



# THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BLOOMINGDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION SINCE 1980

**VOL. XLIV**



**ISSUE 2**



**FEB. 2024**



**WWW.BLOOMINGDALE.LIFE**

**THIS MONTH**

## BLOOMINGDALE WINS BATTLE OF THE BELTS!



**BLOOMINGDALE SCHOLARSHIP INFO**  
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**BETH SMEDLEY NAMED PRESIDENT OF BRANDON LEAGUE OF FINE ARTS**  
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**PLEASE RECYCLE**

**WINNER**

2013, 2014, 2016, 2018 & 2019

Hillsborough County  
Neighborhood  
Recognition Award

Best Communications  
Newsletter Category

**STORY PAGE 14**

“Great Minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people.” *Henry Thomas Buckle*



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**Jane Owen**  
**Editor - The Bloomingdale Gazette**  
P.O. Box 6313, Brandon, FL 33508 - (813) 681-2051

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The official publication of the BNA since 1980, delivered free to Bloomingdale residents on the first Wednesday of each month.



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# Tampa Bay Times

## BLOOMINGDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 6313, Brandon, FL 33508 (813) 681-2051

Email: [Bl.Neighbor1@gmail.com](mailto:Bl.Neighbor1@gmail.com) Website: [www.Bloomingdale.Life](http://www.Bloomingdale.Life)

Follow on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Bl.Neighbor1](http://www.facebook.com/Bl.Neighbor1)

BNA board meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at the Bloomingdale Regional Library.

**President:**  
Suzy Watts

**Directors at Large:**  
Laney Balis

**Vice President:**  
Sean Donahue

Kalyn Dukes

**Treasurer:**  
Grace Lewis

Bobbi Ferraro

Kiersten Sutton



Jessica Robertson  
BNA Office Manager

# BNA BRIEFS

## BNA CALENDAR

March 17 / Bunny Visit / 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

August 6 / Music Bingo at Bullfrog Creek Brewery Supporting Seeds of Hope

September 7 / Community Garage Sale Sunday, December 3 / Santa Visit

December 8 / Santa Visit

## JOIN THE BNA!

\$42 annually helps keep our community programs going. Please send your membership in today and be part of making Bloomingdale a great place to live! Membership can be paid through PayPal!

Scan this QR Code or visit <https://bloomingdale.life>  
At the bottom of the homepage, click Membership.



## Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association

# Monthly Meeting 4th Tuesday, 7-8 p.m.

# Bloomingdale Library 1906 Bloomingdale Ave.

[www.Bloomingdale.Life](http://www.Bloomingdale.Life) for details

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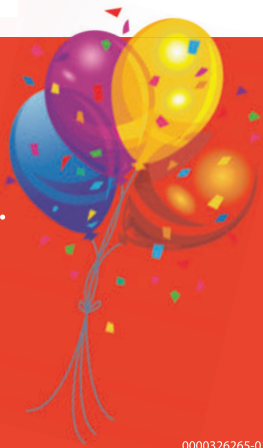
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# Join the Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association Today!

The Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association has been serving our community since 1979. The \$42 annual membership fee supports community events and programs such as the community clean-up day, scholarship for seniors, the annual Bunny and Santa visit, and community garage sale.



Join the BNA today! Make checks payable to the BNA and mail them to P.O. Box 6313, Valrico, FL 33508. Another option is to use PayPal. Scan this QR code to pay with PayPal.

BNA monthly meetings are the 4th Tuesday of the month at the Bloomingdale library and the community is welcome to attend.

Join by February 15th to be entered into a drawing for Bloomingdale area business gift cards held on February 27th!



BNA President Suzy Watts, Community Resource Deputy Cliff Fletcher and BNA Vice President Sean Donahue at the BNA January meeting.

# Bloomingdale Neighborhood Scholarship Application is Open!

The Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association (BNA) created the Bloomingdale Community Scholarship Fund in 2006 to assist outstanding Bloomingdale High School Seniors who plan to continue their education in college or vocational school programs. The \$2,000 scholarship named in honor of the late Bloomingdale Principal B.J. Stelter serves to reward high school seniors and encourage them to pursue a college career.

To be eligible, applicants must be residents of the Bloomingdale community, and the applicant's parent/guardian must be a current member of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association. In addition, the applicant must have at least a weighted 3.2 grade point average at the time of scholarship disbursement, and must be accepted at a two- or four-year accredited college or university. The application selection criteria includes Community Service, Extra-curricular activities, Essay, Academics, and Letter of Reference. Applicants will be judged solely on merit, not financial need.

The application is generally available in January of each year at the high school's guidance office, the BNA office, and on this website. The winning student will be announced at the May BNA board meeting.

To get more information, email [bl.neighbor1@gmail.com](mailto:bl.neighbor1@gmail.com) or visit: <https://bloomingdale.life/government-services/bloomingdale-community-scholarship/>



Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association

## Bloomingdale Bunny Visit

### Sunday, March 17 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Please bring food donations for Seeds of Hope Food Bank.

