Kids are also encouraged to participate, and the farm sells all-organic, freshly harvested vegetable baskets for \$25.



Emmanuel Roux is the founder of 15th Street Farm.

Roux has also helped implement 15 school gardens in Pinellas County, through a program funded by the USDA in partnership with USF and believes in the principal that “food brings people together.”

Future expansion plans include a fully operational commercial kitchen, wood-burning oven, yoga breakfasts, lunches, corporate groups, and family-style community dinners including expert guest speakers with topics ranging from “The Intelligence of Plants” to “The Gut Microbiome.”

“Feed the body and feed the mind,” says Roux.

The proposed kitchen concept is designed as an incubation center for small business operators who can use the facility to create their products with a strong focus on exotic tastes, for example French pates, cookies made with saffron, and decorative focaccias (edible works of art). The intent is to give the visitor a true taste of fresh food, trying things never tasted before, such as purple lady bok choy or watermelon radish.

Currently underway is a GoFundMe campaign to support the purchase of items ranging from silverware to a walk-in cooler. Roux hopes to open the kitchen sometime in January. ●



For the past 13 years Roux’s passion has been growing over 100 different vegetables right in the city.



Helping people to start their own gardens is also another part of the 15th Street Farm’s mission.

Donate or learn more about 15th Street Farm at [15thStFarm.com](http://15thStFarm.com) or follow @15thstfarm on Instagram.

## Wishing you happiness, peace and joy in the New Year!



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# StART the Year Off Right

Brandy Stark

The new year brings fresh inspiration for art lovers of all stripes in St. Pete, in all kinds of media. Check out a few of our favorites in January and February.

## Art Centers

**Florida CraftArt: Creative Muse.** 510 Central Avenue. Jan 5-15. Mon-Sat, 10am-5:30pm; Sun, noon-5pm. floridacraftart.org

*Creative Muse*, a pop-up show by the ArtLoft artists with studios on the second floor of the building, will include paintings, drawings, jewelry, and photography. This show runs in conjunction with *The Sacred Arts Tour*, Jan 8-14, in the FCA gallery, where Tibetan Buddhist monks of the Drepung Gomang Monastery return once again to create a dazzling sand mandala.

**ArtLofts: Black and White.** 5th Street North, second floor. Jan 1-31. Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm; Sat, 12-4pm, Second Sat; 5-9pm. Contact Susan Hess at 727-504-8788.

*Black and White*, the newest exhibition of the Women's Caucus for Art, Florida Chapter, "examines the metaphoric and physical nature of opposites, attracting, repelling, and completing one another in a mind-body connect," according to organizers. The exhibit examines the metaphoric meanings and cultural viewpoints of "black and white," societally, economically, racially, and as a visual construct.



ArtLofts artist Di Staola's "Atlas Compass"

*Valentwe'en: Tell-Tale Heart.* Feb 1-28. Opening Reception is Second Sat, Feb 10.

The SPIRITS of St. Petersburg and ArtLofts host the 10th annual installation of this gothic Valentine's Day/Second Hallowe'en art show. This year's theme is All things Edgar Allen Poe, that master of the maudlin. Dress up as your favorite Poe character and help find his lost Lenore.

**Historical Roser Park Ghost Tour: Valentwe'en Edition.** Feb 24. 5-8pm. Tickets and more at facebook.com/theGrimCupid or email brandybstark13@gmail.com.

Four special tours feature the local lore and legends, plus haunted homes of the historical neighborhood investigated by the SPIRITS of St. Petersburg. This neighborhood has multiple stairwells and brick streets, so strollers are not recommended.

## Spots About Town

**Beach House 5317: Resin Workshops.** 2135 3rd Avenue S. Studio 6. Through Jan 27. Wed-Sat, 11am-6pm. eventbrite.com/o/beach-house-5317-41161224693

For those who want to experience making art with the help of an expert, then the month of January is the time to check out this studio near Five Deuces Gallery. From "beach resin wine glasses" to cutting boards, to ocean resin wood trays, this venue offers a wide assortment for the aspiring artist to try something new.

**Five Deuces Gallery: All Things Florida.** 2101 3rd Avenue S. Feb 5-26. Opening receptions Feb 5, 6-9pm, Second Sat, 5-9pm.

This exhibit strives to showcase what local artists love about Florida. Rather than traditional beach and bird scenes, artists will display less conventional insights into the state.

**Soft Water Gallery: Women of the Diasporas.** 515 22nd Street S, Unit F. Through Feb 3. Open Thur-Sat, noon-6pm, and by appointment. Contact Director Lisa Lippincott, 727-318-3223. softwatergallery.com

This exhibition focuses on the work of four Florida-based women artists who have migrated to the United States from various parts of the world, and how their cultural heritages



Alicia Brown, currently based in Sarasota, poses with her large-scale triptych "The Weight of the Crown," on view as part of "Women of the Diasporas" at Soft Water Gallery.

inform their work. Artist Alicia Brown conducts a gallery talk about her painting "The Weight of the Crown" in January (date announced via website). Participating artists include Alicia Brown, Kate Downing, Anja Palombo, and Vlasta Smola.

Also on display is *Constructing Utopia - Works by Marianne Chapel* on exhibit Jan 13 - Mar 2; opening reception Jan 13, 6-9pm.

Explore artist Marianne Chapel's narrative oil paintings of "fantastical worlds in pursuit of a self-manufactured Utopia. Her vivid, candy-colored constructs touch on themes of power dynamics, urbanization, and environmental concerns."



"Allerleirauh" by Marianne Chapel

**St. Petersburg Opera: Opera Scenes.** 2145 1st Avenue S. Thur, Feb 8, 7:30pm and Sat, Feb 10, 2pm. stpeteopera.org/event/opera-scenes.

Two programs of famous opera scenes performed by St. Petersburg Opera's resident artists. Performances include Act 3 from Puccini's *La Bohème* as well as several scenes from Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* and Samuel Barber's nine-minute opera, *A Hand of Bridge*.

**Woodfield Fine Art Gallery: The Poetry of Paint.** 2323 Central Avenue. Jan 12 - Mar 2. 11am-5pm, Wed-Sun, and until 9pm every second Saturday. woodfieldfineart.com

Woodfield Fine Art Gallery hosts *The Poetry of Paint* by D Yael Kelley, recipient of the prestigious MUSE Visual Arts Award and a US Department of State Art in Embassy artist whose work was recently exhibited in the embassy residence in San Salvador. She is a founding director of the St. Petersburg Arts Alliance and the Center for Contemporary Arts. Her work can be found in private collections and institutions throughout the world. ●



"Listen to Your Dreams" by artist Vlasta Smola

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- 📈 59% Repeat or Referral Business in 2023

## 2023 SOLD HIGHLIGHTS

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>165 15th Avenue NE, Old Northeast   \$1,850,000*</b><br/>Eighth real estate transaction with these customers</p>                                    | <p><b>1325 Snell Isle Boulevard NE #403, Snell Isle   \$1,180,000</b><br/>Sold for 98% of listing price</p>   | <p><b>7862 Sailboat Key Boulevard South #603, Harbourside   \$729,000</b><br/>Multiple offers<br/>Penthouse condominium sale featured in <i>Tampa Bay Times</i></p> |
| <p><b>2042 Iowa Avenue NE, Venetian Isles   \$1,400,000</b><br/>Sold for 97% of listing price<br/>Fourth real estate transaction with these customers</p> | <p><b>140 25th Avenue North, Old Northeast   \$1,175,000</b><br/>Sold with multiple offers for 98% of listing price<br/>Sale featured in <i>Tampa Bay Times</i></p> | <p><b>1119 25th Avenue North, Greater Woodlawn   \$660,000</b><br/>Sold over listing price in 1 week with multiple offers</p>                                       |
| <p><b>1999 Tanglewood Drive NE, Tanglewood   \$1,290,000</b><br/>Sold over listing price with multiple offer<br/>Under contract in 48 hours</p>           | <p><b>1740 73rd Circle NE, Harbor Isle   \$990,000*</b><br/>Third real estate transaction, won bidding war</p>  | <p><b>567 Peninsular Drive, Lakeland, Christina Woods   \$601,150</b><br/>Under contract within 72 hours with multiple offers<br/>Sold for over asking price</p>    |
| <p><b>1325 Snell Isle Boulevard NE #603, Snell Isle   \$1,200,000</b><br/>Sold for 98% of listing price</p>   | <p><b>7221 18th Street NE, Harbor Isle   \$855,000</b><br/>Sold for highest price per square foot in non-waterfront Harbor Isle</p>                                 | <p><b>6290 Bahia del Mar Circle #1, Isla del Sol   \$600,000</b><br/>Highest sold price in Bahia Shores Townhomes</p>   |
|   | <p><b>447 13th Avenue North, Crescent Lake Park   \$794,000</b><br/>Sale featured in <i>Tampa Bay Times</i></p>   |   |

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**GOOD THINGS HAPPENING**

**Got Valentine's Plans?  
Not-Boring Ideas for You and Your Date**



LOVE Mural at St. Pete's Body Electric Yoga by artist Lisa Marie Thalhammer

Photo courtesy of the City of St. Petersburg



**Happy New Year!**

To my clients, neighbors, family, and friends - thank you for your continued support of my business.

