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BRICKBATS + BOUQUETS

BOUQUET to City Sanitation Workers
Since the city’s curbside recycling program ceased operation in early October, the men and women who already have the thankless job of collecting residents’ trash also had to contend with ginormous recycling bins jam-packed with empty wine bottles and Amazon boxes. With curbside recycling returning April 4, let us take a moment to thank those who have picked up ... when others dropped the ball.

BOUQUET to Late Bloomers Garden Club
An offshoot of the Garden Club of Jacksonville, the volunteer group works to restore, improve and protect the quality of the environment through programs and action in horticulture, conservation and education. Most recently, members took part in Weed Wrangle, a national event to remove non-native invasive trees, vines and flowering plants, by uprooting botanical invaders at Walter Jones Historical Park in Mandarin. Their deeds were even more heroic considering it was in the 40s that day with wind gusts up to 50 MPH.

BRICKBAT to Whoever Is in Charge of Gas Prices
As of press time, the price of a gallon of regular gas in Jacksonville is $4.40! What the Shell?!?! (Not picking on you, Shell, but you’re the only one that rhymes with “hell.”) What’s even crazier is it probably already hit $5 before you finished this sentence.

BRICKBAT to Gov. Ron DeSantis
Regarding the Parental Rights in Education Bill (aka “Don’t Say Gay”): gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay. That’s one time for each member of the Florida Legislature who voted to pass the bill that got it to your desk. And here’s one more for you: gay.

Susan Armstrong does a fantastic job of putting all* the pieces together. (*"All" would actually require a novel-length article. She weaves together the most relevant pieces of the puzzle.)

-Julie Delegal
Pisces
You’re set up for success and luck is on your side, so go for it! While you’re busy taking advantage of this good fortune, your emotions will be a little subdued. Spend some relaxed and cozy time with loved ones.

Cancer
A new romance is becoming more passionate for you. Don’t shy away from someone who makes you comfortable. In addition to this relationship, some other life changes may have you feeling more emotional.

Scorpio
You’re moving toward a healthier mental state and making improvements in your daily life. Your friends and family are enthusiastic about your progress. Take inventory of who expresses support during this time; there may be some friendships you’ve outgrown.

Aries
Your work life will see a shift toward the end of this month. While you finish up with a project or position, you’ll be ready to re-center your priorities and embrace the change. Entering this Aries season will bring exciting possibilities.

Leo
Don’t be flippant with your money, and keep your eyes out for a helpful business relationship that may come your way. Those closest to you will make you feel especially seen and understood this month.

Sagittarius
You’ve been after harmony, and it’s finally coming your way. Things will fall into place whether it be redecorating your home or changing careers. Your communication skills are especially strong right now, so it’s a good time to collaborate with others.

Taurus
Let go of anything that feels stifling. It’s time to let your imagination and creativity play. Be careful to avoid limited perspectives. If you’re open to different ideas; you’ll have the potential to grow in areas of importance to you.

Virgo
Appreciate the flexibility and freedom you’re experiencing right now. It will allow you to be selective about who you’re spending your energy on. Stay in touch with your emotions and resist the urge to rationalize everything away.

Capricorn
Optimism and confidence will serve you well. This is the perfect time for you to pursue depth: depth in your relationships, hobbies and spiritual outlooks. The planets are lining up in your favor.

Gemini
You may be expecting some major changes in your home, such as a move or new roommate. There might be some additional setbacks, so be open to changing plans. Remain flexible and optimistic.

Libra
People will be especially drawn to your aura this month. It’s a good time to make long-term connections. Although, trying to pursue too many avenues will leave you tired; focus on what you really want.

Aquarius
Your month is going to be steamyyyy. Bask in the heightened attention from romantic prospects. Though, don’t get carried away and make sure not to acquire any negative baggage. You’re going to be shedding stressors, don’t create more.
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28 MANCHESTER ORCHESTRA
with LUNAR VACATION & GLAZED

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FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT JAXRIVERJAMS.COM
As the LGBTQ+ community faces more and more obstacles, including the ‘Don’t “Say” Gay’ bill, a safe place for the community is needed now more than ever. JASMYN is stepping up to take on the challenge in an effort to build a community where young LGBTQ+ members can freely be themselves, despite any backlash those members may face with friends and/or family.

JASMYN is an organization that aims to provide a safe place offering health and wellness services to young members of the LGBTQ+ community. They offer development opportunities and promote equality for all. They believe the young members are a “valued asset in the Northeast Florida community.” JASMYN partners with organizations all over Northeast Florida to provide necessary resources to those who need them.

Most recently they have announced their goal to expand and complete their campus located in downtown Jacksonville. For a year, JASMYN has been engaged in a campaign to finish the campus. The $1.6 million goal will allow the organization to provide a larger health clinic, an outdoor classroom and entertainment space in a shared backyard that will be available “rain or shine,” a meditative zen garden for people to go when they are feeling overwhelmed and need some quiet time to themselves and additional office space for their ever-growing staff of mental health counselors. The organization will be fully equipped to provide a space for young LGBTQ+ members to go and feel loved and welcomed.

Safe Place will also be raising money via the “Over The Rainbow” fundraiser. This fundraiser allows individuals to donate pavers that, once finished, will be their “yellow brick road.” This is just another way they provide a welcoming community for those who need it.

It is, unfortunately, often we hear of young LGBTQ+ members being cast out by their family or friends in a time of need, but JASMYN offers a place to go if that happens. Not only do they provide health care and services to aid in a healthy and safe lifestyle, but they also provide housing support. This organization, along with others like it, offer a space for the young members to grow and develop into who they want to be, not who society tells them to be. For the past 25 years they have achieved such but are always aiming higher.

If you or someone you know is looking for more information visit jasmyn.org and don’t be afraid to be who you are.
Folio first featured Ellie K in its pages in one of the earliest installments of “Folio Weed,” nigh on four years ago. Our first interview, way back in August 2018, took place at Starbucks. At the time, she was in the first year of her YouTube channel, which deals specifically with cannabis products made and sold in Northeast Florida. She only had a few hundred subscribers at the time, and her goal was to get that number above 1,000, thus opening the door to AdSense loot.

Today, Ellie’s channel, Florida Cannabis Reviews, has over 8,000 subscribers and 71 videos at press time. Two of those videos have eclipsed 100,000 views, and one of them has over 200,000 views; that’s impressive stuff from a fully independent, one-woman creative team. “Honestly, I was not expecting those videos to take off and do as well as they did,” she said. “I put about equal effort into all of my videos, so I hope for the best with each one. I didn’t think there was anything different about those two, but it was a happy accident.”

Most outlets that review cannabis products (like this column, for example) are always open to getting samples and trying new products, so one might assume the region’s most prolific reviewer would be basically dialed-in to the dispensaries, through a sponsorship deal of some kind. That’s not the case with Ellie, who generally buys all her own products, and usually only talks about the ones that she actually likes. “For the most part, I’m just a normal person going into the dispensaries,” she said.

Unlike most people in this field, Ellie never gives the impression that she’s trying to get anyone’s attention. The cannabis industry is kinda like craft beer in that self-promotion is essential to the rapid growth of the industry. But she’s not some crazy stoner doing thicc boy dab hits designed to trigger your mom or some pushy, proselytizing industry rep humble-bragging about their gear. Her videos stem more from genuine interest in the product than any real desire to advance her personal brand. She’s very straightforward, almost reportorial in tone; she could just as easily be talking about records, young adult novels, vintage fasteners or artisan tea bags. This could be pastiche but probably not.

Florida’s cannabis market continues to grow, with new users and new businesses joining the chat on a weekly basis, which is good news for people like us. “The numbers for [medical marijuana] card holders do continue to grow, but at the same time, some of that growth has slowed, compared to 2018,” she said. The failure of legalization efforts in 2020 and 2022 has certainly taken a bit of the edge off, but current trends have no plateau currently in sight. “Somehow there is a disconnect between wanting this to be passed and actually getting there,” she said, “because we have seen these petitions fail to pan out. But I don’t really know what the answer is to fixing that. I’m really not sure.”

Most of Ellie’s videos run between five and 10 minutes, but some can run well over 20 minutes. You could probably watch every video on the channel in the course of one weekend, but their brevity belies the work put in. The amount of time and effort that each requires is generally impossible to tell, just from looking at them, and that is by design. As far as work-flow goes, “It really depends on the video,” she said. “I’ve made videos, from start to finish, that took one day, and I’ve made videos that took over a week.” At this point in the conversation, her cat yowls, maybe jealous of all the time it spends alone while Ellie is on the computer. “There’s a lot of research that goes into it, and the editing takes up a lot of time.”

