

# It Was a Berry Good Day!



Photos by C. Kay Johnson 13

## 9th Annual 2023 Habitat Ocala Strawberry Festival!

### IT WAS A FUN FAMILY DAY!

The Festival Is presented by Habitat for Humanity of Marion County

An estimated 22,000 people attended? They sold 188 fats of Strawberry's.

There were 211 Exhibitors. The reason for the Strawberry Fest is to promote Family day and raise funds for Habitat Houses so they can continue to do all those great things they do for the local people in need.

It is hard to tell how much was raised this early and there was fund raiser's going on inside the Festival like Parking was being shared by several groups needing funds, food and many more. There were many Sponsors involved which is listed at the end of this story.

It started out the day before when there were 40 mp wind gust and some of the tents set up early took flight. The team was on it working hard to find solutions. On the day of the festival there was a breeze and cloud cover to keep it cool. The hard rain held off until 4:50 PM. A great time was had by all. I thank Habitat for the day of intertainment and fellowship.

Thank the volunteers? We had over 500 volunteers who worked all aspect of the festival and assisted us host an excellent festival. Our loyal volunteers dedicated

their time and effort to help us organize an awesome event.

The Habitat Team led by Joanne Black says we appreciate our sponsors, each year we have dedicated and supportive sponsors who support the festival and want to make a difference in their community. Sponsors the festival helps us host an excellent festival and in turn raise funds to build a new Habitat home.

### Strawberry Festival Presenting



Photos by C. Kay Johnson 13



Photos by C. Kay Johnson 13

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*Continued page 2*

## TO THE EQUESTRIAN WORLD, BOYD EXELL NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION.

Fascinated by horses from the age of six, six times World Champion Boyd Exell's path to international sporting greatness began when a school teacher in his native Australia introduced him to a carriage driving friend. His passion was cemented when he went on to win the Australian Pairs Championship at the age of 16. More pictures on 7.



Kevin Sheilley

OCALA/MARION COUNTY CHAMBER & ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP



I want to highlight several areas describing the economic growth our community has experienced throughout the last year.

Healthcare

An item which can no longer be denied is the growth of Ocala as a regional healthcare hub. Continued investments and expansions by AdventHealth Ocala, HCA Ocala, and HCA West Marion have added beds, new service lines, and increased access to care throughout the community, all while continuing to provide amazing care through the pandemic. We recently cut the ribbon on a new 26,000 sq. ft. cath lab at HCA Ocala wrapping up their revamped tower while at HCA West Marion a third tower was started with the ribbon cutting on an inpatient rehab and more beds. AdventHealth continues to expand services especially with its refurbished and expanded NICU and its new, free-standing ER in Belleview. Finally, UF Health began work this past year on a new Ocala Neighborhood hospital at US 27 and I-75.

Downtown

The continued growth and redevelopment of the downtown core is truly something in which every citizen can take pride. New restaurants and establishments such as Cantina and Mutiny opened this year with several more in the works including the long-awaited Mellow Mushroom. The expanded Reilly Arts Center opened its new black box theater and lobby areas which doubled the size of this popular entertainment venue. Several major residential developments are

either under construction or preparing to begin including the Watula South Townhomes, Lamplighter Legacy luxury apartments, and Brick City Lofts. Work should begin later this year on a 2<sup>nd</sup> parking garage and several projects are finalizing in midtown including the renovation of the Sovereign Building to a boutique hotel.

Tourism

Finally, it would be impossible to discuss business growth and not discuss the World Equestrian Center. This incredible complex had its soft opening in December 2020 and rolled out hard into the year. Featuring five indoor arenas, 25 outdoor arenas, 2800+ permanent barn stalls, a beautiful 250-room luxury hotel, and 7 restaurants, WEC has become a destination for equestrians and non-equestrians alike. With more than 700 employees and an annual economic impact already well north \$100 million, this complex has single-handedly reimagined the local tourism economy. Work is progressing on Phase 2, which will bring 80,000 sq. ft of retail, more meeting space, and a 400-room hotel by the end of the year.

Another project which opened in the last year is the new Florida Aquatic Swimming and Training (FAST) facility. This \$30 million facility being built as a part of the new Calesa master-planned community just south of the airport is truly a one-of-a-kind competition aquatic center. Featuring indoor and outdoor competition pools, seating for 2000 spectators, and state of the art scoreboards and timing systems, this facility has the capacity and ability to host major national level events. The facility is already drawing thousands of competitors and tourists and is furthering redefining our tourism industry.