Parade route will be posted on Facebook [www.Facebook.com/BL.Neighbor1](http://www.Facebook.com/BL.Neighbor1) and [www.Bloomingdale.Life](http://www.Bloomingdale.Life)

**Look for Signs in the Neighborhoods!**

For more information about this event, email [BL.Neighbor1@gmail.com](mailto:BL.Neighbor1@gmail.com)

## Attention Bloomingdale Seniors!

**IMPORTANT DATES**

**FEB 1 – APRIL 1**  
Applications Accepted

**APRIL 1**  
Application Deadline

**APRIL 23**  
Winner Announced

Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association

# Bloomingdale

## \$2,000 Community Education Scholarship

**REQUIREMENTS:**

**Candidate**

- **Must be a resident** of the Bloomingdale community.
- Must be a graduating senior accepted at a 2 or 4-year college or university. Proof of acceptance is required.
- Weighted 3.2 GPA

**Candidate's Parent/Guardian**

- **Must be a resident** of the Bloomingdale community.
- Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association 2024 membership **dues must be paid prior** to the scholarship application deadline. Membership drive begins January 2024. **Deadline is April 1, 2024.**
- Proof of residency is required.

**Selection Criteria**

- Community service
- Extra-curricular activities
- Well-written essay
- Academic Standing
- Reference letters

Scholarship information will be available January 2024 online at [Bloomingdale.Life](http://Bloomingdale.Life) and at Bloomingdale High School.

BNA Community Office: P.O. Box 6313, Brandon, FL 33508 • (813) 681-2051 • [bl.neighbor1@gmail.com](mailto:bl.neighbor1@gmail.com) • [www.bloomingdale.life](http://www.bloomingdale.life)

# YARD OF THE MONTH

**GLENN & LORRIE GERVAIS**  
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The Yard of the Month is sponsored by Ace Hardware of Bloomingdale and Campo YMCA.

Send Yard of the Month nominations to: [bl.neighbor1@gmail.com](mailto:bl.neighbor1@gmail.com) or call 813-681-2051. Winners receive a \$25 Gift Card to Ace Hardware of Bloomingdale and a 1 month family membership, plus join fee to the Campo YMCA.



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# Beth Smedley: A Brush with Leadership in the Brandon League of Fine Arts

By Amanda Ragan



The Bloomingdale Gazette is excited to report a “win” for the arts community! Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association’s very own volunteer graphic designer, Beth Smedley, has been elected as the President of the Brandon League of Fine Arts (BLFA), which was founded in 1959 with a mission to, “promote the visual arts and artists of the Brandon, Florida Area.”

Beth, a retired graphic artist, is not only a proficient designer, but also a skilled artist in her own right. Her achievements include winning Best in Show for Mixed Media at the 2019 Strawberry Festival and, more recently, earning the 2023 prize for the Best Strawberry Themed Art Award.

One of Beth’s primary goals as president is to invigorate the BLFA by expanding its membership and reintroducing art shows to the Brandon area. Beth hopes to enlist a new generation of artists that can learn from seasoned professionals while simultaneously bringing a fresh perspective to the organization, thus revitalizing the local art scene.

In addition to gaining a new leader, the BLFA has also found a new home at Creative Junk Therapy, located at 772 W Lumsden Rd, Brandon. This space provides a nurturing environment for artists to explore and express their creativity. Every third Monday of the month, the league gathers at Creative Junk Therapy for an artistic workshop. These workshops not only serve as a creative outlet for members but also offer an opportunity for socializing with fellow art enthusiasts, accompanied by light refreshments. Beth characterizes these gatherings as “art parties that showcase a variety of art forms, guaranteeing an engaging artistic experience for everyone!”

Beth has ambitious plans for the BLFA. This month, she aims to set up a “For the Love of Art” display, a collaborative wall within Creative Junk Therapy, featuring art from every league member. This initiative will not only celebrate the diverse talents within the league, but also foster a sense of unity and shared passion.

To join the Brandon League of Fine Arts, visit <http://bfla.us>. To stay updated on BLFA events and activities, join the BLFA’s public Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/www.blfa.us/> or email Beth Smedley: [Smedley.creative@gmail.com](mailto:Smedley.creative@gmail.com).

# BSHS Students Perform at All State Concerts

Bloomingdale students from all three areas of the music department qualified for All State Concerts. *Congratulations to these students:*

**CHORUS:** Angelina Lekov, Luciana Granados, and Anjali Pathania

**BAND:** Clay Larson

**ORCHESTRA:** Ethan Vargas and Daylin Alvarez



L to R: Angelina Lekov, Andrea Lange (Choral Director), Luciana Granados, Anjali Pathania



Clay Larson participated in the All State Honor Band on Bass Trombone under the direction of Professor Ted Shistle, Director of Bands at Jacksonville University.