There are so many new brands, new products, new retailers, all the time, but this far into the game, is there really anything actually new at this point, or are we just playing new variations on old themes here? “I feel like it’s the latter,” said Ellie. “I think we’re at the point where we’ve found the majority of products that are going to be popular right now. I’m not really seeing a whole lot that’s really brand new or innovative.”

That said, there is no shortage of impressive gimmicks out there. We all have our favorites, and so does Ellie. “One product that I’ve tried recently that was interesting was the dissolvable powder from Cannabist,” she said. “It’s a drinkable product, and it’s made with cannabis-infused sugar.”

As one might expect, this kind of content is heavy on engagement, and feedback for the St. Augustine native has been resoundingly positive. There is so much of this material out there, and we’ll be shining the spotlight on other regional creators in the weeks and months ahead.
WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH: HIJABIS

There is no experience comparable to wearing a hijab while living in the West. It’s something only Muslim women have to go through: the fear of being discriminated against for one’s appearance while simultaneously having the option to simply remove it at any time and become one with the crowd. It’s a true test of mental strength and bravery; willingly risking your own safety for the sake of faith.

As a Muslim man, it’s difficult to witness. My sisters are publicly struggling in ways men are often too scared to do. Muslim men also have a dress code, but it isn’t nearly as apparent as the hijab. Wearing jeans and a t-shirt is enough to cover up what is required. Muslim men often adopt Western clothing, haircuts, and fashion trends in an attempt to blend in. It’s been taught to us, especially the children of immigrants, not to look “too Muslim” so as not to be seen as a threat. According to some elders, we’re supposed to be grateful we’re allowed to live here in the first place and to not worry about our right of self expression. Some Muslim men intentionally wear Arab and Muslim clothing in public to fight this stigma and show solidarity with our sisters, despite it not being a key part of our religion. For Muslim women who wear a hijab, also known as a hijabi, it isn’t as voluntary. In order to fully practice the faith, they have to cover their hair.

UNF student Nagat Khalifa, who became a hijabi in 2019, said that there are many things she goes through as a result of her hijab. Being “visually Muslim,” as she calls it, does result in a level of discrimination that could be easily avoided if she took it off.

“It’s not a choice though,” she said. “It’s all part of the struggle and we’re doing this for Allah. It’s a part of Islam.”

Interreligious discrimination wasn’t the only issue Nagat experiences. Even other Muslims tended to be judgmental, telling her she would struggle to get married or find a job with her hijab. However, she found that when it came to employment, the opposite was often the case.

“It’s like being a ‘token,’” said Nagat. “I’ve had a lot of opportunities open up to me because they’re looking for more diversity. But I’ve tried to use that to my advantage.”

Personally, I always feel a sense of protectiveness and fear when I see a hijabi in public. I scan the surroundings and try to keep an eye out to make sure she isn’t in danger of harassment or violence. Hijabis go through that fear every time they’re out in public.

Despite all this, Nagat says she’s had a lot of support from her friends. Some of them would be curious about the hijab and her decision to start wearing it, but overall most people were respectful and understanding. She advises young Muslim women to do it if it feels right and to not be scared or influenced by anyone.

“It’s ultimately between you and Allah,” she said. “Don’t let anyone interfere with your relationship with god.”
DOG GONE!
Rory Diamond's Charitable Boondoggles
BY EMILY NUNEZ
Sir Winston Churchill said, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Looks like Jacksonville didn’t get his memo.

Large salaries and lavish spending, along with fraud and abuse by those heading charitable organizations have been a recurring theme in Jacksonville, especially among elected officials.

To illustrate, in 2013, then Lt. Governor Jennifer Carroll resigned when Allied Veterans, a charity for veterans which she widely championed and was the public face, was helping themselves to money meant for veterans. Carroll was ultimately not charged, although most of the $300 million raised was spent by the charity’s leaders for beachfront condos, Maseratis, Ferraris, boats and a host of other exuberance. In 2017, U.S Congresswoman Corrine Brown was convicted of 18 corruption charges in connection with her fake charity, “One Door Education.” Brown allegedly used donations to pay for elaborate parties, expensive trips and cars. Her conjunction has been overturned. Jacksonville City Council members Katrina Brown and Reginald Brown were convicted in 2019 for multiple counts of fraud involving grants for small businesses. Former JEA Chief Executive Officer Aaron Zahn and former JEA Chief Financial Officer Ryan Wannemacher have been indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of conspiracy and wire fraud.

Oblivious to headlines and history, on Sept. 28, 2021, the Jacksonville City Council voted unanimously to award money to charities which, coincidentally, included those that employ city council members at large, in addition to their council earnings. The council also waived the requirements that called for all charities to be allowed to apply and compete for city dollars.

The local media and ultimately some citizens were less than enthusiastic with the council’s endowments to their cronies’ charities and salaries. But to some council members, it was no big whoop, as attaining council seats appears to be a familiar segue into lucrative salaries at local charities. Sometimes the opposite is true, as participation with charities seems to be big vote getters.

Councilman Rory Diamond is concurrently the city council and the CEO for K9’s for Warriors. Although he voted “yea” along with his council contemporaries, he quickly pointed out on social media that while other members of the council were employed by charities that received city funds, “…the non-profit I run has never taken a penny of city money…” It appears that although Diamond was quick with bragging rights here, his charitable history is not completely altruistic and his memory slightly selective.

When Ponte Vedra resident Shari Duval’s son came home from Iraq with severe post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), doctors and medical facilities offered little help. After a great deal of research, Duval found studies that showed service dogs offered significant relief from PTSD. Shari paired her son with a Belgian Malinois and he began to show immeasurable progress.

Duval felt she had witnessed a miracle and wanted to share that same miracle with others suffering from PTSD. With only determination, love, empathy and no financial backing, Shari started the non-profit K9’s for Warriors. Her charity trained dogs, many rescued, as service companions for veterans suffering from PTSD. The largest salary Shari Duval reluctantly received after years of tireless efforts was approximately $60,000, with much of that going back to the charity.

In 2015, Shari Duval met 36-year old Rory Diamond. He claimed to be a Nevada native and boasted a B.A. from the University of Michigan. After college, Diamond said he was an “...alumni of the White House,” and he was Deputy Associate Director for President George W. Bush during 9/11. He claimed to have helped in “founding the U.S. Office of Homeland Security,” and “…watched two wars unfold.” Diamond told Duval he was the Briefing Director for California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. He said he received a law degree from San Diego School of Law in 2007 and worked for two international law firms. Diamond asserted that he left one of the law firms to become a federal prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice from April 2011 to Sept. 2012. He said he “focused upon impactful prosecution aimed at rescuing high crime communities from the grips of drug dealers, gang leaders, and violent criminals.” He also said he specialized in public corruption, financial fraud and organized crime.

Shari Duval was impressed. She hired Diamond as Executive Director of K9’s for Warriors. with a starting salary of $155,674. What Shari didn’t know was that Rory dressed up his employment history more than just a little bit.

It appears Diamond, 22, fresh from college, volunteered at the White House several days before 9/11. His title was “unpaid intern.” According to research, unpaid interns played no pivotal role in creating the Office of Homeland Security, except supplying coffee. Since he was allegedly at the White House for just over a year, he likely watched the two wars unfold...from another state.

In December, 2011, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed approximately 11 members of the Log Cabin Republicans, a national organization of Republicans who focuses its efforts on recruiting LGBT Republicans, to unpaid state boards to ensure the rights of the LGBT community. Diamond was appointed to the Student Aid Commission.

Diamond’s resume lists he graduated from law school in 2007. The California State Bar shows he was licensed in 2009. But, Diamond was never a federal prosecutor in VA, as he claimed. A press release dated August 24, 2011, says Rory Diamond worked as one of many “special assistants” to assistant state attorneys in VA. The “special” designation means Diamond was an unpaid temporary volunteer for one year.

After Duval hired Diamond, he began earning his salary by creating spin-off organizations from K9’s for Warriors.

In 2016, Diamond created “The Institute for Warriors” and later renamed it “K9s For Warriors Research Institute. (KWRI)” The research allegedly focused on the use of service dogs as a treatment option for PTSD. IRS forms showed Shari Duval took no salary from KWRI, however in 2016, Rory Diamond took an additional income of $34,775. By 2019, Diamond’s salary with KWRI increased to $63,000 and his Chief of Staff, Patricia Dodson’s, salary was $191,120.
While working at K9’s, Rory was elected to a seat on the Neptune Beach City Council, and then to a seat for District 13 on the Jacksonville City Council. By 2019, Diamond’s salary with K9’s was $209,680.00, plus his council salary. He was, and still remains, the highest paid member of a non-profit on the Jacksonville City Council.