As another year has come to an end, I would like to wish you all a happy, healthy, peaceful and prosperous new year.

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**Abby Baker**

If you're looking for a Valentine's Day date idea that isn't Outback Steakhouse take out, look no further! We're not hating on a casual steak dinner to commemorate you and your loved one's connection, but if you're looking to get out and about and spice it up this V-day, here's seven out-of-the-box ideas in and around St. Pete. The best part? Everything on this list can be done for \$20 or less.

**Kayak Away**  
When planning a feel-good Valentine's Day outing, we can't forget the most essential part of this city: the waterways. Coffee Pot Park offers a greenspace and boat launching station near the hustle of downtown. If you and your honey are the type of people who own kayaks, this is an ideal spot to launch. If you don't own your own kayaks, there is a non-city-affiliated kayak rental vendor that you can find when you pull into the park.

**Scoot into the Sunset**  
Electric scooters have been banned in several cities, but not downtown St. Pete! Not yet. Use, don't abuse, one of the hundreds of lime green Lime Scooters stationed around downtown for a romantic whirl around our city streets or the Old Northeast. If you're scooter savvy, Central Avenue in downtown is a colorful part of the city to drive around and maybe even break for a bite to eat with your date. Learn more at [stpete.org/visitors/scooter\\_safety.php](http://stpete.org/visitors/scooter_safety.php).

**Pick Pilates**  
On Valentine's Day at sunset, Rare Body Studio is holding a free outdoor Pilates class at the St. Pete Pier. Whether you're a Pilates expert, or just looking for a chance to lay in the downtown grass, sweating out the day together is a sure sign of love. Remember to bring water, two mats, and two towels.

**Boyd Hill**  
According to St. Pete parks and rec, there're no official Valentine's Day events in city parks this year. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't get outside this February 14. With its trails, boardwalks, grassy patches, Boyd Hill Nature Preserve is an outstanding place to take your Valentine for a romantic – or family – outing. When you walk into the preserve, there's a mini colony of various birds, all rescue animals who now call the preserve home. Boyd Hill allows you to bring non-alcoholic beverages and properly-disposed-of food into the park. That means a picnic at the park is an option for Wednesday night, or whenever you plan to celebrate V-day. More at [stpeteparksrec.org/boydhillpreserve](http://stpeteparksrec.org/boydhillpreserve).

**Indie Flicks**  
Going to an independent movie theater is just more romantic. Green Light Cinema is downtown St. Pete's own independent movie theater. Think irregular show times, great films, and eclectic snacks. On Valentine's Day, Green Light is showing *Teachers' Lounge*, a thriller that follows a German teacher blurring the lines between professionalism and idealism. Not your typical date movie – perfect for folks looking for something different. ●

*Of course, there's no right way to celebrate Valentine's Day. We won't judge you if you stay home and eat takeout in your jammies. But if you do end up trying any of our ideas, send a picture with a caption to [editor@northeastjournal.org](mailto:editor@northeastjournal.org). You may just end up in the paper.*



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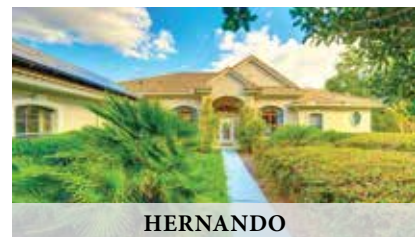
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# Dinner and Duds: One Woman's Mission to Give Back

Laura Flint

One Christmas Eve over 20 years ago, Toni DeForest took her children to a local park to pass out coffee and cookies to the homeless. She wanted her family to be involved in making a difference and it became a DeForest family tradition. Eventually, it blossomed into a more substantial breakfast in the park on Christmas mornings. Still, she felt she could do more.

In 2016, DeForest bought a travel trailer to offer people in the community a place to shower. Fundraising for what she dubbed Operation Shower Power proved to be tough, however, and feedback from the community told her they still needed food and other basic necessities. So, DeForest began cooking meals, gathering donations, and bringing them to the park every Saturday. Thus, Dinner and Duds (DAD – a

tribute to her own father) was born.

Dinner and Duds, an organization whose mission is to provide hot meals, clean clothing, and toiletries to those in need in Pinellas County, has served 5,852 meals as of November 2023. DeForest serves hot, home-cooked meals each Saturday at 2 pm, first outside of the Unitarian Church at Mirror Lake and then at St. Vincent DePaul. In the beginning, DeForest remembers serving around 30 to 40 people by herself each week. She now often serves 120 to 150 people each Saturday with a regular small group of volunteers who she counts on to help with donations, serving, and passing out clothing and toiletries.

A typical week leading up to Saturday's meal is busy. Each Monday, DeForest creates the menu. On Tuesday, she spends the day getting supplies and groceries from local food banks, donors, and the grocery store. Wednesday begins her first round of meal prepping, which leads into Thursday, or what she calls, "The Day," a full day of meal preparation and cooking. Friday, while still busy, is slightly less hectic. She has her grandchildren over and together they make the cakes for Saturday's dessert. She proudly recounts that her grandson recently made a cake by himself for the first time.

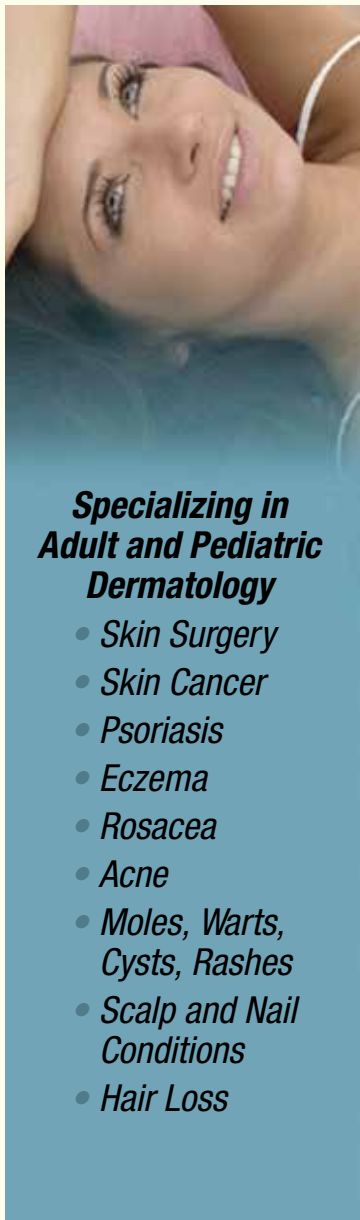
It's a labor of love, but it takes more than that.



Toni DeForest has devoted 20 years to helping the homeless in St. Pete, including weekly home-cooked meals.



Every week Dinner and Duds serves more than 100 people in need.



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DeForest smiles and says fondly, “People are always asking me, ‘What do you need?’” But a better question may be: What don’t they need? Every week is a patchwork of community support and DeForest’s tenacity. Meals are subsidized through food donations from volunteers, businesses, and food pantries such as Love They Neighbor and Good Neighbor. DeForest also receives cash donations and gift certificates from various community donors. She does the cooking herself but relies heavily on volunteers to help serve the food, pass out toiletry bags, and assist with the clothing donations. This time of year, she also collects and passes out blankets and warm clothing.

“We will accept almost anything,” she says. “A donor named Matt just bought and donated six new blankets and 20 pairs of warm socks. It was very kind.” Ever humble, DeForest places emphasis on the partnership of various organizations helping the

homeless in Pinellas County. “We all collaborate, help each other, and spread the word about each other.”

Dinner and Duds does not limit itself to just Saturday evening meals. DeForest serves a special meal every Thanksgiving and Christmas. She also holds a yearly Holiday Toy Drive that started, once again, when her own children were young. “I never thought Christmas should be so commercial,” she says. “I wanted to show my children the meaning of Christmas.”

One evening, she passed a children’s shelter and thought about the extra toys that her family could donate. Over the years they began to collect toys, fix up used toys, and take them to the children’s shelter wearing Santa hats to pass them out. When the shelter closed, she took matters in her own hands and asked the Unitarian Church if she could use one of the rooms in the back for a toy drive and they happily obliged. Each child gets toys, an outfit, and shoes if they are available. DeForest has served up to 75 children at past toy drives.

When asked why she has dedicated so much of her life to this mission, DeForest talks about her own past struggles. Around age 20, she was homeless herself. “The highlight of our week was when people would come to the park and feed everyone,” she remembers. A few years later she was living in a nice van outfitted with a stove, fridge, and bed. She would often set up at the park to cook herself a meal. She got to know the people who hung around and started passing out



Toni DeForest with Brother Flinth, pastor at People That Love Mission, with Dinner and Duds donations.



Volunteers help out at the Universalist Unitarian Church at Mirror Lake.

whatever she had leftover. Soon she began to make a little extra to feed people here and there, remembering when she had been offered the same gift.

DeForest’s own experiences inspire her to show up each Saturday ready to serve a hot, home-cooked meal to those who need it. She says the best part is “seeing everybody so happy to receive a meal. I’ve had people tell me I’m the best cook in the world, which is so nice, because my children always told me I couldn’t cook!” She laughs and adds, “I’ve had a lot of practice at this point.” DeForest also emphasizes the importance of fostering relationships with those in the homeless community: “Some of these people I’ve been serving for years. We show up and let them know that we are happy to see them – it’s important.”