L to R: Ethan Vargas, Ms. Sara Mirabal (Director of Orchestras), Daylin Alvarez

# University Of Tampa Takes Third Annual Field Trip to Bloomingdale

On January 10th, the University of Tampa's field ornithology class took its third annual birding field trip to Sandy Reed's home in Bloomingdale. The class is designed to use encounters with wild birds in nature to teach upper-level science majors, many of which are preparing for careers as professional biologists, about the biology of birds.

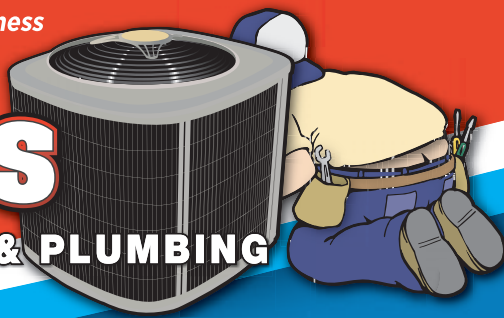
Professor of biology Dr. Mark McRae brings the class to Sandy Reed's yard in Bloomingdale because she is well known within the local birdwatching and bird conservation community. Sandy is a long-term member and leader in the Tampa Bay Audubon Society. She is also the administrator of the Hillsborough County Birds Facebook group.



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## Chill Cawfee Offers Community, Connection, Coffee and Creativity

Chill Cawfee offers a place to “chill” with a handcrafted cup of coffee. Looking for a sweet treat? They offer “Chill-ato,” coffee and Gelato. Located at 3407 Lithia Pinecrest Road, Chill Cawfee is the perfect place to relax and have fun this February.

**Friday 2/9 - Open Mic - 5pm-7pm (Every 2nd Friday)** - Everyone is welcome to perform.

**Saturday 2/10 Trivia - 5pm-7pm (Every 2nd Saturday)**

**Sunday 2/11 - For the Love of Coffee, Pizza and Art Fest - 11am-2pm** - Local Artisans: We are inviting talented local artists to showcase their work and creations at this special event. Whether you're a painter, sculptor, photographer, or any other form of artist, this is your opportunity to share your passion with the community.

**Friday 2/16 - Couples Game Night 5pm-7pm** - Newlywed style game show atmosphere anyone is welcome to play.

**Saturday 2/17 - IFPA Pinball Tournament - 4pm-10pm** - Come Join us at Chill Cawfee in Valrico for our Saturday Monthly IFPA Match Play tournament. We are limited to 20 players on a first-come basis, so be there on time at 3 pm for registration. All skill levels are welcome!

**All Sundays: Board on Sunday, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Board games**

All information for the For the Love of Coffee, Pizza and Art Fest and IFPA Pinball Tournament can be found on EventBrite.



Cyndi Sessums, Eric Sessums, Pawel Debowski, Allison Northcutt, and Kerri McDougold enjoying game night at Chill Cawfee.

## February Events

## Local Wedding Venues That Will Capture Your Heart Say 'I Do' in Style: Discover Hidden Gems Among Local Wedding Venues

By Michelle Colesanti

With Valentine's Day soon upon us and love in the air, we thought it would be fun to include a few local wedding venues offering unique ideas to help make your future celebration everything you have dreamed of.

### Cross Creek Ranch

Now celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, Cross Creek Ranch is an excellent choice if you are looking for a venue where every detail is taken care of for you. Included in wedding packages are a vendor coordinator, event liaison, design team, setup and breakdown team, wedding coordinator with an assistant, DJ, banquet team, and bartender.



Cross Creek Ranch: Cross Creek Ranch offers all-inclusive package weddings.

According to Annika LaSala, who is the Director of Weddings/Lead Wedding Coordinator, “We provide a truly all-inclusive experience that helps guide our couples through a crafted planning and design process. Allowing them to customize their wedding day while also being a guest at their wedding.

Cross Creek Ranch is located at 12950 E. Wheeler Rd. in Dover. Visit [www.crosscreekranchfl.com](http://www.crosscreekranchfl.com) or call 813-651-0934 for more information.

### E&E Family Farm

E&E Family Farm opened its doors to the community in 2014 and it has become a tradition for many to visit every year and get Christmas and family pictures taken in beautiful surroundings.



E&E Family Ranch can host up to 100 guests in its beautiful barn accommodations.

Mercedes Essman, Owner of the Farm, thought it was the best-kept secret in town, but the farm was recently awarded ‘Best in Florida for Wedding Venue’ in 2023.

She said, “Our purpose is to give our couples the best night of their lives. We hold 100 guests under cover and host weddings from September through May along with family reunions, celebrations of life, and other events.”

E&E has also been featured on four magazine covers, and in country music videos, and is the location of choice for the photos taken for Military Spouse of the Year 2019.

“We are so grateful for those that entrust us with their wedding and a special thanks to all those that support the family ranch in our community, added Essman.

It is located at 2420 N. Valrico Rd. in Seffner. For more information, call 813-662-5547 or visit <https://eefamilyfarm.com>.

