

BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER



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

Design/Layout: Chris Hicks, NTZ Studios (ntzstudios.com) Staff Writers: Michelle Colesanti, Nick Nahas & Amanda Ragan

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



Andrea Dalv Senior Marketing Manager adaly@tampabay.com



BLOOMINGDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

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

Email: Bl.Neighbor1@gmail.com Website: www.Bloomingdale.Life

Follow on Facebook: www.facebook.com/Bl.Neighbor1

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

President:

Directors at Large:

Suzy Watts

Laney Balis

Vice President:

Kalyn Dukes

Sean Donahue

Bobbi Ferraro

Kiersten Sutton

Treasurer:

Grace Lewis



Jessica Robertson **BNA Office Manager**

BNABRIEFS

BNA CALENDAR

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

March 26 / BNA Monthly Meeting/ 7 p.m. / Bloomingdale Regional Library

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

September 7 / Community Garage Sale

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 **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 and www.Bloomingdale.Life

Look for Signs in the Neighborhoods!

For more information about this event, email BL.Neighbor1@gmail.com



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BNA News and Upcoming Events

Bloomingdale Bunny Visit

On Sunday, March 17, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Easter Bunny is visiting Bloomingdale East and West! Look for the Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association's designated STOP points along the route. The STOP points are where families can gather for Bunny visits and photo ops. For safety reasons, the Bunny cannot stop outside of the STOP locations. The route will be posted on the BNA website: www.bloomingdale.life and on the @Bl.Neighbor1 Facebook page.

Bloomingdale Community Scholarship Application Deadline is April 1

The BNA's Bloomingdale Community Scholarship awards a \$2000 scholarship to an outstanding senior who is planning to continue their education in college or vocational programs. Applications can be found at https://bloomingdale. life/government-services/bloomingdale-community-scholarship/. The application period ends April 1. The winner will be announced on April 23. For information see page 6.

BNA Membership Drive Underway

Join the BNA today! Your \$42 membership fee supports community events and programs such as the clean-up day, scholarship for seniors, and annual Bunny and Santa visit. The BNA would like to thank Bloomingdale Pizza, Stonewood Grill & Tavern, Bamp to Baby, Purple Pear and Michelle Hazzard, and Mary Kay Independent Beauty Consultant for donating gift cards to our raffle to promote the 2024 BNA Membership Drive.

Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association Monthly Meeting is March 26

The BNA meets monthly at the Bloomingdale Library in the McLean Family Community room. The community is invited to attend! The next meeting is March 26.

Successful Bloomingdale Annual Clean-Up Day By Jane Owen

Bloomingdale's Annual Clean-up Day, hosted by the Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association, was once again a huge success. The clean-up event was on February 3 at the Hillsborough County Parks Maintenance Facility behind Alafia Elementary School. 322 vehicles, including cars, pick-up trucks, and even a u-haul truck or two, brought items to dispose of. Hillsborough County Waste Management Department was onsite educating residents on what could and could not be recycled. They also assisted 28 residents to order new garbage or recycling roll carts for their homes.



Football players from Bloomingdale High School helped residents remove items from their cars to place in the dumpsters at the recent Bloomingdale Clean-up Day.

Bloomingdale Special District Works Hard for Our Community

By Kristine Schroeder, BSD Community Relations

Spring is upon us and new banners welcoming the season can be found throughout the community. The district purchased the new banners to fill the gap between Christmas and Memorial Day when they will be replaced with our red, white and blue Summer banners. Residents and visitors will also find colorful flowers, including snapdragons, violas and pansies at community and neighborhood entrances.

Work is underway to remove several pine trees along a section of Natures Way Blvd. The trees to be removed are located between Elton Place and River Close Blvd. in the area between the sidewalk and the perimeter wall. The pine tree removal project should be complete by the end of the month.

Vandalism led to additional work throughout the community in February. Graffiti was discovered on Greenhollow Lane and Glenhaven Drive. The District made quick work of painting defaced perimeter walls and worked with Hillsborough County crews that came in to clean the graffiti from sidewalks. Work also had to be done to repair and reinstall the Bloomingdale sign that was knocked over at the corner of Bloomingdale Avenue and Culbreath Road.