Strawberry

Continued from page 1

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Florida had some rough spots but was not in bad shape. Yes you did some good things to ensure our vote be counted, I'm still not sure double the cost of the lottery was a good thing. How much is a dream of winning and living poverty free for life. I don't beleive in the Turnpike Extension and many other pending things. You need to stay and take care of the things you started.

HOPE is missing in our world today, you represent hope for Florida people. I run a small newspaper group that stands for HOPE but not necessarily all change. I would like to see you run for President after

Trump cleans up what he can. I'm afraid the swamp will make up things about you and swallow you. You are on a roll State wide, there is no one that could replace you and make the voters happy. Look what they did to Trump after all the great things he did. For some reason the very very wealthy wants Socialism and control, the Americans voters, tax payers / citizens don't.

Trump has to address the CIVID leak and a hundreds other things, he has done business thru out the world and knows how to deal with these people who hate us. Now is your time to keep the state with continued respectful. We will have many unforeseen thing coming with all of these people moving to Florida and China buying our land. I run a full page of your press releases almost every month in my four newspapers.

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Thomas N Loury

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Florida State Senate

DENNIS K. BAXLEY



Dear Friends,  
We are now at about the halfway point of the 60-day Legislative Session in Tallahassee. We are reminded of how blessed we are to be living in this great state and it is an honor to be able

allows local businesses to assess the job market for their specified region and collaborate with local schools to ensure that roles found to be of a greater need are greater emphasized in our educational system. As the entire nation attempts to address labor shortages in key fields such as nursing and logistics, Florida will lead through innovative educational policies that benefit individual students and the economy as a whole.

to serve you in the Florida Senate. Thanks to you, Florida continues to thrive economically and we are seeing hundreds of people moving here every day. While we are excited that they have chosen Florida to work and raise a family, it does present us with many challenges as we address the explosion of growth. Our leadership team in the Senate, along with Governor DeSantis and the Speaker of the House, is working tirelessly to address these needs and continue to make Florida's future secure.

Senator Travis Hutson recently presented SB 240 in the Pre-K - 12 Education Committee. This bill revises current high school graduation requirements to place a specific emphasis on educational curriculum that is focused on technical education and career training. Additionally, this legislation establishes a program that

SB 202 recently passed its third and final committee and is headed to the floor. This bill establishes universal school choice across the State of Florida. This bill puts parents in the driver's seat regarding their child's education, provides parents and students with the full array of educational opportunities, and allows every student in Florida to receive an education in a setting fit to their own individual needs. Through this legislation, families of students who fall below 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL) will be prioritized, with a second priority for households with income below 400% of FPL, to receive an empowerment account to take education dollars earmarked for their child and choose among a variety of options to customize their child's k-12 education.

As the fentanyl crisis continues to

threaten millions of Floridians each day, it is critical that the legislature take a proactive approach to ensure that we limit the negative impact of synthetic drugs that are flooding into our state through the southern border. Recently, SB 736 was heard in the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice where it passed with unanimous committee support. Senate Bill 736 adds nitazenes, synthetic opioids similar to fentanyl, to the list of Schedule 1 controlled substances. This legislation ensures that our law enforcement agencies across the state have the necessary

tools to cease the distribution of nitazenes and hold those accountable who are distributing this poison in our communities.

We encourage all of you to keep track of these bills and more at [flsenate.gov](http://flsenate.gov), or you can call our office at 352-750-3133 and one of our staff will be glad to assist you. We are here to serve you.

Onward & Upward,  
Senator Dennis Baxley

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Tom Loury *Tom Loury Long time member of CEP/Ocala Chamber of Commerce, Past President of the Ocala Business Leaders and current member, Co-Founder and past President of Select Business Associates, Past President of the Lady Lake Chamber and current member.*

## PUBLISHER'S NOTES



By TomL  
Saturday Morning Donald Trump stated that he would be arrested for the Stormy Dannel's thing all the top FBI and the DOJ have already looked at. In fact the statue of limitation

has run out. They are struggling to make him look bad. I ask how many times can they investigate the same thing??? I think Trump has grounds for Harassment!