### Sarah Rose Events

The services offered by Sarah Rose Events can help you create the wedding of your dreams. Its floral design team can help your vision come to life in blooms. Personnel will enhance your day by offering you an unforgettable luxurious experience and help by coordinating the last-minute details.

Are you looking for something small? Sarah Rose Events also offers an intimate venue for a maximum of 33 guests. Aside from the indoor space, there is an outside space and a nicely sized deck that can be used for your celebration.

The Sarah Rose Event venue is located at 1107 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Brandon. For more information, visit <https://sarahrose-events.com>.

### The Secret Garden at Paradise Springs

On a winding gravel road just off Lithia Pinecrest Rd. past FishHawk, you will find The Secret Garden at Paradise Springs lying just beyond a Tuscan-style villa. This venue provides a one-of-a-kind natural backdrop where stunning photo opportunities await. It accommodates up to 150 guests, and you can party indoors or outdoors. It is located at 10400 Paradise Spring Ct. in Lithia. For more information, visit [www.paradisepingwedding.com](http://www.paradisepingwedding.com).



### The Sparrow Barn

The Sparrow Barn welcomes couples for an intimate ceremony and champagne celebration for their micro-wedding in its newly air-conditioned barn.

According to its website, “Our simple, sweet, traditional wedding barn venue

packages offer you all the elements of a big, expensive wedding at an affordable price.”

The Sparrow Barn is located at 1516 Thompson Rd. in Lithia. Visit [www.thesparrowbarn.com](http://www.thesparrowbarn.com) for more information.

### Old and New House of Roses

Old and New House of Roses is a Christian family business providing affordable pricing and designed to be simple and transparent. The venue layout captures the essence of romance making it ideal for a wedding celebration. Up to 70 guests can be accommodated.

Unique offerings include optional gratuity and no upcharge for a Saturday wedding.

Wedding Décor rentals, Florist services, and event coordination are available. It is located at 2005 E. Lumsden Rd. in Valrico. Call 813-299-4015 or visit <https://express.adobe.com/page/b2C3exwwYAjW4/> for more information.

## Love Takes Center Stage in Tampa Bay: Valentine's Day 2024

By Amanda Ragan

*Whether you're drawn to classic romance, culinary adventures, soulful melodies, or friendly competition, there's something for everyone to enjoy this Valentine's Day.*

### Tampa Theatre's Valentine's Vows and “Girl Shy”

Step into the romantic ambiance of Tampa Theatre on Wednesday, February 14th, for an evening filled with love and laughter. Starting at 7:00 PM, “the Right Reverend John Bell, also known as the Tampa Theatre President & CEO,” will lead a mass renewal of wedding vows. Written for an audience well-versed in romantic movie quotes, the vows ceremony will be followed by a champagne toast to “happily ever after.” For anyone ready with a marriage license in hand, Rev. Bell is prepared to perform legal ceremonies for anyone wanting to “walk down the aisle.”

Then at 7:30 PM, the lights will dim for the classic silent rom-com “Girl Shy.” The film will be accompanied by renowned organist Steven Ball on Tampa Theatre’s Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ. This event promises to be an evening of timeless romance.

For more information or to purchase tickets visit <https://tampatheatre.org/movie/valentines-vows-girl-shy/> or call the box office at (813)274-8286. You can also register for the ceremony by contacting Jill Witecki at [jill@tampatheatre.org](mailto:jill@tampatheatre.org) or call (813) 274-8287.

### Sweet Bites Baking's Cupcake War and Decorating Event

For those wanting to do something “sweet” for that special person in your life, Sweet Bites Baking has several fun filled events lined up! On February 10th, from 11AM - 1:00 PM, couples can compete in a “Nailed It” style cupcake war bake off. There will be prizes given for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners.

On February 11th Sweet Bites Baking Company will be hosting a “Love is in the Air” cookie decorating event from 10AM - Noon. This class will teach participants how to



create Valentine's Day inspired, “edible art.” To register for these sweet experiences, call (727)755-4224 or visit Sweet Bites Baking at 329 E Robertson St. in Brandon.

### Boys II Men Live at Seminole Hard Rock Casino

Get ready to be serenaded by the smooth sounds of Boys II Men at the Seminole Hard Rock Casino on February 14th at 8:00 PM. The best-selling R&B group of all time will be performing hits including, “End of the Road,” “I’ll Make Love to You,” and “One Sweet Day.” Tickets for this unforgettable evening start at \$116. For more information or to purchase tickets visit <https://www.seminolehardrocktampa.com/events/boyz-ii-men>

### Trivia Night at Bullfrog Creek Brewing

For people who love trivia, Bullfrog Creek Brewing is hosting their weekly trivia game at 7:00 PM on Valentine's Day. So pull up a barstool next to your favorite person or people, and get ready for some passionate competition.

### “Moulin Rouge the Musical” at the Straz Center

For those looking for a little glitz and glam on Valentine's Day, check out “Moulin Rouge the Musical” at the Straz Center at 7:30 PM. Tickets for this “Spectacular” performance start at \$60. This captivating production is sure to sweep the audience off it's feet as it celebrates “Truth, Beauty, Freedom and — above all — Love.”