In other news, we would like to welcome Bob White as the newest trustee on the Bloomingdale Special District board. Bob has been a resident of the area for 20 years and is an involved member of our community. We look forward to his input and appreciate his support of the BSD's mission.

Please join us for our monthly meetings. The BSD meets the second Monday of each month at 6:30 pm at our office located at 3652 Erindale Drive.

BLOMINGDALE SPECIAL DISTRICT

813-684-6667 bstd@verizon.net



The BNA would like to thank the Hillsborough County Solid Waste Management for their partnership with Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association and for the dumpsters; eCycle for collecting old, unused electronics, Lighthouse Ministries for accepting a truck-full of donations; and ProShred for helping residents securely get rid of old paperwork. The BNA is very grateful for the community support with \$963 in voluntary donations from those participating in the event and the volunteer work by the Bloomingdale High School football team.

YARD OF THE MONTH

JAMES FITCHETT **620 OAK MOSS DRIVE, BRANDON**









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 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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Bloomingdale High Seniors Can Apply for BNA's BJ Stelter Scholarship

By Michelle Colesanti

Are you currently a senior at Bloomingdale High School and plan to attend a two- or four-year college or vocational school? The Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association (BNA) will award a \$2,000 scholarship to a deserving student.

The scholarship, which was named in honor of the late Bloomingdale Principal B.J. Stelter, who passed away in 2019 after serving the Bloomingdale community as the second principal of Bloomingdale High School, is an opportunity for the BNA to highlight outstanding students in our community and provide an incentive for them to obtain community service hours as well as helping non-profits and various charities.

According to BNA Vice President Sean Donohue, "The scholarship was created to encourage and reward students who not only received good grades but served their community. Despite the state having the Bright Futures scholarship, there are many schools including trade schools that don't accept Bright Futures. Additionally, Bright Futures doesn't cover numerous fees that some colleges and universities may charge."

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 include Community Service, Extracurricular activities, Essay, Academics, and Letter of Reference. Applicants will be judged solely on merit, not financial need.

Suzy Watts, BNA President said, "Our scholarship celebrates students who have volunteered in our community. These students often remain in Bloomingdale as caring neighbors. Great neighbors are what makes Bloomingdale a great place to live, work and play."

The application is available at the high school's guidance office, the BNA office, and at https://bloomingdale.life/government-services/bloomingdale-community-scholarship/. The winning student will be announced at the April 23 BNA board meeting. The deadline to apply for the scholarship is Monday, April 1.

Members of the community may donate to this scholarship by contacting the BNA. For more information, call 813-681-2051/252-0252, or email BL.Neighbor1@gmail.com.



Bloomingdale resident Gabriella Counterman was awarded the BNA's \$2,000 BJ Stelter Scholarship Award in 2023.

The Gazette Welcomes Elise Cruz Aragon as New Editor

By Michelle Colesanti

The Gazette and Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association would like to welcome its new Editor, Elise Cruz Aragon to the team.

Aragon has lived in the Bloomingdale area since moving here from Maryland in 2015. She attended HCC and then received her bachelor's from FSU and master's from USF. She is currently working on getting her PhD from USF too.

She currently teaches Journalism at Bloomingdale High School. Before that, she spent three years at Burns Middle School.

Aragon said, "I loved teaching middle school, but I was ready to move on and try something new."

She swapped special education and offered to take the Journalism position

New Gazette Editor Elise Cruz Aragon

after working with the previous teacher. When he left to go back home, she took over.

"I felt at home teaching journalism. It wasn't anything I did in high school or college, but I'm an avid consumer of news media, and I liked the challenge of trying my hand at something new," said Aragon.

She loves a challenge and becoming editor will allow her to give back to the community.

She said, "To me, your own backyard is where philanthropy and meaningful change starts. I wanted to be able to do something more for my community and help bring us together."

Aragon is excited to get into the swing of things and be more involved, both in the community and the paper itself.

"It's really exciting to be a part of something that touches so many others," she said. She would love to partner with local schools and provide more for student journalists, not just from high school, but from elementary and middle schools. She wants to help foster a love of journalism in our future citizens.