April 2023 news brings something that I have been reporting for three years. Dr Anthony Fauci who is supposed to be the leading Medical Authority in our country proves to be a lot less in my opinion. Three years ago my research on the internet stated that the United States were involved in suppling money for research at the Wuhan Lab. It goes on during Obama's term at which during that time the money was being funneled through a company and then sent to the research Lab so it would not be visible

to the American people. Several bad mishaps at the Lab brought attention to the Lab and Obama told Fauci to shut down our part of the research on on the viral research, Fauci did not! The research went on for some years hidden under some cloat of secrecy.

Here is what I think was going on, the research was to develop a pandemic and a cure. Owning the cure to sell at a price of their choice, (Follow the money).

Along comes Trump. He is President of the United States by now and he is going to help find a cure. Trump pull's out all the red tape and road block to help find a cure quick. Fauci and Big Pharma did not count on that. Meanwhile there was a race going on and a power struggle at the same time. Now it is coming to light that big communications companies got involved in shadow Banning by Twitter and others. Five or six of the leading doctors in our country lost their voice of communication because they were band from speaking by Fauci and big communications companies. It was about

money for a cure. If they could not get money from private individuals then start a move to secure funds from the federal government in the name of trying to cure or stop the CIVD viral spread. Many well known doctors were silenced. I think we will find money from that fund is unaccounted for.

Now information is just beginning to flow. Just remember who told you three years ago. It was yours to find on the internet to find and then authenticate it. Just my opinion!

What came out of the efforts. A lot of death's, no inoculation, no accountability! Actually the medical world is saying there are some bad effects from the shots. So what did we gain? We found several a way to treat the illness which was out of control! At least we have cut down on the death with early treatment.

Come back Donald Trump we need you!  
Electric car charging stations are popping up every where. Interesting facts according to stats. A 350kw diesel generator takes three hours to charge an electric car. Does that make sense to sit some where for three hours while your car charges and how many times can you charge a electric car before the battery goes bad at a price of a new car. How far can you drive on one charge. It does not make sense. Maybe a vehicle that has both gas and electric and when you go to gas that same motor charges the battery.

The American people are not ready for a forced change and they will see that during the next election OR BEFORE!

The USA is divided, I'm glad I'm on the side, that believes in God, has the most guns and knows which bathroom to use! God Bless America!

## Newspaper Deadlines

*Editorial & Ad Copy for April*

**Seniors Voice & Ocala DownTown**

**Noon, March 17th**

**Lady Lake Magazine & Village Spectator**

**12am, March 22nd**

## Seniors Voice of Ocala/Ocala Downtown Products of TomL Publishing, LLC

P.O Box 1698, Dunnellon FL 34430

**Publisher: Tom Loury**

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# Gross Out Science

May 20, 2023 - August 26, 2023

Sometimes science can be gross! What is your blood made of? How loud is a burp? Can you identify animals by their poop? Come get up close and gross with your favorite stinky and slimy science questions.



# National Consumer Protection Week

As National Consumer Protection Week comes to an end, I want to remind Floridians how important it is to watch out for new and emerging scams.

My Consumer Protection Division works hard every day to protect Floridians and put an end to scams and deceptive business practices. Since 2019, we have recovered more than \$535 million for Floridians and consumers nationwide. Last year alone, the team secured more than \$221 million in direct relief to consumers through restitution, debt forgiveness and other relief.

From the development of the NO SCAM app, to combating price gouging during declared emergencies and much more, we have a dedicated team of professionals that is always prepared to fight for Floridians.

In addition to recovering funds, my office helps inform Floridians about common and emerging schemes through our Consumer Alerts and Scams at a Glance program.

All of these resources are designed to warn specific audiences about tactics scammers may use to steal their money or identity.

By working together to hold scammers accountable and identify emerging schemes, we are building a Stronger, Safer Florida.

# Restaurant Review

Terry's Restaurant bakes fresh bread every night for the next day and my buddy and I were there. We had the fish sub. The

price went up a little since I have been there but so did the quantity, larger filets. Excellent chef work at the working mans restaurant.

\*\*\*\*\*

Road House Grill Ocala for my wife birthday lunch. We had the onion starter.

Continued page 8

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# 9th Annual Habitat Ocala Strawberry Festival!