In October of 2019, Councilman Diamond formed yet another charity linked to K9’s For Warriors. He drafted legislation to form Northeast Florida Fire Watch council. Diamond marketed “The Firewatch” as a “coordinated” effort between Duval, St. Johns, Clay, Nassau, and Baker Counties to end veteran suicide. Each participating county initially provided taxpayer dollars to the organization in a show of solidarity to reduce veteran suicides. Diamond then created “The Fire Watch Project, Inc.” a parallel non-profit to The Fire Watch, which also sought donations. This organization has not filed with the department of agriculture despite receiving public donations via its website.

Shari Duval died after a recurring battle with cancer in February, 2021. While she saw no positive results for veterans from any of Diamond’s spin-offs, K9’s for Warriors was an incredible success story. Since its inception, Duval’s charity “rescued” 1,268 dogs and 650 veterans. However, after Duval’s death, it appears that Councilman Diamond has been a poor guardian of her legacy and for those who are waiting for a service dog, those who have contributed to K9’s For Warriors, K9’s For Warriors Research, Fire Watch and Fire Watch Project.

According to K9’s For Warriors website, Rory Diamond rakes in a salary of $283,509, plus a 401K. According to a representative of K9’s For Warriors, Veterans now wait approximately four to five years to obtain a service dog. (Research shows it can take from 6 months to two years to train a service dog, depending on the breed of the dog.) Yet, Diamond takes a fat bonus every year. The representative from K9’s said the long wait is due to the fact that “rescue dogs do not always make good service animals.” Some have questioned why Diamond does not ask for donations of suitable dogs or even purchase dogs for training instead of spending large donations for management salaries.

While K9’s management are listed as working 40 hours weekly for their fat paychecks, none can be reached via phone at K9’s. According to the financial information provided via the K9’s website, the upper management salaries for K9’s for Warriors, including Diamond’s, are well over $1 million a year.

While Councilman Diamond may not have asked for taxpayer dollars to go to K9’s for Warriors, he has personally advocated for at least $255,000 of taxpayer dollars budgeted to the city to be reallocated to The Fire Watch. On behalf of The Fire Watch, elected officials and others have also extended emotional pleas to neighboring county governments to donate to the non-profit in efforts to help stem veteran suicide. Initial contributions from local counties ranged from $5,000 to $70,000. Diamond’s organization has asked counties for a 300 percent raise in taxpayer dollars for the FY 2022 budget. But it appears at least two formerly participating counties may be looking for reassurances that Fire Watch is actually assisting veterans.

John Martin, Nassau County Commissioner and county liaison to The Fire Watch told the programs executive director, Nick Howland, that he was concerned about the county’s contributions to the charity.

“I need data indicating The Fire Watch is making progress toward reducing Veteran suicide in Nassau County,” Martin emailed The Fire Watch officials. “…There is no doubt that this is a worthy cause. However, for me to advocate to approve your request for triple the amount of taxpayer funds as you received the previous two years, I need data to support it.” Martin received no answer, but he continued his quest.

Commissioner Martin sent another email inquiry to Howland “… I understand that K9’s for Warriors subsidizes your (Fire Watch) salary. However, it will not go unnoticed by my fellow Commissioners that your Executive Director’s salary increased from $125,000 to $150,000 per year and additional staff are being brought onboard.” Martin chided. “This is all justifiable and cannot be used to oppose your request if the data I have asked for indicates that The Fire Watch is making a difference in Nassau County.” To date, Martin has received no data that indicates Firewatch is actually assisting suicidal veterans in any way. Nassau County will not be honoring the funding request.

A Clay County official, who wished to remain anonymous, told Folio they also had doubts about The Fire Watch. The official asked for proof that Fire Watch was actually providing services to vulnerable veterans. Again, nothing was proceeded.

When suicidal veterans, or those who want to help veterans, attempt to contact The Fire Watch, all inquiries are directed to other veteran charities. One local Jacksonville charity takes the calls to keep veterans off the street by provings for 90 day hotel stays, suppling veterans with food, mental health counseling, and whatever they need in an attempt to stabilize their situation. Low on resources, the Jacksonville charity asked that The Fire Watch provide mentors or someone to sit with the

RORY DIAMOND'S CHARITABLE BOONDOGGLES ARE A LIVING EXAMPLE THAT WINSTON CHURCHILL WAS RIGHT.
distressed veterans. Firewatch told the organization they didn’t have any mentors or assistance to provide. This answer left the organization with questions as to what the FireWatch was actually accomplishing for veterans.

When Folio attempted to discover exactly how money donated to The Fire Watch was actually spent, it appeared Fire Watch had one expenditure, Nick Howland’s salary. Despite the fact that he is running an aggressive time-intensive political race to fill the remainder of the late Tommy Hazouri’s city council seat, Howland’s salary as Executive Director of K9’s remains the same. Howland did, however, respond to questions about his large salary.

“I do not need to share the amount since the Fire Watch Council pays nothing for management of the program.” Folio discovered an Executive on Loan agreement showing that K9’s had been paying Howland’s six figure salary. Howland wrote “…At some point, K9s probably needs a resolution of thanks from the Council and perhaps each County Commission.” Perhaps, it is Howland who should perform that resolution of thanks to K9’s for his large salary.

Despite his paycheck and title, Howland seems to have no knowledge about the legal requirements for the charities he represents. When Folio asked for the names of board members for Fire Watch Project, Inc., Howland said those names were not required by Florida’s sunshine law. He was wrong. After Folio’s queries, board members were finally listed on the website Sunbiz.org, but remain unlisted on the non-profit website. Although required, there are also no meeting minutes provided on the website. Any charity that solicits funds from private citizens is required to be registered with the Department of Agriculture and consumer services and will be listed on the Check a Charity website. The Fire Watch Project Inc. is not registered, despite Howland’s assurance that the donate button on his website has generated private donations. Although Fire Watch was formed in 2019, there are no tax forms on file yet for the organization, and only snapshot expenses and budgets have been provided on request. Interestingly, no budget for office expenses, rent, utilities, or internet is listed. A white paper written by Howland disclosed that K9’s for Warriors owns all Fire Watch intellectual property, including the Trademark, designs, and website.

After public disapproval of the council’s bequests to their cohorts’ charities which pay for their charitable salaries, Councilman Diamond drafted a bill that would ensure a competitive bid process for grants to non-profits. The bill also included reporting requirements for the council members’ role in the non-profit. Council watchers said Diamond’s efforts were clearly for show, since he already voted to give money to members’ charities and skipped the competitive process. Watchers said his bill was meant to garner favor for his next political race and mask shadowy aspects of the charities he represents.

Most purloining by public officials takes place because they are placed in positions of accessibility. Organizations and charities that do little for the most vulnerable divert funds from those that respond to real needs. Insiders, outsiders, and council watchers say it’s time for city council members to get out of the charity business or get off the council, because they can’t do both honestly. The Jacksonville City Council has repeatedly picked the non-profit winners and losers. Rory Diamond’s charitable boondoggles are a living example that Winston Churchill was right.
Ever since COVID-19 hit the nation two years ago, our world was changed forever under a global pandemic. What people forget is the other pandemic that plagues our lives even to this day: HIV. That's why NFAN is there for us.

Located in Southside, the Northeast Florida AIDS Network (NFAN) is the largest AIDS service organization in the region. For over 30 years, they work to prevent the spread of the disease or to treat and assist those who have it. The group serves about 1500 people every year and offers a large number of services.

The main purpose of the organization is to make sure those who need their services have access to the medication and medical care they need. But before they can do that, sometimes they have to help people with bigger struggles they have. They feed, help pay rent, help deal with traumas, help house the homeless, and more; just so they can get one step closer to providing the necessary medication.

"Nobody's gonna take their medicine if they have all these other problems in their life so the first thing they do is tearing down all these barriers and then they get down to the HIV." said executive director Donna Fuchs.

NFAN is partnered with Down to Earth Farm, a Jax farm that offers fresh veggies and farm-raised pork. Together, they can help people grow their own food and get them to be self-sustaining. Along with that, they work with Feeding Northeast Jax to give people good nutritious food. NFAN also works with UNF’s Food Fighters program, where the school takes surplus food and sends it over to the organization so they can get a hot meal for those who need it.