In her spare time, she channels her inner grandma as an old 30-something. She crochets, reads spicy books, and plays mahjong.

"The older the hobby, the better and more likely I am to do it. I did latch hooking as a kid in 5th grade, so I've always been old," she added.

Aragon has been married for 16 years and has two daughters. One is a sophomore at Bloomingdale, the other a sixth grader at Burns. They share their home with two crazy dogs.

Spotlight on County Commissioner Michael Owen

By Michelle Colesanti



County Commissioner District 4

Michael Owen loves giving back to the community where he was born and raised. His position as County Commissioner for District 4, allows him to fulfill that opportunity.

He went to both private and public schools, eventually graduating from Bloomingdale High School.

A real estate attorney by trade, he has a small practice in the Riverview/Brandon area, but right now his focus is on serving as Commissioner.

Owen chose to run because he saw a lot of challenges due to the area's growth. Land Use was one of his specialties, so he felt he was

qualified, and that he could offer good representation to the district where he grew up.

The big challenge our community now faces is due to all the developmental growth as new people migrate here.

The Commissioner, like the rest of us, has his concerns. He feels that we need to grow "smart". Right now, we are playing catchup on the roads and infrastructure. When it comes to issues of fire safety, Owen notes that we lack the response time to handle the growth. There should be a maximum of six minutes to respond to a call, but to reach that goal, we need more fire stations and equipment.

A budget of more than \$9 billion was recently approved by the Commissioners, with some of those funds going toward roads.

According to Commissioner Owen, "We (also) need to partner with state and federal governments for grants to widen roads."

He is currently working on the Lithia Pinecrest Road project and hoping to get sales tax dollars to help with the funding. Commissioner Owen recently visited Tallahassee to stress the importance of these funds being released into the east and south end of Hillsborough County, where most of the growth is currently taking place.

"We need our roads and infrastructure to catch up to the growth," added Owen.

The Lithia Pinecrest Road widening should not take as long as the Bell Shoals project, which was hampered by Covid-related delays.

Commissioner Owen is proud of some of the other issues that he has put forth.

"We are amending codes so that vaping shops can't be within 500 feet of schools."

Also, changes to the public library card system will now give parents control over what books their children can access.

The Community Investment Half Penny Tax (CIT) which was approved in 1996, will appear on November's ballot. "It is not an additional tax, but a continuation of one already in effect", noted Owen.

This tax has been used for road and bridge improvements and many other projects through the years. Without this tax, the maintenance of our county parks will suffer.

When he has some personal time he enjoys Tampa Bay sports, including the Lightning, Bucs, and the Rays. He also enjoys riding his Harley.

"Most people who live in this community chose this area because they like a traditional, rural-style community. Owen said, "I'd like to see East and South County stay in the suburbs."

Bloomingdale is a great place to live, and with the help of our commissioner going to bat for residents, it can remain that way for many years to come.



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Swim in the Springs or Take a Hike at Lithia Springs Park

By Jane Owen



Be sure to look for the trees that form a heart near the minor spring!

Florida is home to an abundance of natural springs. Bloomingdale is fortunate to have one nearby at Lithia Springs Conservation Park. This spring, cool off in the 72-degree water of the park's natural spring.

The swimming area is a large, manmodified, spring pool from Lithia Springs Major, a second magnitude spring. Lithia Spring Major has an average water flow of is approximately 24 million gallons a day coming from a large limestone "crack" at a depth of about 10 ft. The water is clear and blue-greenish. The spring pool has steep retaining walls with several access stairways leading down into the water. The entire bottom of Lithia Spring Major is bare white sand. Lithia Spring Minor joins the Alafia River approximately 100 ft. downstream from the mouth of Lithia Spring Major.

The park is not only a good place to swim, it is a great place to have a picnic (they have many barbeque grills and picnic tables), let kids play on the play ground or play a game of volleyball. Campers and paddlers will love the park, as well. The park features 44 campsites, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis. The park also hosts a canoe launch area for those who want to paddle on the Alafia River. There are also opportunities for hiking. The rangers often host hikes, where you can learn about the 160-acre conservation area and animals and birds that make it their home.