Photos by C Kay Johnson 13  
The Lady with the red camera





# Horse Park Spring Fling

Florida Horse Park has been Busy. Each entry consists of a driver a horse or team of horses. The driver is assisted by grooms who ride along on the carriage, taking an active role during the marathon course. The groom's function is like the navigator.

Combo Wagon come to Ocala from a number of countries to compete. We were lucky enough to receive picture from C. Kay Johnson 13 one of Ocala's top photographers. Pictures as you can see are intense and lots of action.

*Photos by C. Kay Johnson 13  
The Lady with the red camera....*



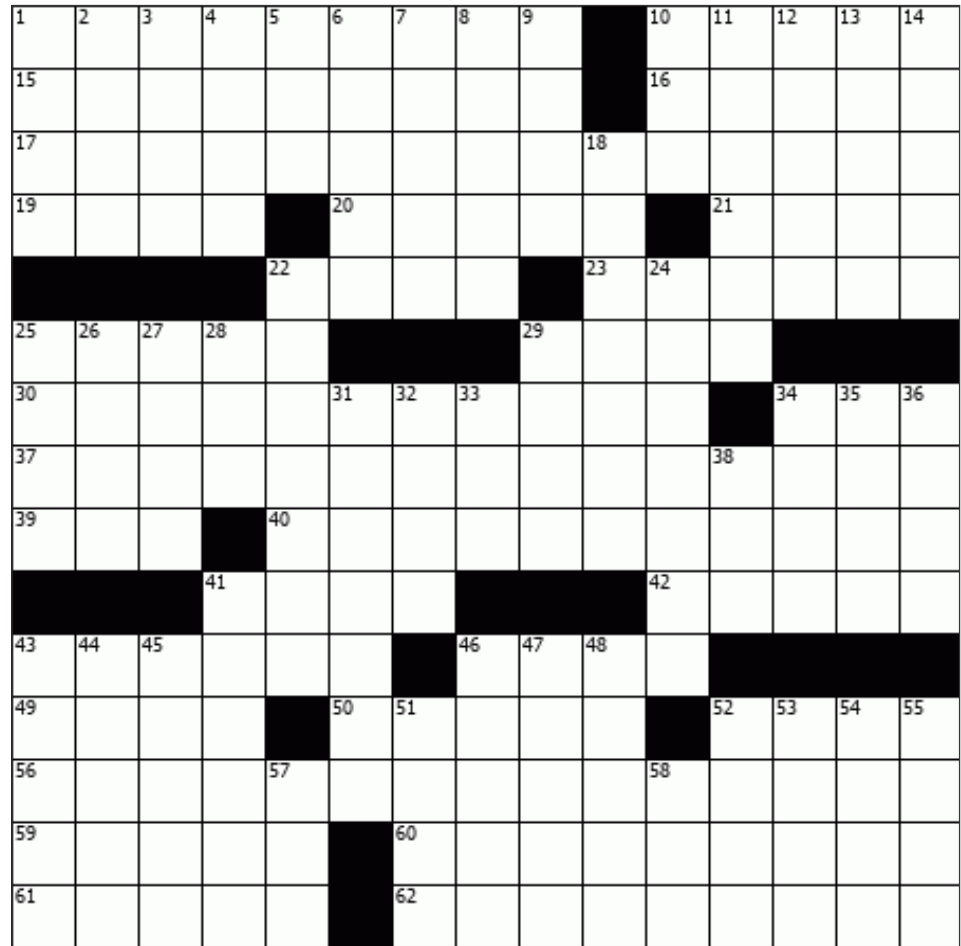


1. Tried to hit, as a handball
10. At a high level
15. Rocky, e.g.
16. Plains Indian
17. "Forget it"
19. Underground anchor
20. Take after
21. Watch
22. Toots in a restaurant
23. Polished
25. Loud bird
29. Like some accounts
30. For the most part
34. Money pile?: Abbr.
37. The people, to  
Alexander Pope
39. TV cousin
40. Tax, with "on"
41. "Oy!"
42. Introduce, as an issue
43. Obedient affirmative
46. "You Don't Know Me"  
singer, 1956
49. Tied items

50. Leaf-eating critter  
52. With 5-Down, "Watch it grow!" '80s fad  
56. Lots  
59. Spanish princess  
60. Little Lord Fauntleroy feature  
61. Doesn't fade  
62. 1967-68 NHL Rookie of the Year Derek