DeForest doesn’t want to stop with Dinner and Duds. She hopes to one day open a kitchen in the downtown area to better serve the community. She says she’ll call it “Grommie’s Kitchen,” a name given to her mother by her children. ●

*Dinner and Duds is always looking for more volunteers and donations. Learn more and sign up to volunteer at [dinnerandduds.weebly.com](http://dinnerandduds.weebly.com). Find more, such as a weekly menu, needs, and resources their Facebook page, Dinner and Duds for the Homeless. Reach DeForest by email at [dinnerandduds@gmail.com](mailto:dinnerandduds@gmail.com).*



“Some of these people I’ve been serving for years. We show up and let them know that we are happy to see them – it’s important.”



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Photos courtesy of the City of St. Petersburg

**New Year, New You**

Picture this: You start your week off with a cardio kickboxing class in Campbell Park. While you're there, you pick up some inexpensive produce from the park's recreation center. There're fruit, vegetables, and other goodies in Healthy St. Pete's Fresh Rec Stop pantry. Later in the week, you're signed up for a free kayaking paddle with a Healthy St. Pete instructor. You bring the family out on the water, they love it. On Saturday, you have a yoga class in Crescent Lake Park. You think about skipping but figure you could use a good stretch. Your lower back thanks you.

Sounds like a healthy, busy week, right? It's all free – aside from the \$6 bag of groceries you picked up on Monday.

Utilizing Healthy St. Pete in 2024 is a great way to do the whole lifestyle change, New Year's-resolution-to-be-more-healthy plan while on a budget. Plus, you'll get to enjoy a whole lineup of local parks you may never have been to before.

That's what Susan Rosenbaum did when she moved to St. Pete from New York City in 2021. She'd been living in the area for only a week and a half when she signed up for her first yoga class with Healthy St. Pete.



Coach Tii Wood teaches a Fit Lot class for seniors each month. It's all about fitness within reach.

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“I just went online and keyed in ‘yoga class’ and went to the first one. It was a fabulous class,” Rosenbaum said. “The other women I met there told me about all the other stuff that Healthy St. Pete does.”

More than two years later and Healthy St. Pete classes have become a regular part of her life.

“I think it’s the best-kept secret in St. Pete. It’s gotten me to neighborhoods I wouldn’t typically go to, and the support and camaraderie makes it what it is,” Rosenbaum said. “Some of the classes get pretty full but I always think to myself, ‘Why are there not more people here?’”

### The Programs

In addition to monthly trail runs and neighborhood group walks, Healthy St. Pete installs the mile markers in local parks. It’s part of the physical sector of the city program. But the most popular branch of Healthy St. Pete is the Get Fit St. Pete sector and its free classes.

Each month, participants can join a plethora of complimentary workout classes offered by the city. It’s free, but you must sign up for a Get Fit St. Pete membership online. Users are also welcome to register at the park, but that can become time consuming for instructors and participants.

Most Healthy St. Pete coaches are local fitness instructors and personal trainers who teach the city-sponsored classes on an unpaid volunteer basis. However, Coach Tii Wood is a personal trainer and group fitness instructor for Healthy St. Pete who is paid via an AARP grant.



Healthy St. Pete offers monthly cooking classes and nutrition seminars.

Wood is also an Army veteran and has been with Healthy St. Pete since May of 2023. She teaches the popular cardio kickboxing class on the first Tuesday of the month at Campbell Park and the AARP-sponsored Fit Lot Training on the second Friday of every month, a class designed for older athletes to stabilize and teach workout techniques in a safe space. Think CrossFit, but for seniors.

“I want to teach people to move in their bodies so one day they can do it without me,” Wood said. “Every one of the people that show up to my classes bring their own flair and have their own relationships within the class.”

Wood’s Fit Lot classes are curated for the group and offer a gentle introduction into fitness. Her cardio kickboxing classes are a little more intense, but everyone

is welcome. “Show up, give it all that you have,” Wood said. “We like to have fun out here.”

As for the Healthy Eating and Nutrition program, there’s a real possibility to take advantage and get your hands on clean foods. According to the Healthy St. Pete, “the city has allocated \$1.179 million using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to improve food access and security in St. Petersburg.”

For Healthy St. Pete, the program has installed 12 produce stations in local recreation centers all across the city. Anyone can buy produce for extreme discounts, or sometimes it’s given for free in surplus. The list of produce spots includes Child’s Park and Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, but you can find a full location list online, along with recipes and more.

There are also cooking classes and nutrition seminars held monthly. Said Young, “We’re just trying to get produce in people’s hands.”

Along with promoting food security, Healthy St. Pete also holds mental health seminars and classes as part of the Healthy Minds program. Narcan training, mental health chats, meditation – it’s all a piece in training minds along with bodies.

If you’re interested in getting started, Healthy St. Pete invites you to jump in with the 2024 Healthy St. Pete Fit City 5K + 1 Mile Walk: Glow in the Park on February 3. You can either take on the 5K or take it easy with a one-mile option. The only requirement is you bring glow sticks and have fun! ●

Learn more about Health St. Pete, register for programs, Glow in the Park and much more at [healthystpetefl.com](http://healthystpetefl.com).

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# NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

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## ST. PETE'S JEWEL ON TAMPA BAY

Rick Carson, editor • rickcarson1@gmail.com

### Rainy Weather Doesn't Dampen Candlelight Tour Magic

Rain or shine, the annual Candlelight Tour of Homes never disappoints. And this year – the 25th anniversary – the splendor of eight beautiful homes decked out for the season was nothing short of magical. The sold-out tour takes a village to produce, including the tour committee headed by Anna Broshears, 200 volunteers and docents and, of course, the gracious homeowners who open their doors and invite 1,600 guests to soak in the holiday wonder of their historic Old Northeast homes: Nick Gravina and Gregg Hartung; Lynn and John Generalli; Peggy West and Jack Sinks; Hugh and Deborah Gelch; Mary Harmon and Donald Carl Eliason; Sally and Randy Scott; Hope and Miles Green; the Snyder Family.

This year's homes represented a wide range of ONE residential architectural styles, including Colonial Revival, Mediterranean Revival, and Prairie. Homes ranged from 1910 to a current-build that mimics a traditional four-square home.

Each year the tour committee seeks to make the current year better than the previous tours. This year, a refreshment station was added to the event, featuring various local food and beverage vendors and live entertainment.

Rarely does the holiday tradition have to contend with inclement weather, but this year was an exception. Shortly after the start of the tour, the skies opened up with drenching rain for several minutes. Although it soaked tour guests and created "lakes" of standing water on many neighborhood streets, it didn't dampen the spirit of the occasion. As one guest noted, "It's Florida and rain happens." The home docents went into rain crisis mode and did a great job of protecting the tour homes from the unwanted moisture.

By the end of the magical evening and in spite of the weather, guests agreed the silver anniversary Candlelight Tour of Homes lived up to its billing as one of the best ever. It appears the bar

has been raised again and the committee will have its work cut out for it when next year's 26th annual tour rolls around on December 8.

Proceeds from the tour are used, among other things, to replenish the neighborhood's street tree canopy, produce dozens of annual events and support neighborhood communications including honna.org and regular e-blast newsletters. A portion of the proceeds also goes to two local non-profit organizations: Downtown Waterfront

Parks Foundation and the St. Pete Youth Farm. Special thanks to our tour book advertisers, Westminster Palms, Robinson Brand Builders, ARTicles, Robert Holmes, ticket outlets (Marion's, Rally, and Sunken Gardens), Lemon Drops Florals, Minuteman Press, and Old Northeast Tavern. ●



### November Quarterly Neighborhood Meeting



HONNA President Nick Bell, Lisset Hanewicz, and Evan Mory

The Ray's stadium proposal and parking were the focus of HONNA's annual neighborhood meeting on Monday evening, November 13, at Westminster Palms.

Lisset Hanewicz, District 4 Councilmember, discussed issues involving development of the new Rays stadium. The more than 70 attendees were presented with information regarding the development's transparency, short- and long-term cost implications and whether the city negotiated an optimal deal. Evan Mory, the city's parking director, engaged in a lively discussion with attendees regarding "van lifers" parking on neighborhood streets. A proposal to update the city's domestic equipment ordinance to include van life vehicles was to go before city council on November 30.

A key component of HONNA's annual meeting was the election of board members with Anna Broshears and Monique Kramer re-elected to new two-year terms.

### Upcoming Porch Parties



Neighbors will gather on Friday between 7:30 to 10 pm to meet new residents and reconnect with ones we've missed seeing. Light refreshments and water will be provided, but guests are encouraged to BYOB. For more information, visit HONNA.org/events. Porch Parties are a benefit for HONNA members and their guests. Non-member neighborhood residents are also welcome to attend, in which case a small donation at the door or online at HONNA.org is welcomed to help defray party expenses.

Here are the upcoming PPs: January 19, Susan and John Arsenault, 245 7th Avenue NE; February 16, Michelle Quintana, 201 11th Avenue N; March 15 (St. Patrick's Day party), Chris and Deidre McCabe, 556 17th Avenue NE.