Lithia Springs Conservation Park: Hours: Spring/Summer: 8 AM - 7 PM. \$2 per vehicle up to eight people. Swimming: \$2 per person 3932 Lithia Springs Rd, Lithia. 813-744-5572, https://hcfl.gov/locations/lithia-springs-park



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Explore, Play and Relax at these Local Parks

By Jane Owen

Alderman's Ford Nature Preserve

Alderman's Ford Nature Preserve features a paved loop for walking, running, and bike riding. There is a boardwalk and bridge on the loop that takes visitors over the Alafia River. If you'd like to go deeper into the woods, or just extend your walk, primitive trails can be accessed from the paved loop. The park is just under 10 miles from Bloomindale, about 20 minutes away. Location: 100 Alderman's Ford Park Drive, Plant City, FL





Alafia River State Park

Alafia River State Park is a top destination for mountain bikers, equestrians, hikers, campers and nature lovers. The park spans just under 8,000 acres. The park is open from 8 a.m. to sundown and is located about 20 minutes from Bloomingdale at 14326 S. County Rd. 39 in Lithia. For more information, visit www.floridastateparks.org or call 813-672-5320.



Circle B Bar Reserve

Circle B Bar Reserve is a wildlife refuge that is a prime destination for bird watching, hiking, and cycling. The reserve consists of 1,267 acres. If seeing an alligator is on your must-see list, the reserve's Alligator Alley Trail is one of the best places to see them in the wild. Circle B Bar Reserve is just under an hour away from Bloomingdale, but well worth the trip. It is considered by some to be one of the best places to see wildlife in the state. Location: 4399 Winter Lake Road, Lakeland, 33803. For more information









Rent Canoes or Kayaks from Alafia River Canoe Rentals for a Fun Day on the Alafia River

By Jane Owen

Bloomingdale neighborhoods back up to the Alafia River. For a few hours enjoying nature on the river, a great option is to head to the Alafia River Canoe Rentals to rent a canoe or kayak. Spring is the perfect time to visit, as the weather is perfect and it is when the river is lower and most stable. Floating and paddling up and down the Alafia River is sure to be a fun activity for anyone.

Getting to Alafia River Canoe Rentals is a quick trip. They are located off Lithia Pinecrest to the right on River Road. Once there you will meet owner, 84-year-old Sybil Cribbs. If she isn't at the desk underneath her house, simply give the number listed on the desk a call and she will be quick to help you.

Sybil's husband Robert started the business in 1976. Robert went to buy a canoe to be prepared for occasional flooding and returned with four canoes and the idea of starting a business. If asked her favorite part about the business that's in its

48th year, Sybil may simply say, "My husband." Sybil loved the years working with her husband and all the people she has met over the years. Delightfully to her, many of her customers that now bring their own families, once were there canoeing down the river as kids.

Canoe's rent for \$25 for a full day and Kayak's rent for \$15. The hours of rentals are flexible: You can rent as early as 8 and as late as an hour ahead of dark. For individuals who don't want to paddle upstream, if you have the means to transport a canoe or kayak, you can take them up to the canoe launch at Alderman's Ford and make your way downriver to the Alafia River Canoe Rental dock.

Alafia River Canoe Rentals: 4419 River Drive, Valrico. 813-689-8645











One evening recently, I was sitting on my lanai reading. I paused as I listened to teens playing basketball on the next street overtheir voices, laughter and bounces of the ball reminded me of my childhood. I have many fond memories of basketball games and bike riding in my neighborhood.

As they were playing, my next-door neighbor Sandy was in hospice. There's little chance that Sandy was hearing them—but she would have loved the sounds in the neighborhood. She was an original homeowner on our street. She had a

profound impact on me during the short 7 years we've lived in the neighborhood. That night, I kept trying to read one more chapter, while being aware of a basketball game and a family broken waiting out life. Recognizing life and sitting within it is hard and beautiful.

Over the years, Sandy and I shared the ups and downs of our family lives. I shared berries when I would get them from the Berry Barn. She shared plants from her backyard for mine. My daughter would fill her bird baths with water when she was out town or take her dog Cocoa out when she was gone on a day trip. Sometimes we would get her mail when she was on a trip and she would graciously text me when one of my kids left the garage door open at night, again. On many occasions she invited my daughter over to spend time with her granddaughters. My favorite moments with

Sandy were spent in her backyard or on her lanai looking at birds. We would talk about birds, our families, and the neighborhood. Sandy taught me not only a true love of birds, plants, and nature, but a love of people, goodness, and neighbors.