1. The can
2. Airport waiter
3. 19 for K, e.g.: Abbr.
4. Review subject
5. See 52-Across
6. Conductor Leinsdorf
7. His backup group was once the Aliis
8. Sacrifice site
9. Spots for drivers
10. Guitar relative
11. Rod, so to speak
12. Mall sights
13. Name in 1936 headlines
14. Irrigated grain field
18. Alter the landscaping, in a way
22. Bantu tongue
24. Expose
25. Kennedy of "Dharma &

Greg"  
26. Vet school subj.  
27. Word of frustration  
28. One of Rita's exes  
29. Hasn't yet settled  
31. They may be biting  
32. Interruptions  
33. Onetime Eastern  
cultural center  
34. Kahului's island  
35. Grounded birds?  
36. It's found on a lid  
38. Writer LeShan  
41. Nod, say  
43. Change registers  
frequently  
44. "The Hot Zone" subject  
45. Tall and grande  
46. Celeb dubbed  
"television's most frequent  
clapper" in the 1992  
Guinness Book  
47. Noted Mayflower  
pilgrim  
48. Worked in a hold  
51. Durable wood sources  
52. Old head  
53. Brooders?  
54. Keen on  
55. Gp.  
57. "Street's Disciple"  
rapper  
58. Cockney prayer?



- Manage your blood pressure and blood glucose levels.
- Talk with your doctor or pharmacist before taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (e.g., Advil) or naproxen (e.g., Aleve).
- Be active for at least 30 minutes each day.
- Aim for 7 to 8 hours or more of sleep each night.
- Quit smoking.
- Consult a registered dietitian to build a meal plan you can stick to.

“For people with kidney disease, working with a health care team is key to an early diagnosis and to staying on top of their kidney health,” said National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) Director Dr. Griffin P. Rodgers. “As we continue to research new ways to prevent and treat kidney disease, there are steps people can take today to improve and maintain the health of their kidneys—and enjoy more healthy moments.”

For more information on getting tested for CKD and following your kidney health, visit the NIDDK website at [www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov).



## Continued from page 5

She had the NY Strip Steak and I had steak and shrimp for me. Service was good, the food was good and we did not have to wait very long. Yahoo I don't wait well. I like to go there in the Ocala Roadhouse for lunch because it is crazy at night.

\*\*\*\*\*

Carrabas had lunch there with our lunch referral group. Had a good time, referred someone and they used my paper to advertise. Moderate prices and good service.

Keep your appointments even if you feel well. Your doctor may repeat testing each year, or more often if needed, and use the changes in your results to plan the next steps for your care. If your kidney function is stable, your care team may recommend you continue doing what you're doing. If your kidney function seems to be getting worse, the team may suggest lifestyle or medicine changes.



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Join us at the Ocala Downtown Market (ODM) to purchase a diverse array of products from farmers, artisans, craftspeople, food trucks! A true destination location, ODM is set just blocks off the Ocala Downtown square, in a beautiful open-air Market Pavilion. Besides permanent roof cover the facility it also has large overhead fans, restrooms, a nearby ATM, and water fountains. The Market Pavilion is also available for rental.



Interested in becoming a vendor?  
Visit [www.ManageMyMarket.com](http://www.ManageMyMarket.com)

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## Love is just a leash away!!

The HSMC is here for you and the animals who depend on us. We wanted to share that we will continue to be here to help unwanted pets during this pandemic while following all Marion County and Florida state guidelines.

As this situation is constantly changing, we ask that you continue to visit our Shelter using the safety guidelines in place.

## How can you help?

**Pet Food Bank:** Help stock our Pet Food Bank with pet food and supplies for people who cannot afford them due to job loss or other reasons. You can also bring donations to our Shelter daily from 10-6. Masks required please! If you need help keeping your pet with you during this time, our Happy Paws food program is here for you.

**Volunteer:** A small number of volunteers have returned to help in various departments. We are accepting volunteer applications but do not yet know when we will schedule orientations for new volunteers. Please contact us for more information about volunteering. We are currently working on a digital orientation.

**Opt to adopt:** According to the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, there is no evidence that companion animals such as cats and dogs can spread the virus that causes COVID-19.

**Donate:** We know there is a lot of uncertainty right now but homeless and unwanted animals still need us. Donate to help the Humane Society of Marion County so we continue our lifesaving work and make them feel safe and loved.