NFAN holds Dining Out for Life, an event made by a Philadelphia network that promotes awareness of the cause. On April 28, restaurants around Jax will donate a percentage of their earnings that day to NFAN. They have done this for 16 years and partner with establishments like Biscotti’s, Black Sheep, Hamburger Mary’s, and more. Meanwhile, volunteers will be there to spread awareness of NFAN and HIV.

“It surprises me in particular that every year I still have face to face with one person in the community who approaches me and says ‘I thought HIV was over?’” said special programs manager Jessica Kloke.

Their greatest obstacle is the stigma behind those with HIV. The stigma of having it, the stigma of taking medicine for it, even the stigma of being associated with it as a whole. The matter gets even worse with legislation like the “Don’t Say Gay” bill popping up. Most people give looks to those who support it or even have the red ribbon on them. It got to the point where the location needed to take the ribbon off just so people won’t feel ashamed coming in. That’s why NFAN makes it a point that their location is a 100% safe space.

COVID-19 hitting the world did not help things; in fact, it only made those with HIV even worse off. Both those with the disease and those working to stop the spread would now have to deal with two pandemics at the same time. As demotivating as that would sound, that gave even more reason for NFAN to stand tall and lend a helping hand to everyone. They need to help those who lost their jobs and can’t cope with the new way of life now more than ever.

The ultimate goal for NFAN, along with other AIDS networks, is to get to a point where they aren’t necessary. To make sure the spread lowers and those HIV-positive are treated properly so that the disease is no longer such a big problem. That being said, they still see and treat hundreds of people every year. Fuchs summarizes things in an apt way: “Unfortunately, business is booming.”
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Abby Jewel

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Rachel Fleischman
We’ve all seen it on TV, in the movies, and sometimes in real life. You’re walking around, minding your business when you see a group of people dressed as characters from *Star Trek* or *Lord of the Rings*. If it isn’t Halloween, don’t get too confused; those people are just cosplaying.

Cosplay, short for “costume play,” is the act of dressing like or making oneself look like a fictional character. Cosplays are especially popular at events like conventions or the premiere of an anticipated movie. The kinds of things people will cosplay vary greatly from anime, video games, comics, novels, TV shows and much more. People will even cosplay memes!

The art of cosplay dates all the way back to the 15th century with the rise of costume parties and masquerade balls. It wasn’t until the 1800s that the idea of what we consider “cosplay” was born. Cosplay is commonly associated with Japan, as the word comes from their word (kosupure). The country even has special cafés based around cosplay, where a person can be served food by maids or their favorite fictional character.

How people go about cosplay depends on the person. There are some who take the character’s design and create the clothing from scratch themselves, sewing fabric or sculpting props to go with it. Some cosplayers like to do “closet cosplays” where they take clothing and materials they already have and try to put together an outfit that at least somewhat matches. There are even some who just buy a completed cosplay off of a vendor. All different takes on the art, but each of them shares the love for the medium and is equally valid.

People of all ages, all ethnicities, and all walks of life join under the shared interest of dressing up. Even animals join in on the fun sometimes! Today, cosplaying has taken the front stage in modern media with several movies and TV shows making episodes about characters dressing up for conventions and such. The animated show *My Dress-up Darling* depicts a high-schooler’s story to perfect cosplays of characters she loves.

I got the chance to talk to cosplayer Alissa Gilmer, known by her cosplay alias LadyAshe XII.

**What does cosplay mean to you?**

For me, it’s just kind of the perfect creative outlet. I love there’s a community link with it. I’ve always been crafting, you know, like drawing and painting; I started sewing my own Halloween costumes, like, in middle school so I fell into it naturally. I like that you can, you know, bring any kind of skill set to it or just, you know, join it for fun. It’s very welcoming as a hobby and a community, plus it’s a creative outlet and just something to kind of challenge myself to explore new skills.

**Do you have any specific fandoms or genres you stick to or do you go for whatever catches your eye?**

Hopefully I’m going after Marvel and Disney. I’m currently working on the *Lord of the Rings*; that and *Star Wars* are kind of my childhood. I have Rey from Star Wars in the works.

**Any favorite cosplay conventions or events you like?**

DragonCon. I plan my year around it. It’s awesome! It was actually our second [convention]; we went to MegaCon and then we were like “Let’s go do a 75,000 plus convention downtown!” It started with five hotels the year we went and then it expanded, of course. It’s a lot, but it’s very satisfying. It’s very sci-fi-based. A lot of the local stuff is based around anime, which is great and all, but I more go for Star Trek and Deep Space 9 and stuff like that.

**Any advice to newbie cosplayers or people thinking of trying it out?**

Try your local conventions. I mean, they’re a lot of fun! If you’re interested in anything pop culture, you like Marvel, Disney movies, anything, there’s always something there for you. Even if it’s marketed, as like an anime convention, there’s gonna be something there that interests you. A lot of them are kind of a mixed bag ‘cause you’ll have comic book artists and artists in general who represent a bunch of different genres, so it’s always worth checking out if you’re curious and I can’t imagine not going out dressed up; it’s so much fun for me. If you love Halloween and you love just putting a spin on your day or your trip, then try it out ‘cause it just adds a whole other layer of enjoyment to whatever you’re doing.
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LIVESTOCK

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DAIRY SHOW 6PM
APRIL 2:
GOAT SHOW 10AM
UNLIMITED GOAT SHOW 3PM
SWINE SHOW 6PM
APRIL 3:
PoulTRY SHOWMANSHIP 2PM
HEIFER SHOW 6PM
APRIL 6:
STEER SHOW 7PM
APRIL 8:
LIVESTOCK SALE AT 7PM

MAIN EVENTS

• CONCERTS!
• TRACTOR PULLS
(FREE WITH ADMISSION)

DAILY ENTERTAINMENT

• NEW! MEGATRON ROBOT
• FRISBEE DOGS
• PIG RACES
• AG-TOWN OPEN DAILY
• EARLY FLORIDA VILLAGE OPEN DAILY

SPECIAL EVENTS

APRIL 1:
FIREWORKS 10PM
APRIL 2:
PET ADOPTIONS 10AM-4PM
APRIL 3:
REDNECK ROMPER 5PM
APRIL 5:
FERRIS WHEEL SPEED DATING 5-7PM
APRIL 6:
PARADE 1PM
BINGO 3:30PM
APRIL 8:
STAR SEARCH 7PM

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"NOT BAD" ACTIVISM

Today’s whirlwind of media and pseudo activism makes it really hard to tell who is behind a business. Virtual signaling filling storefronts and social media posts aligning too perfectly with current issues are common tools businesses use to create an image of who they are, but it isn’t unusual company practices don’t align with these public cries of “Buy from us! We’re the good guys!”

Brew 5 Points, on the other hand, with no performative activism in sight, are indeed one of the good people. Putting the needs of the community on par with the needs of employees has kept Brew at the top of the local coffee shop showdown for years and will continue to do so given the ownership of the shop.

Chef Calli Marie, co-owner, managing partner and baker for Brew, has a refreshing, unapologetic air about her. Calli was the first employee of Brew back in 2014, working part time as a barista. Unlike many other women who worked their way into positions of power, Calli had a supportive environment where her co-owners encouraged her to spread her wings.

Throughout her time as an employee and the four years she has been managing partner, Calli revolutionized the shop through her baking and cooking expertise, interior design aesthetic and attention to social justice issues. With a degree from culinary school and a long history in baking Calli completely revamped the menu making everything in house, but the most lasting impact she made over the years is the way Brew presents themselves to the community.

“I’m not trying to market our values. I think it’s very clear to see what kind of place we are when you walk in the door. I feel like shouting those things out all the time, in an Instagram post, is just not it. If you just look at all of us, it’s a very diverse group of people who are a full spectrum of sexuality and gender. I think it’s very obvious that we are in support of all of those things,” explained Calli.

The most important part of a coffee shop is those employees you come into contact with every time you walk in, especially for your 7 a.m. latte. Rather than having a visible disparity between employees and business values like some other shops in the area, Brew actively creates an inclusive and representative environment through who they employ and how they treat those workers. Although it’s relatively uncommon for employees working in food service to stay longer than one year, Brew has an average employee retention length of three years.

“I want Brew to be the place I wish I had when I was in college,” explained Calli. “If you need a day off, I give you the day off. We have health care, and all of those things that I didn’t have when I was in college. I was told it was just the industry and that you didn’t get [healthcare]. When I became a business owner, I asked, ‘why didn’t we get taken care of?’ and I’m glad I came into this role to be able to question the standard and change it. But it’s also the f*cking bare minimum to provide these things to employees. It takes a lot of letting go to let a place really flourish. You don’t have to control everything. You have to trust yourself that you hired really good people that will also take care of your place.”