### Fall Clean Up

On Saturday morning, November 4, 15 neighbors volunteered to clean up six alleys as well as the parkland along the waterfront from the Snell Isle Bridge



to the pool and including the mangroves. Over 100 pounds of items, mostly small, were collected. Watch for notices about the next opportunity to help keep the neighborhood litter-free.

~ Doug O'Dowd

### New Watering Restrictions

Although we have been blessed with some rain lately, our region is still experiencing an extended period of drought. These conditions have led the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), the regulator of our water supplies, to issue a Modified Phase 1 Water Shortage Order for Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas counties. The restrictions became effective December 1 and will end July 1 unless modified by the SWFWMD. Information regarding restrictions, programs and water conservation practices are available at stpete.org/waterrestrictions. ●





**U.S. Record Set at Picnic Land 2023!**

The Waterfront Parks Foundation (WPF) created a new record for the Longest Picnic Blanket in the US on Saturday, November 18, at Flora Wylie Park. “Our original lofty goal was to break the world record for the longest picnic blanket. While we missed that goal, we set the new US record instead!” exclaimed WPF President Logan DeVicente. Nearly 2,000 picnic lovers filled the winding, continuous rows of over 400 colorful picnic blankets for almost the entire length of the park.

“Picnic Land is a co-sponsored city event,” added Logan. “Guests enjoyed great weather and the terrific waterfront park setting that provided family friendly games and children’s activities, food trucks, live music, professional storytellers, a magician, and an early visit by Santa.” Every registration included a large souvenir blanket for family enjoyment year-round. Although the record-breaking attempt adds a fun element, Picnic Land is about more than breaking records. It’s a community builder, where each year residents of St. Petersburg can gather and appreciate the access to the many features of our 12 continuous downtown waterfront parks. Another crucial aspect of the event is to encourage financial support for the works of the WPF, which for over a decade has worked to preserve, protect and promote St. Petersburg’s award-winning waterfront parks system in partnership with the city’s parks and recreation department. ●



**HONNA'S SHINING STARS**

In an effort to honor Old Northeast homeowners for preserving or updating their home or property and investing to keep the character and history of their homes intact, HONNA recognizes them with the Neighborhood STAR Award.

Here are the STARS for January and February: 1225 1st Street NE, Larry

Meluso; and 725 4th Street N, Old Northeast Villas LLC (nominated by Stacy Flowers, Property Manager, Urban Core Properties).

Find new STARS posted monthly with yard signs, on honna.org, and on HONNA's Facebook page. We invite you to be a part of this effort, so nominate a neighbor or a refurbished property you admire in the ONE.

Have a home to honor? Send the information to Charleen McGrath at treasurer@honna.org. ●



# THE NATURE OF ART



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Henry Koehler, *Lake George, Florida*, 1881, Oil on canvas, Gift of Spanierman Gallery



# Consider the Mullet



The picturesque waters of Clam Bayou were once home to a mullet catch known up and down the Gulf Coast.



A commercial mullet fisher hauls in a catch in Stuart, FL in January of 1955.

Amanda Hagood

Northeast neighbors know Coffee Pot Bayou is a great place for spotting wildlife. Among the mangroves on Bird Island, you can find a feathered multitude of pelicans, spoonbills, and green herons. In the winter, you might see manatees gliding in from the bay to luxuriate in the bayou's warmer waters. But Coffee Pot also hosts a humbler, if no less significant, Florida critter: the mullet. And no, I'm not commenting on anybody's hair-do.

I'm talking about that unassuming, doe-eyed fish that noses along our estuary bottoms in search of zooplankton, detritus, and small invertebrates (yum!). With a dark blue-gray or green back shading to a silvery-white belly, you've likely glimpsed the striped mullet (*mugil cephalus*) in the shallows, a bright flash of sunlight on scales. You've certainly seen one "jump" – a full-bodied leap that sends this slender swimmer an improbable yard or more into the air.

Though they might go unnoticed today – except when jumping! – mullet was an important food source for indigenous Floridians, witnessed by the presence of tiny *otoliths*, or ear bones, in archaeological remains. Mullet also brought scores of early

settlers to the Gulf. In the eighteenth century, Cuban fishermen established fishing *ranchos* along the coast, salting and drying their catch for export back to Habana, and forming Florida's first commercial fishery.

Through the founding of St. Petersburg, the mullet tradition remained strong among local fishermen. Fried up and served with grits, or smoked tender and savored, this oily fish was a staple for Pinellas pioneers. So central a role did the mild-mannered mullet play in Floridians' diets that in 1883, the state legislature made it illegal to harvest mullet for non-food purposes such as making oil, fertilizer, or compost.

While mullet could be netted in any season, the yearly catch crescendoed with the annual mullet run. Sometime in fall to early winter – often, fishers say, on the coolest, bluest night of the year – the fish would mass in the creeks and bayous, gathering in schools of hundreds or thousands to swim out to sea and spawn. Running mullet, fattened for the journey ahead, were easier to preserve, and females carried a bellyful of salty, red-gold roe.

Even before it drew St. Petersburg developers to build gorgeous Mediterranean Revival homes along its shores, Coffee Pot Bayou drew fishers to its abundant mullet run, known as one of the best on the Gulf coast. This charmed waterway, old timers





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You've likely glimpsed the striped mullet (*Mugil cephalus*) in the shallows, a bright flash of sunlight on scales.

would say, boasted a throng of mullet so dense that it seemed you could dash across their back to the far shore.

Mullet remained a strong fishery in the decades that followed, particularly as the Great Depression and WWII-era rationing sent Floridians in search of inexpensive and readily available proteins. But the tide would eventually begin to turn: decades of dredge and fill, paired with untreated sewage, had placed Tampa Bay's waters in a near calamitous state by the 1970s. As Florida's postwar population boomed, newcomers brought a taste for less "fishy" seafood – such as grouper or snapper – and a vision of the Sunshine State that didn't always include the sights, sounds, or smells of commercial fishing. Palm trees and flamingos, yes; drying nets and tons of unloaded fish, not so much.

Then a new market for Florida's mullet roe emerged: export to Taiwan and Japan, where the delicacy is enjoyed as *karasumi*. Chasing favorable prices, fishers once again converged on Coffee Pot Bayou. Tensions rose as fishers parked trucks near the bayou's mouth or stood watch along seawalls, waiting for the run to begin, and plying the waters through the night. In 1985, the city passed an ordinance restricting fishing within 1600 feet of North Shore Beach, claiming a need to protect swimmers; that December, local fishermen challenged the city's right to regulate those waters, claiming they were missing out on as much as 30,000 pounds of catch per day.

For the next nine years, new city and state laws, governing everything from where fish could be unloaded to when weekend fishing could take place, tightened the regulatory grip on the fishery, amid worries that the population of mullet was dwindling. In 1994, a constitutional amendment banned the use of entanglement nets – better known as "gill nets" – which had become the primary tool used by commercial mullet fishers. State ecologists and recreational fishers claimed the ban as a victory for sport fish, such as tarpon, that feed on mullet, as well as bycatch animals, such as sea turtles, frequently snared in gillnets. But many mullet fishers saw it as an ending. Not just their commercial viability, but of a generations-long tradition.

Today, if you wanted, you could still catch a mullet in Coffee Pot Bayou. You would need to ensure that your catch is at least 11 inches long from the tip of its snout to the fork in its tail. For tackle, you could choose from a 14-foot cast net, two 500-square-foot haul seines, hook and line, or gig. And if you were fishing during the seasonal run, October to January, you'd have to limit your haul to just five fish. As such, Coffee Pot Bayou is effectively closed to commercial mullet fishing. Even so, mullet remains one of Florida's most abundant and valuable commercial fisheries, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Most of this harvest now takes place in Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, and Lee Counties.

And while it may be more challenging to catch mullet close to home, there are still some great opportunities to sample this Sunshine State staple. Ted Peter's Famous Smoked Fish in South Pasadena has been smoking mullet over red oak for seventy years and offers a generous whole-fish platter (prepare to get your fingers greasy) or a delicious dip. Best sampled on a cool night when the fire has been lit in their dining room hearth! Hookin' Ain't Easy in south St. Pete combines an excellent seafood market with tiki bar style dining and serves a mean smoked mullet, alongside other delicacies. Or, if you're feeling fancy, try *bottarga* – a salt-cured, sun-dried, European spin on mullet roe – from Anna Maria Fish Company. Shave onto pasta or pizza for a smack of old Florida in your nouveau cuisine.

Foodie frolics aside, it's worth taking some time to connect with this finny denizen of Coffee Pot Bayou, if only to honor its long history in sustaining #Floridalife. Michelle Zacks, author of study on mullet fishing in Southwest Florida, puts it this way: "Losing the ubiquity of mullet as a food meant losing a link between the common waters and the common people of the region." In a world where global fisheries are straining under the weight of human demand, mullet may offer a sustainable local alternative to our overfished favorites, one that goes hand in hand with keeping our estuaries healthy and vibrant. Though it lacks the *terroir* of a fine French wine or the ... um, *cheddoir* ... of a classic cheese, mullet tastes of place: of sunlit shallows, mangrove mazes, and the delicate balance of salt and fresh water.