This March Gazette is dedicated to my neighbor Sandy Reed. She passed away on February 19.

This issue is my last as the Gazette Editor. I have tremendously enjoyed being the editor the last few years and being able to choose stories to highlight from our community. Our community is incredible. You'll still see me around in the community, devoted to my passions of writing, supporting local businesses, and supporting schools.

With love and Go Bulls,

Jane Owen

P.S. Sandy was a force of nature within the Tampa Audubon Society. To read all about her passion and accomplishments, visit: https://www.tampaaudubon.org/post/in-memoriam-sandy-reed



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The Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival returns to Clearwater Beach

Article and Photos by Amanda Ragan

As the warm breezes usher in the start of spring, many of us are ready to return to some of Florida's most beautiful beaches! Not to be overlooked, Clearwater Beach is hosting its 10th Annual Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival, Sands of Time, from March 29th to April 14th. This two-week celebration combines art, entertainment, local vendors, and plenty of sunshine and sand; thus, ensuring there is truly something for everyone.

At the heart of the festival lies the awe-inspiring Sugar Sand Walk Exhibit, housed within a colossal 21,000-square foot, open - air canvas structure. Here, visitors get the opportunity to walk through and see detailed sand sculptors created by artists from around the world. Standing only feet away from these fleeting works of art, visitors get a chance to see the amount of craftsmanship and skill that goes into each unique sculpture.

In addition to the beautiful sand sculptures, the Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival offers a wide array of activities and events. From free sand sculpting classes, to live music, dance classes, corn hole, and bingo, there really is something for every age and interest! The event will even feature firework displays over the water.

The entertainment lineup for this year's event is as follows:

Friday, March 29: DJ Sloane 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Friday, March 29, 7:30PM: Sugar Vibe Band

Saturday, March 30: Chris Flowers 4:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 30, 7:30PM: TL Jentgens; Fireworks at 9:30 PM!

Sunday, March 31: Josh Austin 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 31: DJ FIELDZ 5:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Thursday, April 4: Beach Blanket Bingo 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Friday, April 5: Kyle Ingram 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Friday, April 5, 7:30PM: TL Jentgens

Saturday, April 6, 8:00PM: The Black Honkeys Band; Fireworks at 9:30 PM!

Sunday, April 7, 7:00PM: Gary Roland and The Landsharks, A Jimmy Buffett Tribute!

Saturday, April 6: Chris McCarty 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 6: DJ Ryan Moore 4:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, April 7: DJ FIELDZ 1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Sunday, April 7: Aubrey Wollett 3:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Thursday, April 11 Beach Blanket Bingo 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Friday, April 12: Chris Flowers 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Friday, April 12, 7:30PM: 22N!

Saturday, April 13: Josh Austin 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 13: Aubrey Wollett 4:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

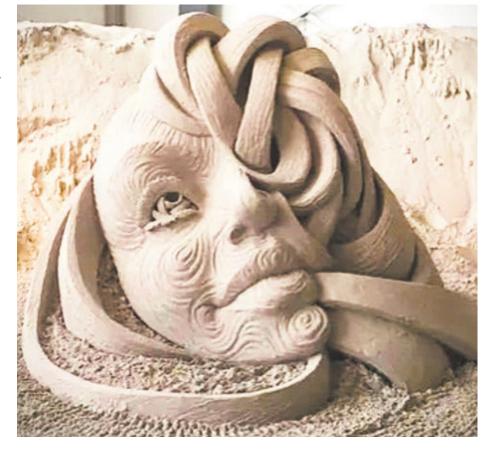
Saturday, April 13, 7:30PM: Soul Circus Cowboys; Fireworks at 9:30 PM!

Sunday, April 14: Salsa and Bachata 1:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, April 14, 6:00PM: Orquesta INFINIDAD; **Fireworks at 9:00 PM!** Join us for Salsa and Bachata at sunset. Dance lessons will begin at 5:00 PM.

and Bachata at sunset. Dance lessons will begin at 5:00 PM.