**Bilbie**

Bilbie is a 14 weeks old male brought to the HSMC with her brother Wombat! We believe they could be Xolaitzcuinli, or Xolo, which is Mexican hairless dog breed.



**Fuchsa** is a 15 week old paralyzed kitten full of love.



**Ninja** is paralyzed in his hind legs but enjoys runs with his wheels.

Your donations make it possible to provide medical care, food and shelter to animals in need. On behalf of all the animals, thank you for caring.



Humane Society of Marion County  
PO Box 1542 Ocala, FL 34478  
Mail check or complete the credit/debit card payment form.



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Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Payment enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Visa ☐ M/C ☐ Discover Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp date: \_\_\_\_\_ Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Donations to the Humane Society are tax-deductible. Check with your accountant for more information. No goods or services have been provided to the donor as a result of this gift.



## FROM THE DESK OF ATTORNEY GENERAL MOODY



**AG Moody, MBI and Federal Law Enforcement Dismantled Massive Cocaine Trafficking Ring, Arresting 35 and Seizing Millions of Dollars' Worth of Illicit Drugs**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody, the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service today announced the dismantling of a massive drug trafficking ring—arresting 35 suspects and seizing millions of dollars' worth of drugs. These defendants made up one of the largest cocaine trafficking rings in Florida history, transporting drugs from Puerto Rico to sell in Florida. The defendants also trafficked illicit fentanyl and are responsible for violent crimes, including torture.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This massive drug-trafficking organization moved millions of dollars' worth of cocaine from Puerto Rico into the United States. They used torture to intimidate and maintain a stranglehold on the market, and supplied Central Florida with so much cocaine that the price of the illicit substance in that area actually dropped. I am proud of my Statewide Prosecutors for working with Florida and federal law enforcement to dismantle this dangerous drug-trafficking ring and ensure these suspects face justice."

The joint investigation by MBI, DEA and

USPIS seized more than 339 kilograms of cocaine, 71 grams of fentanyl and 152 grams of heroin—a seizure worth more than \$8 million. The investigation also uncovered that the traffickers tortured people who crossed the group, and on one occasion burned a man with an iron.

The defendants are charged with racketeering, conspiracy to commit racketeering, traffic in and conspiracy to be trafficking in cocaine and fentanyl—all first-degree felonies.

Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Puerto Rico will prosecute all 35 defendants.

### TAX-SEASON SCAMS SERIES: Tax Identity Theft

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is continuing the 2023 Tax-Season Scams Series with a warning for Floridians about Tax Identity Theft. In 2021, the Federal Trade Commission received [1.4 million reports](#) of identity theft, and the FTC reports that the tax-filing season is the most common time for identity theft.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Identity thieves love tax season and as we continue our series warning about common tax-related scams, I want filers to be extra cautious and take proactive steps to guard their personal information."

Securing personal information, both online and offline, is one of the best ways to guard against tax identity theft. Physical

documents containing sensitive information should be shredded before being thrown away into the trash. If a personal shredder is not available, communities often host local shredding days. Utilizing multi-factor authentication, as well as incorporating strong passwords, can spoil an online scammer's plan of obtaining personal information.

Attorney General Moody recommends these tips to avoid tax identity theft:

- File taxes early so a scammer can't file using stolen information;
- Apply for an [Electronic Filing PIN number with the Internal Revenue Service](#) for increased safety;
- Never use the same passwords across multiple websites or applications;
- Limit the number of companies that receive personal information;
- Avoid filing taxes in public;
- Take sensitive outgoing mail to a post office location rather than placing in a home mailbox; and
- Protect an electronic device with firewalls and anti-virus software, and keep up to date with security patches and updates.

Anyone who falls victim to tax identity theft should complete IRS Form 14039, Identity Theft Affidavit, at [IRS.gov](#) and attach it to the year's tax return. Taxpayers should also check credit reports regularly to ensure that there are no fraudulent accounts opened with stolen information.

### Attorney General Moody Releases 2023 Open Government Manual in Recognition of National Sunshine Week

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is releasing the 2023 Government-in-the-Sunshine

Manual in recognition of National Sunshine Week. The manual is available to download for free on the Florida Attorney General's website at [MyFloridaLegal.com](#).