Next time you're enjoying a Coffee Pot stroll or paddle, consider the mundane *mugil*. Mullet over and I think you'll see: it's a miracle in disguise. ●

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headquarters. Inside is the Wild Space Gallery, which showcases art exhibits related to nature and environmental conservation. “We’re the only Florida conservation headquarters that has an art gallery,” said Dimmitt. The work of well-known St. Pete artists Carol Mickett and her husband Robert Stackhouse is currently on display.

If Dimmitt’s name sounds familiar, it’s because she is connected to the Dimmitt Automotive Group on her father’s side, and the Lykes family shipping, citrus, forestry, and ranching business on her mother’s side. She’s a rarity – a seventh generation Floridian. Growing up, Dimmitt and her siblings spent a lot of time outside. “My parents were outdoorsy and we visited all the rivers you could paddle,” she said. “My sister and I would put on masks and snorkels and my parents would tow us behind their canoe. We enjoyed classic Florida adventures. I was always hiking and biking.”

Dimmitt also enjoyed going on field trips to nature preserves with her mother, who was a board member of the Nature Conservancy. “It exposed me to nature in a new way, the idea of environmental education and conservation as something people could do as a profession, a career,” said Dimmitt. Not surprisingly, she went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in natural resources from the University of the South in Seawee, TN, and then a master’s in environmental economics and policy from Duke. She also enjoyed whitewater rafting with friends in the Carolinas, and paddling trips in Colorado, where she lived for a while and worked for the Nature Conservancy on the North American Lands Project. But ultimately, she decided to come home and get “reconnected with Florida adventures.”

About a decade ago, Dimmitt and her husband Bert Martin, CEO of Martin Capital Management, moved to the Old Northeast where they live with their rescued 93-pound yellow lab, Biscuit. Shortly after they moved into their home, one of the first things this committed conservationist did was to

replant her yard with Florida native trees and shrubs. “The wildlife have come back,” said Dimmitt. “It’s great to see more birds and butterflies.”

In 2007, she co-founded the Legacy Institute for Nature and Culture (LINC) which celebrates and protects Florida’s natural heritage through art. Three years later, Dimmitt joined forces with Carlton Ward, Jr., a well-known nature and wildlife photographer, who spearheaded the idea of creating a Florida Wildlife Corridor to prevent Florida’s wild special places from being paved over completely.

The term Florida Wildlife Corridor might suggest a long, continuous strip of land, like a roadway that goes up the

million acres. That’s the “big, audacious goal,” she is reaching for. It’s a lot of land –in total, 18 million acres. Why is it necessary?

“People are moving to Florida at a record pace. There is rapid transformation of ranch and agricultural land to rooftops,” said Dimmitt. “We need to protect the missing links, the last remaining connecting green spaces in the corridor before they are lost.”

Dimmitt points out that the biodiversity of animals and plants depends on it. As development encroaches on wildlife habitat, the path that many animals have always followed in search of mates, to forage for food, or

Water quality, air quality, and mitigation from storms and flooding are all tied to issues of environmental conservation. Then there’s our quality of life in the Sunshine State. “Three percent of the Florida GDP is related to the outdoor recreation economy,” said Dimmitt. “It’s what people expect when they come here. The proximity to nature and the health benefits of open spaces. No one wants to see it entirely converted to rooftops.”

What’s the next step? Dimmitt and her team work to inspire conservation across a variety of decisionmakers, such as private landowners to get them to permanently protect part of their land



Mallory Dimmitt on an expedition. Photo by Carlton Ward, founder of the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

middle of the state. But it’s more like a patchwork of public and private land that crisscrosses the state, stretching from the southern tip of Florida to the border with Alabama and Georgia. It includes state parks, national forests, natural springs, rivers and creeks, coastal beach areas, and working land, including farms, ranches, and forestry operations.

About 10 million acres of the “corridor” are already protected, which means it can’t be sold to developers. But Dimmitt hopes to protect another eight

to find their own territory as they reach maturity, can be disrupted. And some animals require a big space to roam. For example, Dimmitt explained, the Florida panther requires a territory of some 200 square miles. What happens when there’s an unexpected new highway, or a subdivision in the way? That’s when people and wildlife can bump up against each other – and when it’s serious enough, it can make the news.

But diminishing wild Florida also has a direct impact on people, said Dimmitt.

from future development through a stewardship agreement. That can mean a conservation easement that allows for existing use (such as farming or cattle ranches), but prevents future development. Or it can be an outright sale of land to state or other entities.

Slowly, it is happening. In 2021, the Florida Legislature unanimously voted in favor of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act, officially establishing the corridor as an important conservation initiative. Since then, thousands more acres of

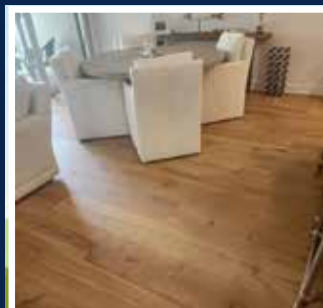


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Florida bobcat in the corridor. Photo by the Florida Wildlife Corridor.



Teen trekkers in a 50-mile Florida Wildlife Corridor expedition from Rainbow River State Park to Homosassa Bay.



Poster for the 2019 expedition, a seven-day trek from Highlands Hammock State park to the Lake Wales Ridge.

both wilderness and working land have come under protection.

It's one thing to talk about the need for safeguarding the land. But a close encounter with nature can really tell the story at a deeper level. To raise awareness of its mission, the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation has hosted seven expeditions into the Florida wilderness. Dimmitt has participated in all of them, starting with the first one in 2012: a six-week, 1000-mile trek from the Everglades to the Okefenokee Swamp on the border of Florida and Georgia.

Last February, she served as a guide on the first day of a four-day, 57-mile exploration of the Florida Wildlife Corridor from Ocala to Osceola Forest. "I paddled a section of the Ocklawaha River with the group, and they continued

on from there," said Dimmitt. "It was a wonderful day. The Ocklawaha is a lesser-known Florida river and we saw all kinds of wildlife – alligators, river otters, bald eagles." The expedition included three veterans from three branches of the military and ended up at Camp Blanding, a military training facility south of Jacksonville. A documentary of the experience can be found at [floridawildlifecorridor.org/2023-020-operation-connect-protect-and-restore-expedition](http://floridawildlifecorridor.org/2023-020-operation-connect-protect-and-restore-expedition). ●

To learn more about the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation and its mission, *The Wild Space Gallery* is open to the public every Thursday to Saturday, including during the Second Saturday ArtWalk. In addition, on April 14, Florence Williams, author of *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier and More Creative* will deliver a talk about the power of a walk through the woods.



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# New Year, New Art, New Goals and Dreams



Composer and musician David Manson is looking forward to the St. Petersburg Jazz Festival in April.



Author and publisher Tiffany Razzano looks forward to "getting books in the hands of everyone while taking a stance against book banning and censorship."



CEO of Florida CraftArt, Jorge Vidal, resolves "to listen and learn on all levels" to build on past relationships.



Artist Robert Southerland is looking for spiritual and artistic enlightenment in 2024.

**Brandy Stark**

Late in 2023, the St. Petersburg Arts Alliance, in collaboration with the Americans for the Arts and Creative Pinellas, released a report about the economic impact of the arts in our area. The study, focused on revenue from 2022, showed that St. Petersburg's nonprofit arts industry generated \$132,530,557 in economic activity. This supported 2,121 jobs and generated \$26,529,721 in local, state, and federal government revenue.

These astounding numbers show that the arts are a big part of what make St. Petersburg such an attractive place to visit and to live. Simply put, the arts are critical drivers for the economy and for diversity.

Terry Marks, CEO of St. Petersburg Arts Alliance, adds that the importance of the study cannot be understated. "With every analysis of the arts community's impact on our economy, the results are ever more apparent. The key is *action*. Can we together create adequate and sustainable funding for the arts? Can we connect and motivate a public and private partnership? Can we build the future along with artists, art organizations, individuals, businesses, government, and the philanthropic community? I know we can."

Bearing this study in mind, I asked various creatives about their goals for 2024. What New Year's resolutions do artists have, and where do they see the year going? What are the hopes and dreams of the those who have such a profound impact on the fabric of our community?

Rebecca Skelton, artist, downtown: "My hope for 2024 is to encompasses greater creativity and art sales, not just for myself and my friends, but for all of us. As a goal, I am trying to step back from my volunteer organizational roles so I can go back to focusing on art

and finding homes for all of it. I want to find time to travel with my husband, Joe Walles, so that he can also work on his photographic art. I (and as he aids me in these tasks, we) am (are) so busy hauling and hanging art, wrangling models/monitors, scheduling meetings, gallery-sittings, and workshops, that we have been curtailed in our own artistic pursuits. Please, stop me before I volunteer again!"

Joe Walles, photographer, downtown: "To echo my wife's sentiments, I need to get back into the darkroom and work with some of my new and existing negatives."

David Manson, EMIT Director, composer, musician, Kenwood: "My resolution is to compose and produce a greater variety of music. I am planning the 2024 St. Petersburg Jazz Festival, April 2 to 6, and it will be great!"