Aside from inclusivity and representation, Calli’s utmost priority is the safety of her workers. Sexual harassment and violence is more common than one would hope, especially in the food service industry. Without diving into details, local coffee shops have a reputation for employment of problematic individuals. Calli has created, and continues to create, a work space that is safe for open dialogue about the well-being of staff. She said, “I went a really long time carrying the burden of the decisions, but there’s 12 people down there that all have an opinion and all their opinions matter.”

Brew is a 5 Points staple and has no plans of leaving anytime soon. Despite talks of opening a St. Augustine location over the years, Calli is committed to her shop in 5 Points. When asked about it, she put it this way:

“Do I want to be splitting my time between here and another location and working 60 hour weeks for like a little bit more money? Or would I just like to be at Brew and be happy with the things I have. I’d rather be improving this shop and putting my time and energy into what I already have. All of our resources and all of our time are going into this place to make it better. That’s all I’m really worried about doing right now.”

It’s refreshing to hear a business owner speak so boldly and proud of what they have, without a caveat that “it will get better with our next location, endeavor, program, etc,” because Calli knows that here is as good as anywhere and the grass is only greener where you water it.
I recently took a trip down I-95 South in the middle of Bike Week in Daytona. As I was driving, I noticed every bike I passed either had a lady on the back or a man driving alone. Why do men always get to do the driving? The obvious answer is because traditionally the man drives the bike, and the woman sits on the back, or in the “bitch” seat. But it got me thinking, “Are there any all female groups out there? Are all motorcycle groups really just full of old dudes with braided white ponytails?” The short answer is no, and I didn’t have to go as far south as Daytona to find out.

Jacksonville local Colleen Nevitt has worked hard to change the standard and create a group where all feel welcome to ride alongside her. Nevitt created the motorcycle group Fat Bottom Girlz, also known as FBG, in 2015 to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for women who enjoy riding motorcycles. Since then, the group has grown to almost 100 members and counting. FBG welcomes all people, no matter your sexuality, miles, age, pronouns, or bike choice. The group goes by three rules: participate in local events, be safe, and follow safety hand signals while riding.

The group is full of seasoned riders and new riders alike. Nevitt herself has been riding bikes since “when Blondie was a hit, and longer than you’ve been gluten free!”

Although the core of the group is riding motorcycles, many members say this group has acted as a second family for them. After one member, Luna, was hit by a drunk driver while riding on a Sunday afternoon last year, she said she could not have made it without the support of the group.

“It’s nice to be a part of a group where they do everything they possibly can to help and support and make sure you feel safe and comfortable,” Luna said.

Fat Bottom Girlz is also committed to helping the community. Last year the group did a raffle and fundraising event for Women’s History Month in partnership with Queen Tattoo, another female-owned business. All funds went to the Women’s Army Corps Veterans Association: Chapter #56. The group has also participated in many other community events, such as opening the River City Pride Parade.

Not only does this group provide a safe space for women to ride, but has provided amazing opportunities for its members. One group member, Anna, has recently been awarded a sponsorship with Indian Motorcycles. The company was ecstatic about getting to sponsor someone from such a generous and philanthropic group. Motorcycling, for these women, is comparable to what yoga is for yogis; many members of the group say it is when they feel most calm and at peace.

Nevitt said “Motorcycling is one of the most special things I can do for myself. It gives me calmness, keeps me in the present moment and empowers me. I am able to use it to help newer female riders sharpen their skills and thus, gain more confidence. I use it to raise funds for those who are in need within our community. Now, I don’t do those things or feel that way when I drive my truck. But when I ride my motorcycle, I can do all of it! Riding is just pure Zen.”

Getting to sit down with this group was really special for me. I have always had an admiration for women who dare to break the rules and challenge the world to think a different way, but these women are so much more than that. Not only are they providing each other with a safe space to be their true selves, but they also are a second family to each other. This is so hard to come across, and I think what they have created is really special and should be celebrated.
How long have you been skating for?

About 13 years.

That's like you learn to walk and push at the same time. Have you been competing the whole time, too?

Oh, not really the whole time. My first bigger contest was in 2014/2015 at Exposure in Encinitas, California. That was pretty sick. I was nine or 10. And I got first place in the under 14. It was an all girls contest so it had a super cool vibe.

How did you get involved with X-Games stuff?

The first Olympic qualifier was a Dew Tour event in 2019. And that was like my first ever, "Okay, I'm super nervous contest." I just got hit up over DM by Lisa Whitaker asking if I was available to do a phone call. She ended up asking if I’d be interested in going to Dew Tour and that could be a wildcard. And then from there it just kept going.

Having a huge name like Lisa call when you're 14 to talk about that kind of stuff must've been pretty intimidating.

Yeah, I was kind of tweaking out. It was stressful. That was like the first one. I had to get a passport and stuff. Even though it was in Long Beach, for the Olympics you have to have a passport, so it was kind of hectic.

How'd you end up riding for Meow?

Honestly, I ended up riding for Meow Skateboard after the phone call about Dew Tour. She asked me if I had a deck sponsor and that's how I kind of started getting hooked up. I've been hit up by a few other bigger companies, but riding for Meow is the best. We just went on a trip to Phoenix and the vibe and everything is just so cool. I feel like I wouldn’t be able to get that vibe with many other companies.

Meow is all chicks. What's it like being on a team with all women?

Skating with all girls is just so cool and different. I really enjoy skating with guys. I enjoy skating with everyone, but it's just different, especially when it comes down to street skating. With girls, we can kind of all like cumulatively agree that we don't want to go to a 12 stair with a fat handrail. And sometimes when I'm out street skating with the guys I'll get taken to these spots. And I'm like, Man, I don't know about this. But I guess that's just like, skill level and stuff, not really even having to do with gender. But typically when I am like skating with the girls it's definitely a different vibe.

I wanna to talk about Red Bull Solus. Can you talk a little bit about what the premise of that is and your experience with it?

So, basically, Red Bull Solus is a contest at Ryan Sheckler's personal skatepark. There's hella people in there with cameras. And no one's talking, you're not allowed to talk to anyone. No one's allowed to talk to you. There's no music. I usually skate by myself, so I didn't really feel any extra pressure. You have an hour, there's a stopwatch in there, and they film you a 60 second contest line. I got one line pretty quick. It wasn't super good, but I just kind of added on to it. I watched some of the other people and they didn't really handle it super well. I know a lot of people get super pissed and in their head frustrated. It was honestly just a test of how well you can handle yourself. And you have to talk to give audio. I was just kind of narrating everything I was doing.

So I feel like it's definitely a lot more inspiring. Now when you go to a park and actually see girls skating.

At the Olympics, there were three 14-year-olds on the podium. So that's kind of saying something right there. I feel, especially for younger girls, they can look and think wow, they're my age. You know, if they can do that, I can go and do this too. When I started skating, I didn't really have that. They're like two girls who skated at Fernandina. It's definitely a lot more inspiring now when you go to a park and actually see girls skating.

What's it like trying to balance high school and doing all this stuff?

Well, I do online school. So balancing it is definitely easier with online school. But last year, I got super behind. And that was not very fun. I had to catch up this year, I had like two English classes. It was just not good. I feel like, this year, I've kind of gotten the hang of it. I've been trying to kind of blow through it all and just get it done. But yeah, if I went to public school, that would be so much harder because I work like four or five days a week too. So that would just be way too much.

So what are your long term goals and like you said, you want to skate for as long as you can. But like specific goals.

I get asked this a lot and every time I think to myself, I obviously just want to keep skating. The next couple years I want to just keep skating. The next couple years I want to just do contests but I don't want to do contests forever. I'm not really too concerned about publicity or social media. I've never really been the type of person to want a pro deck or want an ad. I just kind of want to skate and keep putting myself out there and see where it goes.

Frontside or Backside
Frontside in the streets, backside on transition

One skatepark for the rest of your life?
Poods park in Encinitas

Favorite trick
Kickflip

Favorite obstacle
Any hip
Drew Brown (Co-Director), Keagan Anfuso (Director) and Michael LeGrand (2nd Unit DP) by Sindy Gonzalez
Are you a boy or a girl? Why are you ashamed of your body? What do you expect people to think? You don’t want to be a man? Why doesn’t your girlfriend just date a dude? It’s just the way it is.