So, mark your calendars and join the community in celebrating the start of spring at the Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival. General admission starts at \$14 and children 3 and under are free. VIP tickets are also available. For more information, or to buy your tickets in advance online, visit https://www.sugarsandfestival.com/.





Brandon League of Fine Arts Calendar of Events

Beth Smedley, BLFA President

March 9:

Garage sale fundraiser at Beth Smedley's residence, 4618 River Close Blvd

March 16:

National Craft Month workshop at Creative Junk Therapy

March 18:

BLFA meeting. Speakers: Kathy Carrier, fine art paper mache and Michele Stone, manager Florida Craft Art. For the Love of Art member exhibit winner announced.

March 30:

Mini art workshops at Creative Junk Therapy: watercolor, oil, pastel and mixed media

The Brandon League of Fine Arts (BLFA) is a group of local artists and patrons who support the appreciation and creation of art in Brandon and throughout the Hillsborough county, Florida, area. Members meet monthly to share new ideas, and information, to create and implement programs which benefit the promotion of the arts.



Welcome to the Neighborhood: Beef & Sea

By Jane Owen

On January 11, a New England-style roast beef and seafood restaurant named Beef & Sea opened in the Winthrop Center facing Bloomingdale Avenue. The restaurant is family owned and operated by Dan, Linda, Jenn, and Josh St Hilaire.

The St Hillarie's are longtime local residents with ties to New Hampshire. They have lived in Brandon and the Bloomingdale area since 1991 (long enough to remember when Bloomingdale Avenue was only two lanes and the mall area was Carey Cattle Company).

"Our menu is based on a restaurant in New Hampshire that we have been going to for 35 years. We loved the food so much that we wanted to bring it to our area to share with this community" Linda said.

Beef & Sea serves New England style food including "North Shore Beef" style roast beef sandwiches, handmade onion rings, fried seafood including shrimp, scallops, haddock, and whole belly clams. Their menu includes a wide selection of appetizers, desserts, beer, and wine. They are a full-service family restaurant that offers dine-in and take-out service.

"We've worked very hard to give our restaurant a New England flair. From the moment you walk in, you'll feel right at home," Linda said. "We also have a 24-seat dog friendly courtyard where you can relax and dine with your pet (free pup cups available) beside our calming fountain."

Beef & Sea is located at 6022 Winthrop Town Centre Ave (Corner of Bloomingdale Avenue and Providence Road). They are open Tuesday through Sunday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

They have daily lunch specials under \$10 Tuesday through Friday 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and All You Can Eat Haddock on Friday's 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

For more information, visit beefandsea.com or call 813-853-9508.





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Tampa Bay Times





By Amanda Ragan

No need to cross the pond this St. Paddy's Day, to find a festive way to celebrate. The Tampa Bay Area is gearing up to make the other parts of the state, green with envy, this St. Patrick's Day!

River' O' Green Fest: March 16th 11AM - 6 PM at Downtown Curtis Hixon Park

Kickoff the weekend down at Curtis Hixon Park, as Tampa turns the Hillsborough River green. Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park will come alive with music, kids' activities, food trucks, and, of course, beer. This annual free event is a must, for those looking to immerse themselves in the true spirit of St. Patrick's Day.

St. Patrick's Day Parade: March 16th, 4:00 PM Downtown Tampa

After checking out the vibrant green river, make sure to stick around for the St. Patrick's Day Parade. The procession will commence on Madison Street, creating a sea of green as it winds its way down Ashley before turning onto Polk. The parade promises to be a spectacle of Irish culture and pride.

Bullfrog Creek Brewing St. Patrick's Day Bash: March 17th Noon

For those looking to extend the celebration into the weekend, Bullfrog Creek Brewing has you covered with their St. Patrick's Day Celebration on March 17th. Starting at noon, this family-friendly event will feature live music, games, and an arts and crafts station for the little leprechauns in your life. Bullfrog Creek Brewing has become a staple in the community, and their St. Patrick's Day Celebration promises to be a highlight of the holiday weekend. Don't miss the opportunity to enjoy great company, delicious brews, and the festive atmosphere.

