

ECO EVENTS

BY ANNA RABHAN



November The Beaches Local Food Network has workshops going on at the community garden in Jarboe Park all month. Information on the free children's workshops, including "Bees and Honey" on November 12, can be found at www.beacheslocalfoodnetwork.web.officelive.com/ChildrensGarden.aspx. Information on the adult workshops, including the \$12 "Introduction to Permaculture" at 10 am on November 15 and the \$35 "Growing Mushrooms" at 12 pm on November 15, is at www.beacheslocalfoodnetwork.web.officelive.com/happenings.aspx. You must pre-register for the adult workshops.

Update on Urban Agriculture If you missed the October 6 **Urban Agriculture Forum**, watch it in its entirety here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaQa1VQGtG4&feature=youtu.be

November The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of St. Augustine will host an environmental film series. The 7 pm screenings include *The Turning Point* on November 3 and *Forks Over Knives* on November 10. A \$5 donation is requested to cover the cost of the screening. For more information, call 461-3541.

November 3 Florida Coastal School of Law and Jacksonville University host the **13th Annual Northeast Florida Environmental Summit: Economics, Ethics and the Environment**. Some really interesting speakers will be on hand to discuss environmental issues. Registration is required. Visit www.fcsl.edu/content/northeast-florida-environmental-summit for more information and to register.

November 5 Come out to the **2nd Annual Northeast Florida Veg Fest** sponsored by Girls Gone Green and the Northeast Florida Vegetarian Society. The festival will feature healthy and sustainable foods, cooking demonstrations, live music, informed speakers and movie screenings. The area's best organic, green, animal-friendly and wellness businesses and nonprofits will come together from 10 am to 5 pm in Riverside Park to celebrate this planet and all it has to offer. Check it out at www.nvegfest-com.doodlekit.com/home.

November 5 KYV Farm and Yoga Den are partnering to present **Free Range Yoga**! Join them at KYV in Switzerland at 10:30 am for an hour of all-levels-appropriate al fresco yoga followed by the opportunity to buy fresh, organic veggies. Proceeds benefit Slow Food First Coast, so bring cash (\$10 for KYV farm share members, \$15 for nonmembers) or check made out to Slow Food First Coast. Also bring your yoga mat, a towel and water. Contact Dawn Hutchins at 534-4252 for more information. Directions to the farm can be found at www.kyvfarm.com and information about Yoga Den is at www.yoga-den.com.

November 6- 12 National Animal Shelter Appreciation Week would be a great time to donate to local shelters. "Donate" doesn't just mean money either, although that is very helpful. Shelters are always in need of things like bedding, food, cleaning supplies, office supplies and your time. Contact shelters like First Coast No More Homeless Pets (www.fcnmhp.org) and the Jacksonville Humane Society (www.jaxhumane.org), tell them you appreciate the work they do and find out how you can help.

November 8 Join the North Florida Land Trust for "Cocktails and Tapas," a presentation and

fundraiser at the Sawgrass Marriott Magnolia Terrace from 6- 8 pm. Learn about and support the Trust's plan for creating a Conservation Resource Center adjacent to the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve in Ponte Vedra. Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at www.conservationresourcecenter.com.

November 15 Ever wanted to check out a **farm-to-table dinner** event but been discouraged by the price? Several local, organic farms and the Floridian restaurant are partnering to present a four-course meal, with the option to purchase wine or beer, for only \$25 for the vegetarian dinner or \$35 for the meat option. There will be seatings at 6 and 8 pm, and proceeds benefit Slow Food First Coast. Prices increase \$5 after November 8, so reserve your seats by calling the Floridian at 829-0655. For more information, contact the Floridian or Dawn Hutchins at 534-4252.

November 17 Florida is being invaded! No, not the English, French or Spanish this time- invasive plant species are harming our environment. Learn about a new "bad boy" plant in the Jacksonville area and how to report it and other harmful plants. The Florida Native Plant Society, Ixia Chapter, will meet at 6:30 pm at the Regency Square Library. The program will include "Tamarix Biology and Identification," by Ixia member Jessica Spencer, and "Citizen Science using EDDMapS: Florida's Invasive Species Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System," presented by Ixia member Pete Johnson. The meeting is free and open to the public. Visit www.ixia.fnpschapters.org or call 655-2550 for additional information.