For more information or to purchase tickets visit <https://www.strazcenter.org/events/2324-season/broadway/moulin-rouge-the-musical/> or call the box office at (813) 229-7827

*As Valentine's Day approaches, make sure to secure your spots at these exciting events and create lasting memories with your loved ones. Whether you're renewing vows, watching a show, decorating cupcakes, enjoying a concert, or testing your trivia skills, Tampa Bay has something special for everyone this Valentine's Day.*



# Plan to Have an 'Out of This World' Time at the Florida Strawberry Festival

By Michelle Colesanti

FLORIDA  
STRAWBERRY  
FESTIVAL



The Florida Strawberry Festival's (FSF) long history in Plant City continues this year with its 89th annual event taking place from Thursday, February 29 through Sunday, March 10.

"The sky's the limit," said Florida Strawberry Festival President Kyle Robinson. "Our board of directors, staff, and maintenance crew have been hard at work preparing an 'out of this world' experience for all our guests. We look forward to welcoming visitors from far and wide to BerryFest24."

With headline entertainment such as the Black Eyed Peas, Jordan Davis, The Beach Boys, Riley Keen, ZZ Top, The Commodores, Parker McCollum, and Foreigner, there is something for everyone. Cody Johnson will close out the entertainment on Sunday, March 10 at 7:30 p.m.

There will be lots of free entertainment daily including Dennis Lee and Aaron Radatz Magical Entertainer, performing daily in the Publix Showcase Tent.

Plenty of fair food awaits your visit with many ways to enjoy the fresh Plant City strawberries, including the favorite 'Make Your Own' Strawberry Shortcake provided by Plant City's St. Clement's Church. This is the 50th year the church will be serving the shortcakes.

The festival offers more than 80 rides, games, and attractions, and time spent on the Midway is often a highlight. The Midway opens daily at Noon Tuesday-Friday and at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. The Sun 'n Fun Aerospace Expo Kiddie Koral opens daily at 10 a.m.

While at the Festival, visit The Neighborhood Village on the east side of the grounds to see award-winning creations by youth and adults.

A visit to the festival is also your chance to get up close and personal with cows, sheep, pigs, rabbits, and chickens as youth exhibit the animals and plants they've been raising for months and even years. The schedule of livestock sales and shows can be found on the website.

Festival hours are 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. Admission is \$15 for adults (13 and over) and \$5 for children (6-12). Under 5 is free with paid adult admission. Discount tickets can be purchased in advance at Publix for \$10 for adults and \$4 for children 6-12.

Tickets for admission and headline entertainment shows are on sale and can be purchased online at [www.flstrawberryfestival.com](http://www.flstrawberryfestival.com), at the Amscot Main Ticket Office located at 2209 W. Oak Ave. in Plant City, or by calling 813-754-1996.



# Motivational Mug Finds a Berry Good Place to Serve Coffee

By Jane Owen

If you want to pick up local strawberries and are in the mood for coffee, Berry Sweet Acres in Plant City is the place to go! The field is full of berries and Motivational Mug is serving fresh coffee and baked goods.

Motivational Mug opened in January at Berry Sweet Acres, which is located at 5621 US-92, Plant City, FL 33566. There's seating and games one can enjoy while sipping coffee. Are you interested in shopping? Berry Sweet Acres has a unique "barntique" that offers clothing, accessories, and self-care items.

For more information about Motivational Mug, visit [www.facebook.com/motivationalmugcoffee](http://www.facebook.com/motivationalmugcoffee), email [motivationalmugcoffee@gmail.com](mailto:motivationalmugcoffee@gmail.com) or call 863-738-7212. Berry Sweet Acres information can be found on their website: [www.berrysweetacres.com](http://www.berrysweetacres.com)



Motivational Mug Owner Joe Stemple loves serving people at Berry Sweet Acres.



# Gasparilla Fun Continues with Upcoming Events In February and March

By Michelle Colesanti

The 2024 parades may already be history, but there's more to Gasparilla, and there's still time to enjoy events in February and early March.

The 2024 Gasparilla Music Festival takes place in Julian B Lane Riverfront Park from Friday to Sunday, February 16-18, and features musical acts from a wide variety of genres on several stages. While listening, enjoy cuisine from local restaurants. "It is great to be back for our 13th year with three days of live music and all of our stages this year," according to David Cox, Executive Director of the Gasparilla Music Foundation which produces the annual festival. "With our amazing new venue, we can take the festival experience to another level of experiences and fun." The festival's primary stages include the Riverfront Stage, Fortune Stage, Roberts City Stage, and Row House Stage, each providing attendees with opportunities to experience a diverse mix of bands. New this year will be Robert's City Village featuring a marketplace, libations, and live art installations. The festival will host Silent Disco on Friday and Saturday nights and a family-friendly Kids Fest is set for Sunday starting at 1 p.m. Notable acts include Young the Giant (Saturday night), Louis the Child - Playground Set (Saturday night), Big Gigantic (Saturday night), and Lake Street Dive (Sunday night). Ticket purchases starting at \$45, as well as the complete lineup of bands along with the full schedule of dates and times can be found at <https://gasparillamusic.com/>.