Lisa Lippincott, director, Soft Water Gallery: "I can be a bit of a homebody, so my New Year's resolution is to do a lot more networking in 2024. I welcome any opportunities to talk to groups or individuals about the joys of art collecting – I'm always available to talk art! Last year was Soft Water's first full year in business as a formal, highly curated art gallery, and it was honestly a pretty terrific year for a fledgling business. As a non-practicing artist, retired designer, and an avid art collector myself, I truly love facilitating the placement of artwork into the homes and professional spaces of collectors. The goal for 2024 is to assist even more people by forging new relationships this year, as well as working to ease the insecurities people can sometimes feel surrounding the acquisition of artwork. Buying art should be a joyful process that benefits both the artist and the collector."

Kristi Capone, artist, downtown: "I'm hoping in 2024 to be more patient, more understanding, and to 'trust the process.' I'd also like a slight change of pace.... just a slight one, whatever it is, as long as it's good."

Tiffany Razzano, author and publisher, Woodlawn Park: "After more than a year of many personal changes, I'm looking forward to refocusing on the things that I love the most in 2024: connecting Florida readers and non-readers with books, stories, and local authors in fun ways; creating spaces where writers can engage with one another and discuss their craft and the publishing business; and getting books in the hands of everyone – young and old – while taking a stance against book banning and censorship in our state."

Jorge Vidal, CEO, Florida CraftArt, downtown: "To listen and learn on all levels. My resolution in the new year is to build an understanding of what Florida CraftArt needs to do to serve the statewide community, build upon existing relationships and foster new partnerships so that as an organization we can be bigger and better for our upcoming 75th year."

Robert Southerland, artist, Warehouse Arts District: "2024 will bring new spiritual and artistic enlightenment. I am looking forward to new and deepening friendships, creating new opportunities in art and music, including teaching at Dunedin Fine Arts Center. I hope to enjoy the growth of Soft Water Gallery and all of the exciting Second Saturday events."

As the arts are deemed to be "an essential element to the overall economic health of our engaged community," adds Kimberly Jackson, board member of the St. Petersburg Arts Alliance and the Executive Director of the Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions, "St. Pete shines because of our brilliant artists."

Perhaps a suggested resolution for our local 'Burgers is to continue to explore the arts, engage in creativity, and keep the city moving into a bright and positive 2024. ●



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## AROUND THE BLOCK



## The Largest Boat Show on the Gulf Coast Returns

The Annual St. Petersburg Power and Sailboat Show, Presented by Progressive, is back in St. Pete's waterfront. According to organizers, Informa/U.S. Boats has brought the "most comprehensive display of vessels to St. Petersburg's downtown waterfront" for over 40 years. Attendees can enjoy everything from fishing boats to luxury yachts in the water and in a 40,000-square-foot tent. Guests will also get to talk to boating experts and learn about the latest innovations in the marine industry from more than 300 exhibits. The Annapolis School of

Seamanship and Progressive teamed up to provide on-the-water boater training programs, as well as a kids' fishing clinic. The event supports Tampa Bay Watch, a St. Petersburg-based organization that protects the area's waterways and ecosystem. Proceeds from ticket sales benefit their education programs and eco-tours.

The show is at the Duke Energy Center for the Arts Mahaffey Theater – Yacht Basin and Albert Whitted Park, January 18-21. Find tickets and more at [stpeteboatshow.com](http://stpeteboatshow.com). ●

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Situated on a beautifully landscaped lot, this solid block home showcases pride of ownership with its meticulously maintained exterior and interior spaces.

Spanning nearly 2,300 SFT, this house boasts 3 bedrooms, 3 full bathrooms, 1-car garage plus parking pad, alley access, Anderson windows, updated electrical panel, HVAC 2016/2021, tankless water heater, wood burning fireplace, ample storage space, and so much more!

Stepping into the home you will notice the original oak flooring, lovingly preserved, which sets the stage for a cozy atmosphere.

The living room features a wood-burning fireplace and an abundance of windows that offer captivating views of one of Granada Terrace's beautiful park circles, with glimpses of the waterfront in the distance.

The separate family room, located at the rear of the house, is perfect for entertaining guests.

The gourmet kitchen is a true chef's dream, complete with an eat-in area, a movable granite island, a wet bar, granite countertops, and a high-end appliance package that includes a Dacor oven, Thermador gas top stove with griddle and grill, Bosch dishwasher, and a Sub Zero refrigerator.

The backyard features lovely yet low maintenance landscaping, custom outdoor shower, and a wood deck that is perfect for entertaining family and friends!

Literally STEPS from Coffee Pot waterfront!



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shore. Later Preston was at Nagasaki photographing the devastation of the atomic bomb blast. He was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism in combat. His daughter said, "Like many combat soldiers he seldom discussed the war." Not surprising after visiting Nagasaki just a few months after the atomic blast.

After the war, Preston got jobs as a photographer-stringer with the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Evening Independent* (St. Petersburg's afternoon paper; it famously provided the paper free on any day the sun didn't shine). In 1950 he joined the *Times* full time, eventually rising to the level of photo editor. While he was also an accomplished journalist writing hundreds of pieces for the *Times*, the love of his life was photography. Some of Preston's photos were published in national publications like *Life* and *Look* magazines and penned a popular column for the *Times* on how to take good photos with simple home cameras. In addition to his photographic artistry, Preston was master of a vast collection of photo equipment, experimenting with 35 millimeter and Polaroid film for newspaper use before it was common. His camera also served as a shield. On one occasion in 1949 he used it to ward off the blow of an angry criminal during a police raid. He also got the photo.

In the 1940s and 50s breaking news came from the police departments. TV had not yet become common and radio did not cover much local news. Preston prided himself on being the first reporter to arrive on the scene of breaking news. To help do that he got police permission to outfit his car with a police radio, flashing light, and siren. Preston shared his photos with the police department, which did not have its own police photographer at the time, and his photos were often used as evidence. He later became captain of the police reserves and, at times, his crime reporting and photography blended with his police reserve duties, something that newspaper ethics no longer allow. Preston's crime-related photography and on-scene reporting also became a significant source of supplemental income.



Preston was photo editor for the *Times* and managing editor for the *Evening Independent*.



Bob Preston's photo of a Muscovy duck mother and her 10 chicks crossing Mirror Lake drive went viral. It was published by *Life* magazine and many other publications nationally. Image 1953.

Attorneys involved in the cases often paid for his photos and occasionally called him to testify in court.

Once, Preston and fellow journalist Jerry Blizin got to the scene of a murder before the police. They collected shell cases and interviewed witnesses, then turned that information over to the police when they finally arrived. The perpetrator was later caught and convicted. The story became known as "the hotrod murder case" – the perpetrator drove a hotrod – and it came to the attention of NBC, which made it into a drama film for a show called *The Big Story*. Blizin was made the hero, and even though Preston had accompanied him, and taken the photos, he was never mentioned – although his pictures were later republished by *Look* magazine. Blizin got \$500 from Pall Mall cigarettes, sponsor of *The Big Story*, for using his reporting. He also got a monthly supply of Pall Malls, which he gave away as he smoked a pipe. Preston got nothing.

Bob Preston was fearless when reporting on storms. He said, "If I can survive war, I can survive anything." When Hurricane Dona brushed St. Petersburg in 1960, he tied himself to a palm tree on the waterfront so he could get a good picture of water churning in the bay. When huge waterspouts were seen on Tampa Bay, Preston hired a boat and rowed towards the spouts to get better photos.

He shot thousands of photos of the major league baseball teams spring training in St. Pete during the 1940s and 50s. These included the Yankees, Cardinals, and Giants. Among the family papers held by Preston's daughter, Patricia, is a letter from Atlantic Pictures dated March 4, 1956, authorizing him to "shoot for us 1,000 feet of Eastman Color film (film to be supplied by us), covering ten exhibition baseball games at Al Lang Field." There is another letter from Yankees manager Johnny Neun thanking him for a photo. Unfortunately, all of Preston's baseball photos have been lost from the family collection.

Many photos were of his family, particularly his daughter Patricia when she was a child, and these

## Keeping Up with Life

Apart from surgery or heavy medication, there've been few options that truly help chronic back pain sufferers until now. Dr. Matthew Mann, DAOM provides his patients at St. Petersburg Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine (St. Pete AIM) with much needed relief from debilitating pain.

If you're suffering from chronic pain, you understand this sentiment all too well. Local resident Ed J. found himself at a turning point when he noticed his condition had started to take a toll on his family and friends.

"I was frustrated at times because I couldn't do the things I've been doing my whole life anymore. I've taken care of myself since my teens, and was responsible for my family not long after that. It's been difficult to be on the sidelines now because things such as walking on the pier with Jo, my wife and camping during spring break with all the grandkids has become impossible. My body just couldn't keep up but I'm not ready to be benched!"

Chronic pain affects practically all aspects of a person's life beginning with their ability to perform functional tasks at work or around the home. This often leads to associating anxiety and emotional distress with activities that aggravate their symptoms. It ends up isolating and preventing them from engaging in social activities.

"I grew up biking, fishing, and camping all around town, now I can barely stand up from a bed much less a sleeping bag," explains Ed.

This is what it's like to suffer from chronic pain. Symptoms make participating in and enjoying life incredibly difficult. Daily tasks are nearly impossible.

Too often, the situation is made worse from the extra side effects of the pain medications. Then even more medication is prescribed to help with those side effects, increasing the possibility of drug interactions. It gets to the point where your life is no longer ruled by just pain. It's now ruled by a difficult routine and pill regimen too. Specialists commonly recommend surgery but it can come with risks, sometimes complications, and there are rarely any guarantees except a minimum recovery time.