Keagan Anfuso, a woman and creator who just happens to feel comfortable rocking loose fitting clothes and a “boyish” haircut, copied these quotes from memory onto index cards. In preparation to pitch their film, co-director Drew Brown suggested Anfuso write down all the comments she could remember: anything funny, hurtful, or outright confusing someone has said to her about her gender or appearance. She passed these index cards to Brown, who taped them to the office walls. Card by card, blank space filled with words Anfuso herself was unaware she’d held onto, words said to her by family, friends, strangers, and, reading the cards back they realized, Brown himself.

“Oh my god. I’m the person who said this to you. I thought it was a compliment.”

It was in this office, confronted visually with others’ judgment and misunderstanding of her, Anfuso felt the weight of what she was setting out to create, felt that she and Brown were doing something important.

Over the next five days Anfuso and Brown pitched their film, The Grey Area, at One Spark, a since discontinued local idea festival for creators. Their film would be about Anfuso’s experiences as a woman who rejects the gendered expectations placed upon her.

Attendees listened to Anfuso’s past: how she was reprimanded, bullied by classmates, and constantly met with aggression for dressing in what feels comfortable to her. In these stories, they saw themselves and the ways in which fear of judgement or even safety led them to change themselves. As the festival progressed, The Grey Area crowd grew, ultimately winning the pitchfest as the jury’s award selection for the art category.

That was in 2015. The film, seven years in the making, had its first showing recently at the Jacksonville Film Festival, where it took home Best Short Documentary. Good things take time. And good things take good people wanting to make them happen. Without the Jacksonville community, Anfuso says “I don’t think we could’ve made this film what it is.” Some volunteered money, the local film community volunteered their time and expertise, and businesses volunteered their spaces and sustenance. Without any of which, the film wouldn’t have been made.

The film’s positive reception is due in large part to calculated choices Anfuso and Brown made. The Grey Area is void of any political commentary and doesn’t include the traditional story arc. Instead, it’s simply a perspective film, aimed at making the audience feel as though all of Anfuso’s experiences are happening to them.

Anfuso received some pushback when sharing this concept with others. Other film makers said viewers would be uncomfortable when confronted with “awkward” and “ugly” close up shots of actors reciting those hurtful messages Anfuso had written down on index cards. Her response, “It’s supposed to be uncomfortable. People aren’t going to like it.” With the singular focus on influencing the audience’s feelings instead of building a satisfying plotline or convincing viewers of any political beliefs, the film is effective in inciting empathy and understanding.

I, myself, often live and die by fact based evidence when trying to convince others of a perspective. There’s a time and place to delve into the Western erasure of other cultures’ recognition of gender fluidity, a time and place to discuss biological sex determination isn’t black and white and that even in recent history the color pink and dresses were considered masculine. The Grey Area has found its time and place in addressing these complex and historical issues through the lens of simple connection to one person’s experience.

Anfuso is a woman comfortable in clothes that society deems masculine. We might think this means she’s uncomfortable in her body or gender, that she deserves ridicule for not conforming to what a woman “should be.” But, do we stop to think why this clothing isn’t offered in women’s sections in the first place? Why is being worn on a woman’s body not the qualifier for what is considered women’s clothing? Trying to separate everyone and everything into two strict boxes ignores the complexity of the human experience. Words like feminine and masculine are helpful descriptors, but harmful when employed as rules to adhere to. Anfuso’s film highlights the ways in which such dichotomies are faulty. Not every woman fits into the same box, nor does every man. These labels are instead adjectives to help describe someone’s experience. Anfuso is a woman, filmmaker, parent, climber, partner, friend, runner and so much more.

“If grey is comfortable,” she says “embrace that.”
Florida, you have disappointed me once again. As if the LGBTQ+ community did not have enough to fear already, let’s add new Florida legislation to ensure schools can no longer be a safe space for its students. We all know certain Florida government officials to be very controversial, but this absolutely takes the cake. The new legislation, if signed into law, will restrict primary schools from teaching students about sexual orientation and gender issues.

What is the Parental Rights in Education bill? The bill, commonly known as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, is legislation passed by the Florida Senate’s Education Committee. Republican State Representative Joe Harding, originator of the bill, insists the bill is aimed to keep parents “in the know and involved on what’s going on” in their children’s classrooms. The bill is supported by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. DeSantis claims the goal of education is specifically for children to learn STEM subjects and avoid any ideological disputes.

If that is the case, how can you expect the younger generations to have any idea what is going on in our country? Every day, people of the LGBTQ+ community fight for gender equality, as if basic human rights are unacceptable in America. It sounds like these claims are basically stating that children should have no rights until they get older, but we won’t teach them about those rights. Yet, older generations expect them to be well educated and know all about current affairs…this is one of them, why can’t government officials see that?

Not only is this unfair to students, but also teachers who want the best for their students. If passed, this legislation allows parents and guardians to take legal action against teachers if they fail to comply with the law. You heard that right, parents can sue teachers — who already do not make enough money — if they discuss sexual orientation or gender issues in class. However, before this was even an idea, parents had no issue sending their kids off to school every day with no knowledge of what their kid was going to learn that day. Harding also recently made an amendment to the bill on Feb. 13. This would require schools to “out” students to their parents if they identify as anything other than straight. They would be given six weeks to do so, however, Harding pulled the amendment days after when various officials stated the danger that comes with this decision.

As “doomsday” comes closer, many worry DeSantis will make the decision to sign the bill into law. The bill has recently been passed in Florida’s House of Representatives in a 69-47 vote. The bill will now move to the Senate, as they currently discuss similar legislation already. If passed, the bill will land on DeSantis’s desk for him to pass or reject, which worries those in the LGBTQ+ community and its supporters as he has previously expressed his support for the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. Supporters of the bill consider this a solution to conversation that is not “age-appropriate” for developing students as those who reject the idea of this bill wonder what is so inappropriate about discussions over gender issues and sexual orientation that could potentially help kids who wonder about their own identities.

If signed into law the bill will go into effect on July 1, while district school plans must be updated by June of 2023. This will affect the 2022-2023 school year. Many question why this is still an argument in 2022. Joe Saunders, Equality Florida Senior Political Director and first openly gay Floridian to be sworn in to Florida’s House of Representatives, pleads to not “erase our history” as it is always age-appropriate to talk about the existence of the LGBTQ+ community. In what seems to be an appeal to said community, an amendment was filed to “clarify” the bill and change the ban on “sexual orientation and gender identity” to “human sexuality or sexual activity.” The amendment, however, did not pass and quite frankly, seems like a last minute resort to avoid a community of people upset at the attempt to avoid discussion of an important topic in history.

This bill has caused outrage far past the Florida line. People everywhere, even the President of the United States, have expressed their discontent with the ‘Don’t Say Gay’ bill and are offering support to those a part of the LGBTQ+ community. The community’s history is an important discussion to be had with developing students, not discussing it with them only seems to do more harm to their future than good. The supporters of the bill that are under the pretense that this bill allows parents to have more say over what their kids learn at school and is there to help, not harm. However, officials never had a problem with allowing teachers to have the say before now. This is just one more obstacle in the road for the LGBTQ+ community, but we will not stop fighting for equality and basic human rights.
There was a time in my life where I found myself in a predicament. One that dictated, among other things, a few days out of the week I had to take a bus from McDuff Avenue to downtown. The route traversed McCoys Creek Boulevard from west to east. The times I would become impatient waiting and decide to walk, outnumbered afternoons spent riding the bus. Wandering along the sidewalk which runs parallel to the path of McCoys Creek, I was struck by this mostly untouched waterway in the heart of the city, within sight of the tall buildings of Jacksonville. I remember the smell of the creek too, a heavy metallic odor that rose out of the water on hot days. Sunlight glanced off the surface with a strange opalescent shine. The clearly polluted stream was nonetheless teeming with life and I waited for the chance to see a three-eyed fish or a teenage mutant ninja turtle. I noticed the surrounding neighborhood, Mixon Town as it has been known for a long time, directly north of I-10, a stone’s throw from Riverside, as an interesting place dotted with century-old homes.

McCoys creek runs east from Lackawanna winding through run-down residential areas and industrial sites. The waterway was once used as a canal for moving goods manufactured along its banks to the open channel of the St. Johns River. The creek was part of Henry Klutho’s plan for a large string of parks that would encircle Jacksonville’s main downtown area called the Emerald Necklace. Klutho, Jacksonville’s godfather of architecture, came up with this plan over 100 years ago but we, as residents of Jacksonville, know how long it takes the city to execute even the best laid plans.