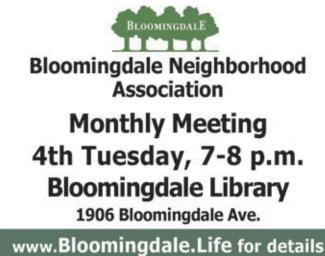
Smack Rocks St. Paddy's Day at Brandon O'Briens: March 17th Noon

Rock to funk, blues to punk - Brandon O'Briens is the place to be on March 17th starting at noon. Smakk Rocks St Paddy's Day promises to have you rocking the day away. Join the community at O'Briens for a St. Patrick's celebration filled with good music and good food.

Astro Skate's St. Patrick's Alien Green Out Day: March 17th 1 - 5PM

For an out-of-this-world St. Patrick's Day experience, head to Astro Skate in Brandon on March 17th for the St. Patrick's Alien Green Out Day from 1-5 PM. This extraterrestrial-themed event promises green pizza, green cotton candy, and prizes for those who come dressed in green. Get ready for an intergalactic adventure that is sure to be an unforgettable day for the kids.

So, put on your green attire, embrace the spirit of the day, and explore all the fun happenings right in our neighborhood. For more information on any of the events listed above, please contact the listed venue.







By Jane Owen

Bell Shoals Road is less scary after construction, despite the arrival of a 12-foot Skeleton named Pepper.

Pepper first visited Bell Shoals Road for Halloween of 2022, but he left on November 1 of that year. When he came back for Halloween of 2023, he decided to stay.

To see Pepper's wardrobe changes, follow him on Facebook: @skelly. of.valrico and on Instagram: @skelly_of_valrico.

For St. Patrick's Day, Pepper is:





Put a Spring into your Step with Hillsborough County School's Race for Education

By Jane Owen



The 3rd annual Race for Education 5K & 1-Mile Run/Walk will be held on Saturday, April 6. The race is located in downtown Tampa, starting in front of Blake High School and looping around and over the Hillsborough River. Throughout the race route, there will be live musical performances from students to motivate you to the finish line.

All proceeds directly benefit students and teachers by funding innovative and engaging programs to improve mental and physical wellness. Registered participants will receive a race shirt. Finishers receive a Custom Finisher Medal.

Do you have a student? Register with the code **HCPSSTUDENT** at checkout by March 31 to receive a discount off the 5K.

Register here: https://runsignup.com/Race/FL/Tampa/HEF5K

For more information, visit: https://educationfoundation.com/raceforeducation/



Bloomingdale and Newsome Co-Host 8th Annual IncrediBULL Games

By Jane Owen



March 8:

International Women's Day

March 10:

Daylight Savings



March 10:

Ramadan (begins at sundown)

March 14:

National Pi Day

March 15:

Ides of March



March 17:

St. Patrick's Day

March 19:

First Day of Spring

March 24:

Palm Sunday

March 29:

Good Friday

March 29:

National Vietnam War Veteran's Day

March 31:

Easter

The 8th annual IncrediBULL Games were hosted by Bloomingdale and Newsome on Friday, February 23 at Bloomingdale High School. The IncrediBULL Games are a special olympic field day event for middle school and high school students in East Hillsborough County. This year's games was the biggest year yet with 560 athletes from 18 schools. Volunteers included 850 student volunteers from Bloomingdale and Newsome, community volunteers from MacDill Air Force Base, The Knights of Columbus and the Special Olympics.

IncrediBULL Games Event Coordinator Donna Hart started the games in 2015 (a year was skipped due to Covid).

"The IncrediBULL Games event continues to be my favorite day of the year. The excitement, from both the athletes and the student volunteers, is beyond measure. It is a day for fun and more importantly friendship!" Hart said.







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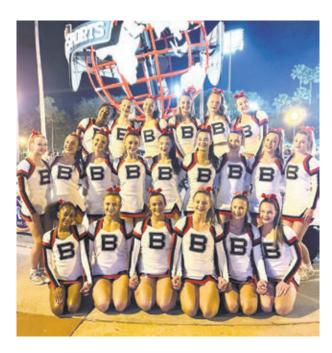


BSHS Cheerleaders Place 3rd at State and Place 9th at Nationals

The Bloomingdale High School Cheerleaders placed third at the FHSAA State Championships on February 3rd.