Ed put it this way, "I couldn't accept that. There had to be something else I could do besides surgery or letting pain and pills control my life."

On one sleepless night, Ed began searching online and found his answer: acupuncture. It kept showing up as an effective, drug-free treatment for chronic pain. Determined to find a local acupuncturist experienced in treating complex chronic pain conditions, Ed discovered Dr. Matthew Mann, Acupuncture Physician at St. Pete AIM.

Dr. Mann has successfully treated difficult-to-manage, chronic pain cases. He uses the time-tested science of acupuncture and integrates it with proven modern medical advancements that encourage healing and recovery.

Acupuncture is a form of Chinese medicine that has a long-proven history of being used to reduce pain. By reducing inflammation and stimulating the body to release endorphins, acupuncture can offer much-needed, effective relief for pain. Dr. Mann also skillfully layers non invasive therapies like ATP Resonance BioTherapy™ and other regenerative therapies for amplified, long-lasting results.



Sunset at the St. Pete Pier with the grandkids

"I feel great! The good days far outnumber the bad. We even went out to the pier with the grandkids. Dr. Mann helped me get back on my feet. I took Jo dancing and now she's been telling all our friends to try acupuncture."

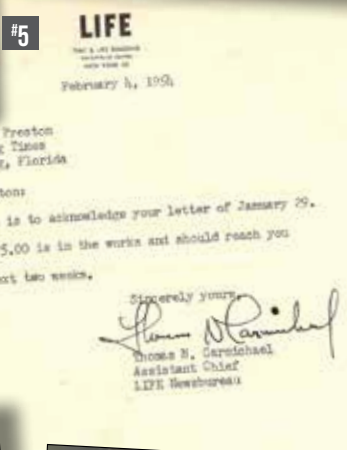
If you're looking for a doctor and a practice that not only understands your diagnosis but also has a proven solution for chronic pain, look no further than St. Pete AIM.

Ed describes the St. Pete AIM clinic almost as enthusiastically as he does Dr. Mann's treatments, "Even Jo loves it here while waiting on me!"

Additional information about Dr. Mann and his integrative treatments can be found by visiting [www.stpaim.com](http://www.stpaim.com) or call 727-235-0435 to schedule a consultation and learn more.







**PHOTOS BY BOB PRESTON**

#1: Troops march in the Festival of the States Parade. (Central Avenue was still paved in bricks.) Circa 1947.

#2: In 1956 Elvis Presley performed at the State Theater in St. Petersburg. This photo was taken by Bob Preston in 1962, at the time of the filming of "Follow That Dream" in Citrus, Marion and Levy Counties. Priscilla Presley, Elvis' wife, is next to him.

#3: "No Fishing From Dock Please." It wasn't all war, crime, and ducks. Preston also took many fashion photos. Image 1961.

#4: Military planes flying Albert Whitted Airport, Demens Landing, and Mirror Lake. Image 1947.

#5: Preston was paid only \$25 for the six photos of the Mirror Lake ducks published by Life magazine. Image 1954.

#6: Fog enshrouds the Snell Arcade. Photo by Bob Preston, date unknown.

#7: Preston's photo of the last trolley ("Old 100") on its final run ending in Gulfport in 1949. Among the passengers was baseball enthusiast and former St. Petersburg mayor Al Lang.

somehow found their way into the pages of the Times and Independent. There are photos of Patricia riding her tricycle on the city's hex block streets; with a chameleon on her nose; dressed for Halloween; reading a book; peaking out from behind a door; at the beach sporting a sailor cap; and chasing ducks at Mirror Lake.

Speaking of ducks, perhaps Preston's most widely distributed photos were not those of crime scenes, or hurricanes, or baseball, but ducks. In 1953, he snapped a mother duck leading a bevy of 10 ducklings crossing Mirror Lake Drive. Preston was there that day looking for photo opportunities with Patricia. She remembers the day well. "I was frequently 'bribed' to do these photo outings with a small doll or something to eat. I wanted to chase the ducks, but Dad wouldn't let me."

After publishing the photos in the Times, the pictures went what we call today "viral." Life magazine published seven of Preston's duck photos for which he was paid the grand sum of \$25. The article described the duck images: "A domestic problem, which might beset any mother with a flock of children, recently

confronted a mother of 10 in St. Petersburg, Fl. A Muscovy duck, for reasons known only to herself, left her home in Mirror Lake and led her family across a downtown street. Her trip was observed by photographer Robert Preston who waited to see what would happen. Eventually the Muscovy mother, with superb aplomb, led her obedient children back home through rush hour traffic, which braked respectfully to a stop. For the ten dumb little ducklings, oblivious of danger, the real trouble was clambering to safety up the curb where they were all checked by the mother."

Patricia recalls that many other publications asked to use the duck photos, including the U. S. Information Agency. Shell Oil Corporation even used them in an ad, perhaps to show that auto traffic powered by oil, also shown in the photo, could co-exist with nature.

After leaving the Times in 1957, Preston joined WFLA/NBC TV as area news chief. In 1960, he joined the Evening Independent as managing editor. Later Preston worked for Florida Today in Brevard County (precursor of USA Today), Progress Index in Virginia (as managing editor), the Palm Beach Post (as executive editor), and the Naples Daily News. He also did freelance work for the Tampa Tribune.

Bob Preston retired in 1982. But even in retirement, he continued to serve his community as volunteer guardian ad litem, perhaps a harkening back to his days as a crime photographer and journalist covering the police and courts. As Patricia reflected, "Dad was continually reinventing himself." Former Times and Independent reporter and editor, Jon Wilson, recalled, "Bob Preston was a legend at the Times and Independent when I first worked there in 1963."



As a photographer/journalist, Preston was permitted to equip his personal car with a police radio, flashing light, and siren to help him to get to breaking news quickly. Image circa 1951.

What is Bob Preston's legacy? One leaves different legacies to different people and places. But Preston's legacy to St. Petersburg is certainly his rich collection of professional photos documenting life in our city during what Jon Wilson calls the "golden era" following World War II. ●

Will Michaels is a former director of the St. Petersburg Museum of History and the author of The Making of St. Petersburg and The Hidden History of St. Petersburg. Contact him at [wmichaels2222@gmail.com](mailto:wmichaels2222@gmail.com) or 727-420-9195.

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# Local Soprano Pays Homage to Sarah Brightman at the Palladium

Cindy Cockburn

It's so exciting to learn of a live musical event that will capture the attention of even the youngest member of your family. Who knows what a "life changing" experience like listening to a children's choir can be to the future of a talented child singer sitting in the audience witnessing his or her first classical performance?

If you missed hearing the world's most beloved soprano when Sarah Brightman visited Clearwater, you've got a second chance to hear her most popular songs when the Palladium hosts *A Tribute to Sarah Brightman* in February, presented by classical crossover soprano and producer Elona Krasavtseva.



"We are very lucky in Pinellas County to have this beautiful venue," says Krasavtseva. "As the producer, I was happy to offer auditions to local children interested in performing on the Palladium's big stage." The chance to perform was offered to a lucky boy singer, who will tackle Webber's famous *Pie Jesu*. Local

children will also perform during this tribute from the Lumina Youth Choirs of Tampa with artistic director Deah McReynolds.

The eclectic tribute concert pays homage to the incomparable talents of Brightman, the world-renowned English classical crossover soprano singer, with beloved songs from Broadway musicals and more. The tribute will showcase not only the classics, but pop and rock songs from Brightman's repertoire brought to life by Krasavtseva, a classical crossover soprano, actress, and songwriter. She performs musical theater, classical and popular songs in English, Ukrainian, Polish, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and Yiddish. Krasavtseva grew up in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and currently lives near St. Pete.

Krasavtseva began her music career in 2005, performing in major concert halls as well as frequent appearances on broadcast television and radio shows throughout Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Russia, and then after global recognition, she began performing in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

The soprano grew up in a music-loving family: Her mother played the accordion, and her father introduced her to the world of classical music. She first saw Sarah Brightman perform at the Bolshoi Theater in Russia and then again in America at the Mahaffey and created this performance as a tribute to her musical hero. ●

Learn more at [mypalladium.org](http://mypalladium.org) and [elonakras.com](http://elonakras.com).

# Queen of Hearts Raises Money for Kids and More



Sixty-four years ago, Alicia du Pont MacGregor envisioned a Queen of Hearts Ball for the American Heart Association with a Queen and her Royal Court of Princesses. The Royal Court was selected from the names presented by clubs and civic organizations dedicated to supporting the cultural, charitable, and civic projects in the St. Petersburg area.

In 1959, Mrs. du Pont MacGregor's vision became a reality, and the first Queen of Hearts Ball was held at the Coliseum with Mrs. R.W. Roberts crowned as Queen.

Today the tradition continues with the Queens Court Inc. who hold the Queen of Hearts Ball each year in St. Petersburg to honor women's volunteerism in Pinellas County and to raise funds for two local charities, with 100% of the net proceeds distributed directly to them.

The Queen's Court has raised over \$2,650,000 over the years for a variety of organizations.

This year, the Queen's Court is honored to announce that the 2024 Queen of Hearts Ball charitable recipients are Inspire Equine Assisted Center and Wheelchairs 4 Kids.