In a surprising turn of events the city has taken some big steps to make this dream a reality. Starting last year McCoys Creek Blvd (which followed the creek from McDuff Avenue to a dead-end at I-95) began to be demolished. The city decided it was time to do something you rarely see cities do: delete an entire roadway. The street was prone to flooding with heavy rains and complaints from the residents of Mixon Town had piled up. The project will eventually be completed as a greenway, instead of a road, and will act as a natural flood barrier. The waterway itself will be restored with dredging and a much needed clean-up. The manufacturing sites that surround the creek have been a source of pollutants for decades and McCoys Creek is among the dirtiest waterways in the city.

The timing of this change couldn’t be better for the on-going real estate boom in Jacksonville. Building of the greenway will no doubt be a major catalyst for development in Mixon Town, a historically underserved neighborhood. As of now, there are already many houses being remodeled to be put on the market. The environment will benefit from the transformation of McCoys Creek from a desolate dumping ground to a healthy stream, but so will new residents. What about the people that currently live there? Will they be the ones who can finally be proud of the creek running through their backyards?

If the other end of McCoys Creek is any sign of the future then the answer is: probably not. McCoys Creek currently enters the St. Johns River underneath a parking lot in Brooklyn next to the former Florida Times-Union building. Plans unveiled last month called for the building to be demolished and a high-end apartment development and grocery store to be built in its place. The mouth of McCoys creek where it meets the St. Johns River will be uncovered and a kayak launch built. Brooklyn has transformed from a historically Black neighborhood, like its neighbor Mixon Town, to the one of the fastest growing luxury apartment communities in Jacksonville. Block by block the old houses have come down, residents have moved out and gleaming Town Center style developments have taken their place. Mixon Town will be served a similar fate with traditional house by house gentrification. We can assume this because it has already happened.

In the heart of Mixon Town along Forest Street, there stands the brand new campus of the Jacksonville Classical Academy, a private school that aims to provide children an education that public schools can’t. That education doesn’t come cheap, far beyond what most in the neighborhood directly adjacent can afford. The land the school sits on used to be home to another school, the Forest Park Head Start School, built during segregation for minority children and demolished in 1970s with a playground built in its place. The site was also home to a municipal waste incinerator which operated from 1910 to the 1960s. Ash from the incinerator was improperly disposed of on land next to the school and the homes in the area. Ash was also dumped directly into McCoys Creek poisoning the already noxious waters. During the late 2000s, the site then became the focus of a Federal Superfund clean up project, a government program reserved for only the most toxic of contaminated places all over the United States. After the soil surrounding the former incinerator and former Forest Park Head Start School was dug up and removed, construction on the Jacksonville Classical Academy began. The memory of the school for underprivileged children and the building burning hazardous waste right next door was lost like dust (or ash) in the wind.

Environmental recovery doesn’t come easily. Environmental justice is even harder to achieve. So, when we see our leaders making what seem to be good decisions for our environment we must ask ourselves not only is this the best choice for our planet and the people but will everyone get to enjoy the fruits of the labor?

There was a time in my life where I found myself in a predicament. One that dictated, among other things, a few days out of the week I had to take a bus from McDuff Avenue to downtown. The route traversed McCoys Creek Boulevard from west to east. The times I would become impatient waiting and decide to walk, outnumbered afternoons spent riding the bus. Wandering along the sidewalk which runs parallel to the path of McCoys Creek, I was struck by this mostly untouched waterway in the heart of the city, within sight of the tall buildings of Jacksonville. I remember the smell of the creek too, a heavy metallic odor that rose out of the water on hot days. Sunlight glanced off the surface with a strange opalescent shine. The clearly polluted stream was nonetheless teeming with life and I waited for the chance to see a three-eyed fish or a teenage mutant ninja turtle. I noticed the surrounding neighborhood, Mixon Town as it has been known for a long time, directly north of I-10, a stone’s throw from Riverside, as an interesting place dotted with century-old homes.

McCoys creek runs east from Lackawanna winding through run-down residential areas and industrial sites. The waterway was once used as a canal for moving goods manufactured along its banks to the open channel of the St. Johns River. The creek was part of Henry Klutho’s plan for a large string of parks that would encircle Jacksonville’s main downtown area called the Emerald Necklace. Klutho, Jacksonville’s godfather of architecture, came up with this plan over 100 years ago but we, as residents of Jacksonville, know how long it takes the city to execute even the best laid plans.

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MARCH FILM REVIEWS
THE BATMAN
With a new decade comes a new interpretation of the Batman (and it’s safe to say this one does not dance) in what may be the darkest big screen adaptation of the character yet.

An elusive serial killer (Paul Dano) is murdering the elites of Gotham City, leaving riddles at the crime scene addressed to the Batman (Robert Pattinson) that tease the identity of the next victim and threaten to reveal a conspiracy involving the city’s most powerful figures. With the help of Police Commissioner Jim Gordon (Jeffrey Wright) and the seductive cat burglar Selina Kyle (Zoe Kravitz), the Caped Crusader must work to catch the killer before he completes his twisted game.

There have been a lot of varied and radically different depictions of Batman on screen, but all of the previous film iterations have shied away from utilizing one of the character’s key features—his abilities as a detective. And for many long-time comic book fans, the best Batman stories are the detective stories in which the Dark Knight must solve a mystery and outwit his foe.

But at long last, on his 13th live action outing, the “World’s Greatest Detective” finally gets to earn that moniker in theaters.

Matt Reeves, the filmmaker behind Cloverfield and the recent Planet of the Apes trilogy, brings a strong amount of real world grit to the film. This is by far the most grounded version of Batman and the Gotham underworld, with everything from the villains to the Batmobile feeling more at home in a “based-on-a-true-story” crime drama than in a superhero epic. Reeves isn’t coy about bringing his influences to the fore of the film, drawing from decades of crime cinema: with a score that’s reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann’s work with Alfred Hitchcock, a police force straight out of Serpico and a Batman that acts more like a Bogart-esque detective than your usual battler of evil doers. And as others have noted, the film has many shades of David Fincher’s work, particularly Seven, Zodiac and the Netflix series Mindhunter, with a brooding nihilistic tone and methodical serial killer psychologically assaulting the detectives who are after them.

The darker approach is one that will likely divide some audience members. This isn’t a breezy crowd pleaser like what comes out of the Marvel production line or even Christopher Nolan’s comparatively whimsical Dark Knight trilogy. There are several highly intense and borderline disturbing sequences, and the action sequences are brutal and sparse. Though there are some undeniable comic book influences, such as a voiceover that reads like it came straight off of a panel on a page.

However, if you can stomach spending three hours in Gotham’s grim underbelly, you’ll find that The Batman is a phenomenally crafted piece of filmmaking and a lovingly faithful, yet individual, adaptation of the character and his world.

With the story set during Batman’s second year as a vigilante, Reeves manages to skip the origin story but still have a relatively novice hero in the lead. And Pattinson is well suited to playing this version of the character, having grown into an incredibly versatile actor over the last 10 years. Playing a Batman who is both intimidating and relatably human, the actor taps into the simmering rage of the character that boils to the surface when doling out his version of justice to the city’s crooks and thugs. Pattison also looks the part when wearing the suit. His Bruce Wayne is similarly rage-filled but wounded and vulnerable still intensely grieving over the (thankfully not portrayed) murder of his parents and taking his pain out on his loyal butler, Alfred (Andy Serkis). Kravitz is perfectly cast as Selina Kyle/Catwoman, creating a modern version of the femme fatale and sharing a smoldering chemistry with Pattinson’s Batman.

The remaining cast is also very strong, and thanks to the extended runtime everyone has a moment to shine. Dano is terrifying and excellent as the Riddler in a villain performance that feels tailor made for our modern era. Colin Farrell is unrecognizable as he chews the scenery as the Penguin, doing a sort of imitation of Robert De Niro, with John Turturro playing menacing mob boss Carmine Falcone.

The Batman is an anomaly in the superhero movie landscape. The movie is more in line with the kind of films that cinephiles love but audiences rarely flock to in droves. It feels as though the studio, Warner Bros, is freely rolling the dice but knows they are loaded by the weight of one of the most enduring characters of the last 80 years. Instead of a fight to save the world, we see a grotesque murder mystery being solved by a violent weirdo dressed as a bat. Here’s to many more. Out now in theaters.

FRESH
Noa (Daisy Edgar-Jones) is a young woman who has endured the worst of online dating—from dick pics to dinner dates with condescending bros lacking any decency. Just as she’s about to give up on finding a partner, she runs into a charming guy at the supermarket named Steve (Sebastian Stan). After a few dates, she agrees to go on a weekend getaway, where he reveals a hobby to be more horrifying, and to some degree enthralling, than anything she could have ever anticipated.