The manual is compiled and written by the Florida Attorney General's Office to assist the public, journalists and governmental agencies in understanding the requirements and exemptions of state open government laws.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "In recognition of National Sunshine Week, I am publishing the 2023 Government-in-the-Sunshine Manual on our website, [MyFloridaLegal.com](#). The manual is free to download and accessible to anyone seeking more information about open government laws in Florida."

The 2023 edition of the Government-In-The-Sunshine Manual incorporates laws, judicial decisions and Attorney General opinions in place as of Oct. 1, 2022. Additional information about Florida's open government laws is available at [MyFloridaLegal.com](#).

### During Busy Spring Break Season, Attorney General Moody Releases Scams at a Glance: Travel Traps

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—As part of National Consumer Protection Week, Attorney General Ashley Moody is releasing a new Scams at a Glance resource to help Floridians spot and avoid travel scams. During the spring break season, many Floridians and tourists will be traveling. Florida is a hot destination where [more than 130 million tourists](#)

*Continued page 12*



FROM THE DESK OF

GOVERNOR DESANTIS



["Governor Ron DeSantis Highlights Three Years of Floridas Success After Rejecting C O V I D - 1 9 Orthodoxy](#)

W I N T E R HAVEN, Fla. — Today, Governor Ron DeSantis

marked the third year since "15 Days to Slow the Spread" was implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and put the United States under a state of emergency. President Biden has perpetuated issues that arose from widespread lockdowns by enforcing a federal vaccine mandate for health care workers as well as requiring proof of vaccination for international tourists three years after the initial lockdown orders. The President also continues to fight to maintain a federal mask mandate for air travel. These prolonged restrictions have had detrimental effects on Americans and the US economy. To watch the Governor's full remarks, click [here](#).

"Florida bucked the COVID-19 orthodoxy and instead used commonsense policies to become a refuge of sanity," said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. "Federal vaccine mandates and restrictions were never about protecting Americans from a virus, they were exercising control at the expense of the American economy and the American way of life. In Florida, we did not abdicate our leadership decisions to DC bureaucrats. Instead, we bucked the bureaucrats by ensuring kids could be in school, Floridians could go to work and businesses could thrive."

"Three years ago, we were told there were

15 days to slow the spread, and today, with nearly 100% of the American public having contracted the coronavirus, the federal government continues to rely on fear and manipulation to peddle vaccines that don't prevent transmission," said **Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Ladapo**. "As the State Surgeon General, I am grateful for the Governor's leadership and for choosing facts and reason over fear in response to COVID-19 in Florida."

Despite pseudoscientific policies from the federal government, Florida's common-sense approach allowed Florida to thrive. In 2022, Florida had the largest net migration in the country and set an all-time record for tourism with 137.6 million visitors. Additionally, Florida's Gross Domestic Product increased by 24% between the first quarter of 2020 and the third quarter of 2022, outpacing the nation by 23%.

Florida recognized the importance of in-person learning for students. While other states locked the doors of their schools, Florida was the first state in the nation to mandate in-person learning for students and welcome students back into the classroom. Because of Florida's smart approach, Florida avoided the learning losses that we are just beginning to comprehend nationwide.

Findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that moving towards remote learning created learning gaps that had lasting impacts on K-12 students while [Floridas students](#) earned the state's highest ever rankings in each assessment and demonstrated historic achievement gap closure for at-risk students at all levels.

"15 Days to Slow the Spread" policies led the way for lockdown policies that are still

causing economic damage to the US economy and have resulted in record inflation rates not experienced since the 1980s. In February:

- Overall inflation rose by 6% over the year.
- Grocery prices rose by 10.2% over the year.
- Energy prices rose 5.2% over the year.

[First Lady Casey DeSantis Hosts a Women of Faith Breakfast Reception to Discuss Hope Florida](#)

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — First Lady Casey DeSantis welcomed female faith leaders from across Florida into the Governor's Mansion to discuss her Hope Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity initiative spearheaded by First Lady Casey DeSantis. Hope Florida, created by First Lady DeSantis and implemented by the Florida Department of Children and Families and the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, utilizes 'Hope Navigators' to guide Floridians on an individualized path to prosperity and economic self-sufficiency by focusing on community collaboration between the private sector, faith-based community, non-profits, and government entities to break down traditional community silos to maximize support and uncover opportunities. These 'Hope Navigators' are essential in helping individuals identify their unique and immediate barriers to prosperity, develop long-term goals, map out a strategic plan, and work to ensure all sectors of the community have a 'seat at the table' to be a key part of the solution. In addition, the Hope Navigators help identify and organize

opportunities for Floridians who wish to help their neighbors by connecting community members, including Florida seniors, with volunteer and mentorship opportunities.