The team placed 9th at Game Day Varsity Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA) Nationals at the Wide World of Sports in Orlando, which took place February 9-11. Teams from all around the country competed.

BSHS Cheerleaders put in the work. Congratulations on two tremendous competition placements!







Four Bloomingdale Wrestlers Qualify for the 2024 FHSAA State Wresting Championships

Qualifying for States takes tremendous dedication, determination, and focus. Congratulations to Bloomingdale's Wrestling State Qualifiers: Leo Perdomo (113lbs), J.R. Singer (144lbs), Luke Bever (150lbs), Miz Morales (215)!

Congratulations to J.R. Singer for winning the Regional Championship for the 144lb weight class! At Regionals, Perdomo won 3rd place, Bever won 3rd place, and Morales won 3rd place. All of the state qualifiers won their final matches the Regional meet.



BSHS Girls Basketball Wins Regionals, Advances to Compete at States

The Bloomingdale High School Girls Basketball Team is the 2024 6A Region 3 Champions. They won the Regional Championship on February 22, beating Charlotte 49-47. The team advanced to the State semi-finals in Lakeland on March 7 to play against Ponte Vedra.

Congratulations on being the 6A-3 Region Champions!



Bloomingdale Boys Soccer Advances to States; Honors Former State Championship Teams

By Nick Nahas

The Bloomingdale boys' soccer program is having one of its best seasons to date, winning a district championship, a Western Conference title, a regional title and recording a 20-1-1 overall record. The school recognized former state championship soccer teams in the regional quarterfinals against Sickles High School on February 13. The Bulls won the game 4-0.

The program honored Bloomingdale championship teams from the 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2001 seasons. Rob Woodard, who coached the '93 and '95 teams, was in attendance, as well as former players from every championship team.

In attendance were: Rob Brown, Ryan McCoy, Scott Kasprzyk and Richard Steinestel, who played on both the '93 and '95 state championship teams. Rob Hill, Alex Ruiz, Shawn Edwards and Chip Atkins played on the '95 team. Chaz Richard represented the '98 team and Daniela Davila represented the '01 team.

The '93 state championship was the first in Bloomingdale High School history for any sport. The '95 state championship team started the season ranked number one overall in the state of Florida and finished with the same ranking and a 25-1-1 record. The team only gave up nine goals in 27 games. They started the season 1-1-1 and proceeded to win 24 straight, with 19 consecutive shutouts, including every playoff game. They finished as the seventh ranked team in the nation.

"It's good for the players to see others getting recognized," said current head coach Dennis Perello. "That could be them one day. That's something that's not forgotten, when you win a state title or you win conference titles."

The 2024 Bulls hope to continue the strong tradition of winning state titles. They were the number one overall seed in the region and avenged their loss last season to Fort Myers on February 21, beating them 3-2 in double overtime to advance to the state semifinal. Bloomingdale won the Hillsborough County Western Conference Championship on January 19, beating Wharton High School 3-1. They also won the 6A District Championship on January 31, beating Palmetto High School 3-1.

Bloomingdale is led by fourth-year head coach Perello, who was selected as the Federal Division Western Conference Coach of the Year. Perello thinks that his team's unselfishness has paid dividends this season. He said that the team has scored about 20 more goals than they did the season before.

"I'm proud of the focus and hard work that the kids have put in," said Perello. "Their consistency and their desire to play at the top level every game is unmatched. Sometimes you play down to your opponents, this year we've taken the step to where we are playing at a higher level every game that we're playing in."

Josiah "Jojo" Davila-Richardson, Stefan Vera and goalie Zane Hydock were name to the All-Western Conference First Team. Defenders Adler Stone, Jason Knipp and Hayden Laufenberg were named to the second team. Davila-Richardson will attend Wake Forest University on scholarship in the fall.



Bloomingdale High School Boys Soccer, FHSAA Class 6A 2024 Regional Champions



Rob Woodard, who coached the '93 and '95 teams, was in attendance, as well as former players from every championship team.

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