This horror comedy is packed with unexpected revelations and turns that should be experienced as the story unfolds.

The narrative is reminiscent of Get Out, and much like that film, Fresh has more on its mind than just thrills. The film is a cutting satire about modern dating, patriarchy and the 1% that is held together by an inventive original script from Lauryn Kahn. Seemingly every man in the film is awful in some capacity, but it never feels overwrought and is agreeable thanks to the consideration put into her writing.

Director Mimi Cave balances the film’s various tones with aplomb and knows which moments of gore should be shown or simply alluded to, creating plenty of scenes that will have you one the edge of your seat with your skin crawling.

Edgar-Jones is charming as the lead and immediately sympathetic. While Sebastian Stan shows immense range in the film, adding another entry to his string of strong performances in several independent films. Overall, Fresh is an engaging and original thriller with a sense of humor and copious amounts of body horror. Available on Hulu.
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Here we are, not even three full months into the year yet, and Florida Man already approaches his mid-season form, and he is NOT alone, as you’ll soon see. Let’s begin with our colleagues at *Orlando Weekly*, who delivered the good word about Publix, which recently cut ties with a company called Chaokoh, who used to be their plug for coconut milk—well, one of them; you can never have too many connections for coconut milk. Why? Monkey slaves.

A PETA operation in Thailand two years ago uncovered evidence that monkeys were being chained to used tires and forced to harvest fallen coconuts. Worse, sources even alleged that the monkeys were being tortured if they resisted. Unfortunately, Publix waited to move until after Costco, Target, Walgreens and Walmart had already done so, but still they moved pretty quick. One thing that Floridians can take pride in is knowing that, no matter how crazy it can get here, almost everyone is generally very much opposed to animal abuse in most forms, and it’s good to see them doing the right thing, because they don’t always do. They helped monkeys, and that’s the important thing. That’s the only thing that matters, ever.

Normally, if the phrase “monkey slaves” pops up on my timeline, I’m likely to save that item for the end, because the visual is really hard to top. But I think we can this month, starting over in Denver, where one or more unknown fools made the mistake of their lives when they robbed a truck in broad daylight. All they got was a random spare dolly and a big cardboard box. “What’s in the box?” you ask? Morgan Freeman won’t tell you, but I will: Human heads, which were being transported to a medical research facility. Organ theft and trafficking is a thing, but there’s not much black market value in the head, although corneas can allegedly command a few thousand dollars on the black market. The box was stamped “Science Care,” so maybe someone thought they were pills or pricey supplements. Clearly, the thieves didn’t bother to check their haul, but that unboxing video would have to be demonetized.

Speaking of social media, the jails and cemeteries of America are full of unfortunate souls whose undoing happened because of social media. Whether it’s rappers giving away their location while agitating the opps on IG Live or seditionists posting selfies at the Jan. 6 uprising, our culture of full immersion creates blind spots in our thinking and encourages poor decision making. That brings us to Detroit, and a would-be influencer whose notoriety backfired after he was arrested for a series of armed robberies of various retailers in the city. The police benefitted bigly from the suspect’s own TikTok page, which allegedly contained multiple videos of him dancing while wearing the same distinctive Nikes worn during the robberies. He also wore skeleton-print gloves and multicolored hair twists. Obviously, we won’t share his name, because we don’t want to encourage this type of behavior, and everyone is innocent until proven guilty. (The guy was also wearing a black backpack with pink flowers, which I’m sure they’ll find amusing in jail.) Usually, people chase clout; in this case, the clout chased him.

OK, we’ve all had a good laugh here (maybe), but let’s get serious for just a moment before we wrap up this month’s installment. There’s a potential situation developing that you and your loved ones may need to watch out for later this year, according to *Scientific American*: flying spiders. Now hold on, relax—they can’t actually fly. Actually, they craft parachute-like gimmicks with their web material and use them to catch the wind and the breeze and glide. A few got into a shipping container from Asia in 2014. It unloaded in Georgia, and now they have millions, like Georgia doesn’t have enough problems lately. If any show up in Florida, they will be easy to spot, since they’re about three inches long. Have a great day!
**March**

19. The Orchestra: ELO’s Greatest Hits
20. Chris Botti
24. Last Podcast on the Left
25. The Lords of 52nd Street: Legends of the Billy Joel Band
26. Paddington Gets in a Jam
26. Steve-O
31. Hasan Minhaj

**April**

1. Kenny G
2. Scott Bradlee’s Postmodern Jukebox
7. KC and the Sunshine Band
7. Spyro Gyra
8. Jim Brickman
10. Jimmie Vaughan
12. Todrick Hall
14. Tim Dillon
15. Martina McBride
16. Demetri Martin
19. The Pout-Pout Fish for Schools
20. Funny Women of a Certain Age
21. Fortune Feimster
23. Nikki Glaser
24. Theresa Caputo
25. Little Feat
26. Rainbow Kitten Surprise

**May**

1. Travis Tritt
2. Rosie Revere, Engineer & Friends for Schools
5. Jessie James Decker
6. Untold Stories
14. Jacksonville Dance Theatre

**June**

1. Brit Floyd
2. Happy Together
10. David Spade
22. Andy Grammer
26. Anjelah Johnson-Reyes

**July**

1. Josh Turner
12. Rupaul’s Drag Race
14. The Brian McKnight 4
15. El Gran Combo
16. Ted Nugent
22. Pure Prairie League, Firefall and Orleans

**August**

6. Untold Stories
27. Randy Rainbow

**September**

15. Bat - A Celebration of Meatloaf
16. Judy Collins

**October**

1. Todd Barry
6. Benise
7. Hotel California
22. Josh Gates! Live
30. Rumours of Fleetwood Mac

**November**

4. Steep Canyon Rangers
14. Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons
3. Paula Poundstone

**December**

14. Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons
24. Abba Mania
26. The Life and Music of George Michael

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DEAR DUMBS,

My wife and I love your podcast. In fact, we’ve listened to last week’s three times now. You both inspire us.

I’ve been asked to be the Best Man for my friend’s wedding. He’s very traditional so we’re doing all the pain in the ass wedding stuff. I mean, by the book. One of my many requirements is the thing everybody’s waiting for, the speech. In the speech I’m supposed to talk about and share stories of, what a perfect couple they are. How he’s changed since meeting her. Well, he’s changed a lot. She has taken away any dream he’s had and there’s no spark in his eye anymore. She’s turned him into a purse holder. Nobody likes this woman. Nobody. So how do I stand up there and lie in front of everybody?

Marshall L
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

TERRY: This is a touchy subject for me. I’ve been “honored” to serve as Best Man twice and both times left me feeling bad about myself.

SHARI: Yes, and you did a great job. But only half of the couples are still together. Is it you?

TERRY: Not my fault. I tried to warn him.

SHARI: Marshall, I’m wondering how much time there is before the wedding? If it’s still months away maybe you should have a discussion about whether he should marry this person? I wouldn’t suggest doing it the day before but if it’s far enough out and they can get their deposit money back, maybe have a come-to-Jesus with him?

TERRY: This is where I’m torn. I think they’re counting on you to be in their corner here. You’re not the relationship guru. You’re the Best Man. With that title comes a lot of responsibility. Just not that kind. You don’t make or break a marriage. I can sympathize with the position he put you in though. You are going to look bad if you gush all over her.

SHARI: Good point. Marshall, how about if you focused your speech on your friend and what a great guy he is? You don’t have to say anything about them as a couple. I mean what are they going to do - ask for their money back?!

TERRY: Good point Shari. I found myself in a similar situation. I told the guy that everybody thought he was making a mistake. It wasn’t fun. Turned out we all were right. But it changed our relationship.

SHARI: Yes, and the wedding went ahead anyway. It sounds like we’re in agreement. Marshall, don’t say anything about the bride. Do your best man duty and let the marital chips fall where they may.

TERRY: Maybe you can get some explosive diarrhea.

SHARI: There’s always that. I think if you just say something nice about your friend, you won’t be betraying yourself and you will have fulfilled your duty.

TERRY: OK. It’s settled. You’re going to say and do the right thing. Those in attendance will know what you really wanted to say and applaud you for being a good friend.

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Obtained $5 Million Settlement from Insurance Carrier in Less Than 90 Days on Disputed Liability Motorcycle Crash

Recently Filed Motion for New Trial for Joe Exotic from Tiger King

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