It's time to wear your walking or running shoes for the **Publix Gasparilla Distance Classic**, which will be held From Friday to Sunday, February 23-25. Sign up online for the 5K, 8K, 15K, Half Marathon, 2024 Michelob Ultra Challenge, 2024 Michelob Ultra Pure Gold Challenge, 2024 Michelob Ultra Organic Seltzer Challenge, and 2024 Michelob Ultra Infusions Challenge. The number of participants is capped for each race so register early. The Gasparilla Distance Classic Association, established in 1978, is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to raising funds for non-profit charitable youth organizations and running programs in the Tampa Bay area. Visit [www.rungasparilla.com](http://www.rungasparilla.com) for information on each of the races and registration.

The 54th annual **Raymond James Gasparilla Festival of the Arts**, which will take place on Saturday and Sunday, March 2 and 3 at Julian B Lane Riverfront Park in Tampa, is one of the top outdoor, juried fine arts shows in the United States, showcasing a wide variety of art mediums and price points. Beyond the art, there's something for everyone, including live music, culinary attractions, and areas designed for children and families. Admission is free. The festival will showcase artists and their work including ceramic, digital, drawing, fiber, glass, jewelry, mixed media, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, watercolor, and wood. This event will also feature the works of local young artists and a weekend full of live entertainment. The artists vie for nearly \$100,000 in prize money and scholarships, including the \$15,000 Raymond James Best of Show Award. For more information, visit <https://gasparillaarts.com>.



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# Bloomingtondale Residents Invade Tampa as Part of Gasparilla Pirate Fest

By Jane Owen

On Saturday, January 27th, hundreds of pirates celebrated the Gasparilla invasion, where the Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla came ashore and demanded the key to the city from the mayor. Gasparilla 2024 brought thousands to the city. Many Bloomingtondale residents participated as spectators and participants in the parade.

Bloomingtondale East Residents Scott and Janine Townes participated in the parade as members of the Krewe of Sea SaveYours (KOSS). KOSS is a steampunk sky pirate themed Gasparilla Krewe.

Scott and Janine joined the crew in 2016 and have participated in the Gasparilla parade every year since 2017. Janine cannot say enough about how much they enjoy being part of KOSS.

“We absolutely love it. It is like gaining a new family. Everybody is always there to help one another out. For example, when I broke my ankle, people brought dinners, they loaned me a wheelchair and a knee scooter. It literally changed our life,” Janine said.

She added that the close-knit Krewe has constant activities throughout the year and collects donations for charities each month.

“It’s an active Krewe, we do a lot with them on a weekly if not daily basis. Every Sunday we have card night and people bring food it is so much fun,” Janine said.

KOSS’s non-profit mission is to help inform the public of boating and trailer regulations, introduce children to the enjoyment of water sports with an emphasis on safety and precautions, while increasing awareness of our footprint on our coastal environment. To learn more about the Krewe of Sea SaveYours, visit: [kreweofseasaveyours.com](http://kreweofseasaveyours.com)



Scott and Janine Townes at their Bloomingtondale East home before leaving for the Gasparilla parade.





# Running of the Bulls 5k Raises over \$15K for Bloomingdale High School

By Jane Owen

The 7th annual Running of the Bulls 5k drew in around 400 people to Bloomingdale High School on Saturday, January 13th and raised just over \$15,000 for the high school and band. New this year, the 5k is providing two scholarships to Bloomingdale High School seniors, which will be presented at the Senior Awards Banquet in May.

Malik Millet won the 5k with a time of 16:41 Makenna Mach, a Bloomingdale High School senior, was the overall female winner with a time of 21:28. Hillsborough County Public Schools Superintendent Van Ayers and Bloomingdale High School Principal Dr. Marcos Rodriguez ran the 5k. It was Van Ayers's second time participating.

"I loved the atmosphere of the race and the way the community came together to support Bloomingdale High. This is my second year taking part in Running of the Bulls 5k and I plan on always making it part of my racing calendar. The race brought together students, staff, and families and was a wonderful way to spend a Saturday morning!" Ayers said.

The 5K is put on by the Bloomingdale Band Boosters and is made possible by local business sponsorships, such as title sponsors Acropolis Greek Taverna in Riverview, The Jeep Depot, Hungry Howies and Reed & Reed. Participants include runners and walkers from all over the area, along with current students and Bloomingdale High School alumni. In addition to the 5k, which utilizes pavement throughout the campus, there was a ½ mile run/walk around the track. Participants of both events received finisher medals and 5k participants received dri-fit shirts.

Bloomingdale Band Director Jordan Frazee is extremely grateful for the support the 5k provides the band.