This year's event will be the 65th annual and takes place at the Hilton St. Pete on February 17. ●

Learn more at [queenofheartsbll.org](http://queenofheartsbll.org).

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~ Jeannie Carlson



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# MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS



## Stephanie Nase 1st Street North

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

I've lived in St. Pete for four years. I moved here from Atlanta where I lived for 26 years. I'm a boomerang! I moved to Virginia in the early 1990s and lived in England for a year, and then Atlanta. Now I'm back in Florida where I started from!

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

I love our downtown waterfront parks, from Coffee Pot Park all the way down to Lassing Park. They are truly a "jewel on Tampa Bay."

### Most interesting/enjoyable/exotic vacation you've taken?

Last year I went to Peru and visited Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley, Lima, went whitewater rafting and camping and topped off the trip with a three-day boat cruise on the Amazon. It is a spectacular country and offers everything I love in a vacation – compelling history and culture, top archaeological sites, beautiful and varied geography, adventure excursions, and cosmopolitan cities.

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

I want to go to Africa, to Botswana or Tanzania, and go on safari. I then want to go gorilla-trekking in Uganda.

### What famous person would you like to meet and why?

I'd like to meet Ida B. Wells. Born a slave in Mississippi, she became an investigative journalist, educator, suffragette, and civil rights activist at the turn of the century. She was a voice for equality and justice and helped lay the groundwork for civil rights.

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

My hobby is flower arranging. I don't do it as much as I'd like to, but it's relaxing and a way to unwind while creating something beautiful.

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

I'm currently watching *Lessons in Chemistry* based on a novel by Bonnie Garmus.

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

A miniature schnauzer! Smart, friendly, spunky, loving, and a little stubborn. Plus they have fabulous beards.

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

Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon are inspiring. I was just a toddler, but I remember sitting down to watch it on TV and how excited and amazed my parents were. To think that a man walked on the moon, and we all watched it on TV is still incredible to me.

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

I love all of Erik Larsson's books and am currently ripping through them. The latest is *In the Garden of Beasts*.

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

After working in corporate America as a consultant for 30 years, I decided to go independent and become my own boss. It's scary at times, but the flexibility and the ability to choose the work and projects I want to do is worth it.

### Something people might not know about you?

I'm a Florida native. Born in Tampa.

### What do you do for a living? Or, if you are retired, tell us about your career.

I'm a consultant and I work with companies who are implementing large, enterprise-wide technology solutions. I help make sure that the project is communicated to all parties who are impacted and that employees are trained and able to comfortably use the new system.

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

All my family lives in Florida. My parents live in Tallahassee. Both of my sisters live in St. Pete, and one sister and a niece even live in the Old Northeast. I have two miniature schnauzers, Beckham and Bowie, who keep me on my toes, keep me company, and make me laugh every day.



## Kerry Converse 28th Avenue North

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

I have lived in St. Pete for about a year and a half. I retired and moved here from Manchester, NH.

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

I love the Dali Museum and the downtown waterfront parks.

### Most interesting/enjoyable/exotic vacation you've taken?

I attended a Buddhist wedding in Japan. It was a fantastic trip.

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

Paris and Toronto.

### What famous person would you like to meet and why?

Adele. I'm a huge fan.

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

Running. I have run many half marathons and 5Ks. I like the challenge.

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

I loved *Ozark* on Netflix and would highly recommend it.

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

A beagle.

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

My late mom comes to mind first. She was very independent and was a great example of how perseverance and hard work can overcome life's challenges.

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

*The Deviant's War* by Eric Cervini or *Secret City* by James Kirchick.

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

I'm proud that I've always been there for my family when needed and of being a public servant.

### Something people might not know about you?

My favorite things are music, art, architecture, and design. I am also a car nut.

### What do you do for a living? Or, if you're retired, tell us about your career.

I am retired now but worked as an environmental engineer for the City of Nashua, NH for 20 years. I was responsible for environmental permitting, compliance, monitoring and reporting and project management for the city's landfill.

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

I live with my partner Jerry. We don't have any pets of our own, but I am currently pet sitting my sister's two dogs. They are very sweet senior dogs, a black Labrador and a little terrier. ●

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# PEOPLE AND PETS

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Photos by M. Shakelford Burns unless otherwise noted.



Daniel and Alejandro with Duke  
 Vinoy Park



Kelly with Chui  
 Locust Street NE



Amy and Joe with Orbit  
 Euclid-St. Paul neighborhood



Julie and Jim with Bodhi  
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Sarah with Wednesday  
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Ava, Kelly, Sean, and Bri  
 with Fergus, Manny, and Agnes hiding in the stroller

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# Volunteers Help to Keep Sunken Gardens Special

Mary Fletcher

“Welcome to Sunken Gardens.” Those are words you’ll likely hear from one of the 15 volunteer docents available to take you on a botanical experience through the gardens. Just ask Education Coordinator Jennifer Tyson, whose many jobs include training the amazing team.

Of the 15 volunteers, two are on the Outreach Team that goes to clubs and businesses to tell the history of Sunken Gardens. This team is outgoing and comfortable around large groups, able to answer most questions or refer people to learn more. Training for this position is once a year with six full days spent learning the plants and history of the gardens. Many volunteers practice on family and friends to make sure they are comfortable giving hours of outreach to the public.

Tyson has been education coordinator for eight years. Her degree is in history, which she put to good use working at the Tampa Bay History Center organizing programs for all ages, including large and small special events related to exhibits. When the position came up at Sunken Gardens, she was well qualified to step in with her passion for educating the public about historic preservation, human rights, and environmental causes.

## What Makes a Volunteer?

Tyson says there are many reasons a person might want to volunteer at Sunken Gardens. Perhaps they’re retired and looking for a change, or a new sense of purpose. They might enjoy being around plants and teaching visitors about history, or perhaps they’re gregarious and like the idea of chatting with visitors. Volunteer Diane Painter qualifies with all the above.

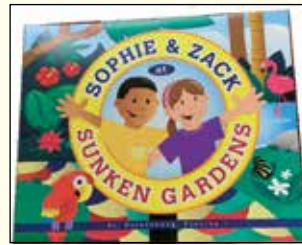
Painter settled in St. Petersburg from the Midwest in 2016 after a 20-year career as an RN in the ICU. She wanted a garden at her home and went to the Sunken Gardens website to learn about plants. Before long, she was a volunteer, first as a wedding greeter and then going on to become a docent, meeting new people and helping them through



In the new Turner History Building, you might meet Kathy Turner Lee, granddaughter of the gardens’ founder, George Turner.



You might encounter volunteer Jane Wallace walking around with one of the garden’s resident parrots.



The Sophie & Zack book is a project with Pinellas County Schools Sunken Gardens hopes to initiate in the next year.



Sunken Gardens Education Coordinator Jennifer Tyson, center, with park volunteers Diane Painter and Steve Viti

the gardens. Ask her about her favorite area and she’ll point you to the rainbow eucalyptus, a tree with multi-colored bark with streaks of pale green, red, orange, gray, and purple-brown, native to tropical regions.

With Painter as your guide, you may also encounter Jane Wallace walking around with one of the resident parrots. Or, at the Turner History Building, you might meet Kathy Turner Lee, granddaughter of the gardens’ founder, George Turner.

A turn through the gardens is also likely to turn up Steve Viti, a Master Gardner from South Florida who now shares his knowledge with visitors as he walks around or leads a tour two or three times a week. His profession was in research and development, so, it is only natural for him to be interested in plants in the gardens that produce medicinal remedies. He carries many pages of photos and information to answer questions and, on the rare occasion that a visitor stumps him, he carries a QR code for AskIFAS.

## Sophie & Zack at Sunken Gardens Book

One of the many Gardens projects Tyson is working on is the Sophie & Zack book. Sunken Gardens Forever Foundation, the nonprofit that supports and preserves the gardens’ legacy, teamed up with a local design group and illustrator to produce an interactive children’s book with cut-out paper dolls, stage pages to play on, and exciting facts about the history, plants, and animals at Sunken Gardens. Over a three-year period, books will be distributed to all Title I third graders in six schools

each year and offer them a field trip to Sunken Gardens (buses and reduced admission included) after they read the book. This program gives the foundation an opportunity to give back to the St. Petersburg community, and organizers hope the partnership with Pinellas County Schools will kick off later this year or in 2024. ●

Want to learn more about volunteering at Sunken Gardens? Visit [stpete.org/visitors/sunken\\_gardens.php](http://stpete.org/visitors/sunken_gardens.php).

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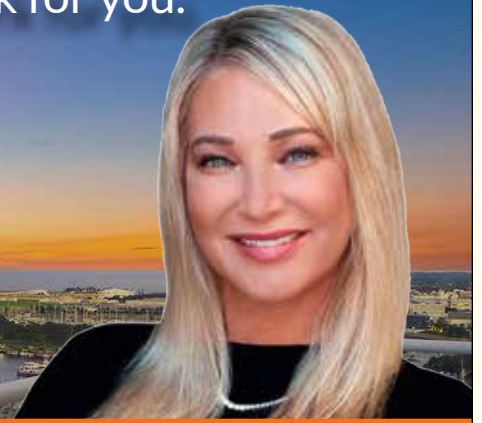


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