"Florida's faith-based communities have been instrumental in supporting their neighbors in need," said **First Lady Casey DeSantis**. "Through Hope Florida's partnership with CarePortal, we have seen a tremendous response from faith leaders across the state not only in filling immediate needs, but also embracing those individuals and personally helping them get back on their feet. It is heartwarming to witness as their faith fuels action, and we are grateful that through Hope Florida we can step in to make the connection and then get out of the way."

"It was an honor to be with these amazing women of faith from across the state today as First Lady Casey DeSantis shared how her Hope Florida Initiative is connecting some of our most vulnerable populations with Florida's faith institutions which stand ready to help," said **Erik Dellenback, Governor's Liaison for Faith and Community**. "I am so grateful for the authentic, meaningful leadership of the First Lady that is moving the needle for how we elevate the already incredible work being done by our churches and faith and community institutions."



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## Moody

Continued from page 10

visited in 2022. Unfortunately, scammers know this and may try to exploit consumers, casting a wide net to try and trap unwary travelers. Attorney General Moody is releasing *Scams at a Glance: Travel Traps* to help consumers avoid falling for fraudsters' tricks during this busy travel season and beyond.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "As spring break gets underway and we continue to recognize National Consumer Protection Week, I am releasing a new resource to help protect travelers. *Scams at a Glance: Travel Traps* highlights common schemes designed to rip off tourists, as well as helpful tips to avoid falling victim. Download it for free before you leave on spring break or plan a summer getaway."

*Scams at a Glance: Travel Traps* highlights some common travel scams:

- Vacation-Rental Fraud: Fake postings offering vacation-rental properties created by scammers who take the victim's money, leaving the traveler without accommodations;
- Taxi or Ride-Sharing Scams: Unlicensed or unmetered drivers that operate out of airports or major tourist destinations, charging undisclosed or flat-rate fees that are more expensive than real-metered fares;
- Fake-Ticket Scams: Scammers create fake websites, ads or physical tickets to trick visitors into buying worthless entrance passes;
- Vehicle-Rental Scams: Damaged sports-rental equipment or vehicles such as

jet skis, scooters and boats are rented to tourists and the owner claims the renter damaged the vehicle; and

- Credit-Card Skimming: The illegal copying of the magnetic strip of a credit or ATM card—often occurring when a credit card is taken out of sight, or by placing illicit skimming machines on card readers or terminals.

Consumers can report spring break travel scams to Attorney General Moody's office by calling 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or visiting [MyFloridaLegal.com](http://MyFloridaLegal.com).

The Florida Attorney General's Office created Scams at a Glance as an online outreach program detailing information about common and emerging scams. The webpage provides downloadable brochures designed to help Floridians avoid falling victim to fraud. For more information on the Scams at a Glance program, visit [MyFloridaLegal.com/ScamsAtAGlance](http://MyFloridaLegal.com/ScamsAtAGlance).

## Congress Woman Kat Cammack



**Congresswoman Kat Cammack Announces USDA Rural Development Grant For City Of Starke**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Kat Cammack (FL-03)

announced the City of Starke's award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development. The City of Starke will

receive a \$6.3M grant, in addition to a \$10.6M Water and Waste Disposal Loan and a \$9.6M Water and Waste Disposal Grant.

The Rural Development investment will be used to provide additional financing for the City of Starke's wastewater treatment plant system improvement project. The proposed investments will bring the city into compliance with regulatory agencies and will assure public health and welfare for its existing and future residents in the City's designated service area.

USDA Rural Development is committed to helping improve the quality of life in rural

America and offers loans, grants, and loan guarantees to create jobs and support economic development and essential services such as housing; health care; first responder services and equipment; and water, electric, and communications infrastructure.

The Office of Congresswoman Kat Cammack offers information on federal grant programs available to communities in Florida's Third Congressional District. To learn more, visit [cammack.house.gov](http://cammack.house.gov) or contact the Gainesville District Office at 352-505-0838.

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