"Seeing the community come out in droves to support the band through the Running of the Bulls 5K was incredible. This event is one of our largest fundraisers and it goes towards helping the band program purchase instruments, equipment, sheet music and so many more things that are required to keep our program functioning at the level of excellence that it has for so many years. I'd like to personally thank our local running community for making our 2024 Running of the Bulls a success!" Frazee said.

To find out other ways to give to Bloomingdale's Rajun' Bull Band, please contact Jordan.Frazee@hcps.net. For more information about the Running of the Bulls 5k or to find out about next year's event, email bloomingdalebulls5k@gmail.com.



2024 Running of the Bulls Start Line



# BHS Teacher and Administrator Slimed at Winter Pep Rally

Photo by Elsie Owen

Bloomingdale High School donated over 1000 cans of food to local non-profit Seeds of Hope. The teacher and administrator who collected the most cans got slimed at the Winter pep rally. Great job Bulls and congratulations to AP/SA Mr. Smith and World History teacher, Mr. Sheehan!

Mr. Sheehan being slimed by The Bull.



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# Bloomingtondale High School Wins Battle of the Belts

By Jane Owen

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in conjunction with Hillsborough County Schools held their 10th annual Battle of the Belts campaign and contest in December. During the week of December 4 – 8 participating schools were randomly checked for Seat Belt Compliance. Nineteen high schools across the county participated and awards were presented at Bloomingtondale High School on January 25.

The categories for awards were: Highest Percent of Seatbelt Compliance, Most Improved Seatbelt Compliance, Best Poster, Best Public Service Announcement, Best Overall Seatbelt Campaign.

Bloomingtondale won the Best Overall Seat Belt Campaign. In addition, Bloomingtondale won Best Public Service Announcement encouraging seat belt usage. Bloomingtondale won second place for the Most Improved Seatbelt Compliance and for the Best Poster.

Bloomingtondale's campaign was completed by the Student Government Association (SGA). Kenny Jackson and Ellie Rendon were the co-committee heads. They said they loved working on the project and teaching others how to drive safe in a fun way.

"We did everything leading up to the week and during the week with the mindset that even if one person

decides to wear their seatbelt because of our movement, then it was a success." Jackson said.

"I enjoyed working on Battle of the Belts because along with learning about safe driving and creating a super fun video I got to share a really important message of safe driving and we got to involve a lot of different people at school," Rendon said.

SGA Advisor Becky Johnson was thrilled with the successful campaign.

"I am beyond excited about winning the Battle of Belts competition! The students rocked it with their enthusiasm for seat belt safety. The victory speaks volumes about their commitment to keeping all BULLS safe!" Johnson said.

The 2023-2024 Battle of the Belts Campaign was sponsored by Jose Loret de Mola, GEICO Agent, Riverview Office.

"Last year was my first Battle of the Belts as I was invited to represent GEICO. I think, beyond the importance of the message, what really drew me in was seeing the excitement and healthy competition it generated amongst all those teenagers. That's why, when I got approached with the opportunity to sponsor it this year, I didn't think twice." Jose Loret de Mola said.



Hillsborough County School Board members, District 3, Jessica Vaughn, Board Vice Chair, District 4, Patricia "Patti" Rendon, District 5, Henry "Shake" Washington, and District 7, Lynn Gray with Bloomingtondale High School's Battle of the Belts campaign members.



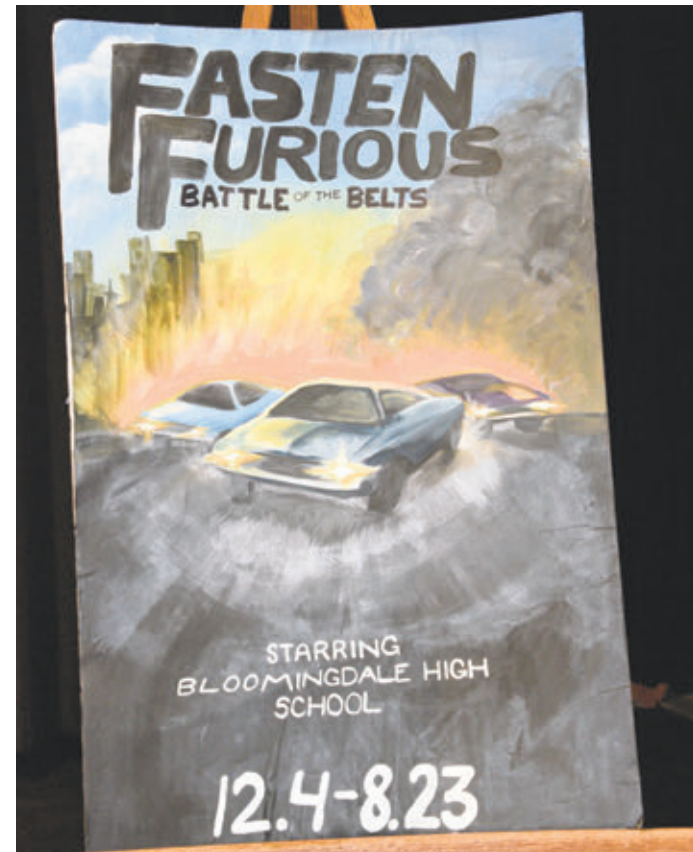
## Summary of Mandatory Seat Belt Laws

- Seat belt laws apply to all cars, pickup trucks, and vans operated on Florida roads.
- All passengers in the front seat must wear a seat belt.
- All passengers under 18 must wear a seat belt.

Why is it Important to Wear a Safety Belt? Seat belts protect you from being thrown from a vehicle. If you are thrown from a vehicle, your risk of death is five times greater.

*"I personally want to congratulate Bloomingtondale High School on winning the Battle of the Belts. It is important to wear your safety belts and we are proud to know Bloomingtondale High School kids agree. Wearing your safety belt can be the difference between life and death in a vehicle crash."*

Bloomingtondale Community Resource Officer Clifford Fletcher



## BSHS Art Class Creates IncrediBULL Mural

Bloomington High School's 2D2 Art Class created an IncrediBULL mural at school. Art teacher Pamela Reeves said the mural took about 2 months to complete.

"We started with painter's tape and a generous donation of paint and supplies by Ace on Bloomington. We collaborated on ideas and problem solved potential obstacles. We then painted it black, removed the tape and did tons of detail work. The problem solving and perseverance of the 2D2 art class was amazing," Reeves said.



## BSHS 2023 Football Award Winners

The Bloomington Bulls Football team celebrated their season at their annual Football Banquet on January 19. Seniors were honored and players received special recognition and awards.

### Congratulations to the award winners!

JV Offensive Player of the Year- Dexter Snyder

JV Defensive Player of the Year- Chaison Coney

JV Most Improved- Bryce Copeland

Scout Team Def Player of The Year- Shane Robinson

Scout Team Off Player of The Year- Christian Hodges

Coach Hutch Award -Merrick Bass

Student Athlete Award- Merrick Bass

Special Teams Player of The Year- Stefan Vera

Defensive Lineman of The Year- De'voun Kendrick/ Cole Tucker

Defensive Skill Player of The Year- Simon Castillo

Offensive Lineman of The Year- Brandon Mecomber

Offensive Skill Player of The Year- Ethan Larson

Most Valuable Defensive Player- Jayden Albertson

Most Valuable Offensive Player- Darien Martin

Team Most Valuable Player 2023- Kylan Tamulonis



Merrick Bass, Coach Hutch Award and Student Athlete Award Recipient, and BSHS Football Coach Patrick Murphy

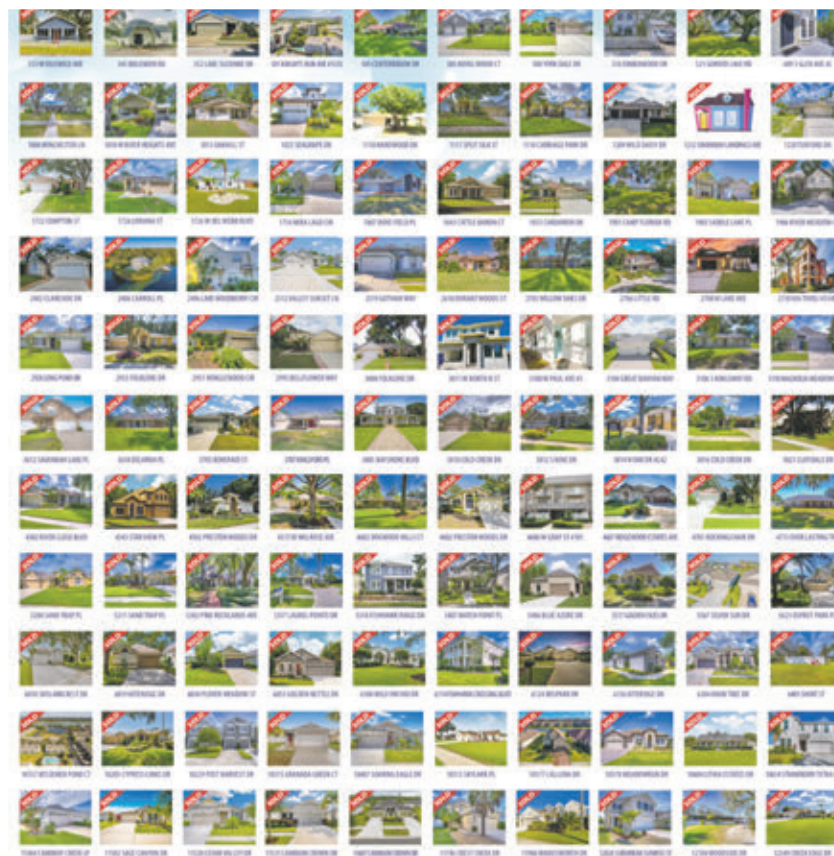


Seniors Jayden Albertson, Cole Tucker, Merrick Bass, Kylan Tamulonis, and Josh Ingram

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