November 19 The Jacksonville Arboretum & Gardens hosts its very popular \$10 **Yoga Under the Trees** from 10-11 am. Bring your mat! For more information about this and other Arboretum events, contact director@jacksonvillearboretum.org.

November 21 Buzz on over to the Duval County Agricultural Center on McDuff Avenue from 7- 8:30 pm. The Jacksonville Beekeepers Association will host a **discussion on beekeeping practices**. Visit www.jaxbees.com for all the information!

December 3 & 4 In partnership with Environmental Concern, Inc., the North Florida Land Trust is offering two full-day workshops on wetlands at its headquarters in Ponte Vedra Beach. "WOW! The Wonders of Wetlands" (\$45) and "POW! The Planning of Wetlands" (\$50) are excellent courses for students, volunteers, educators, home schoolers and property owners who want to consider restoration of wetlands. They are offering \$5 off the total when you register for both workshops, and several teacher scholarships are available. To register, contact Environmental Concern at 410-745-9620 or www.wetland.org. For information, contact Susan Sanger at wow@wetland.org.

ON THE RIVER

BY KELLY SAVAGE

Since it is November, the month of Thanksgiving, I thought I would take a moment to pause and give thanks to our beautiful river. At St. Johns Riverkeeper, we work hard to fight the big issues facing our river every day. We want to ensure it is healthy and a vibrant part of our city and state for generations to come. I think it is important to also take stock and remember all the good things our river brings to us, so here is brief list.

I am thankful for:

Parks Did you know we have the largest park system in the United States? Yet another reason we are lucky to live on the First Coast. Make a point to get out there and explore! The St. Johns Riverkeeper has created the *Get Your Feet Wet* guidebook packed with information about the river, activities for families, and 50 of the best parks from Palatka to Mayport. I personally drove to each park and recorded the amenities, wildlife, access and important information like whether or not the park had restrooms! Many local shops carry our book, or you can order it online at www.stjohnsriverkeeper.org/the-river/guidebook. You can also download the *Get Your Feet Wet* iPhone App. This free app was created by a local company, Nautical Guides, LLC. You will be able to see what parks you are close to no matter where you are in the area!

Water Access Want to paddle in the marsh? Go fishing from land or on a boat? Take a walk with spectacular river views? Take a swim? Again, we are lucky we can do all of the above in one city! It can be overwhelming to find new spots, and I am sure you are like me and tend to frequent the same ones. Once every six months or so, I make a list of at least two new places I want to check out and make a point of getting there. We made it easy on our website, listing all the access points and parks on a google map at www.stjohnsriverkeeper.org/the-river/access-and-recreation.

Wildlife Viewing Since we have a diverse, unique landscape, we also have a diverse and unique stock of wildlife. It is pretty amazing that you can see dolphins, alligators and egrets in the same city as urban animals like squirrels and pigeons. I have found if I sit quietly just about anywhere, some creature will show itself.

People Who Care Our river faces a lot of challenges but has also come a long way. St. Johns Riverkeeper (SJRK) was formed 11 years ago by a group of people who cared enough to take charge and create a nonprofit whose mission would be focused on protecting the river. Since then, SJRK has fought against water withdrawals and point-source pollution from JEA, Georgia-Pacific and others. We have also worked with other groups in our state to get more protection against nutrient pollution and has provided education and outreach opportunities to the public and schools. It is amazing what a small group can do with the support of the public, government officials and local businesses. Thank you to all who care!

River Report Since 2008, we have had a report that documents the health of the river. Thanks to scientists from Jacksonville University, University of North Florida and Valdosta University, we can begin to work toward a clean and healthy river. You can look at a brief overview, which was made into a easy-to-read brochure, or view the entire detailed report at www.sjrreport.com.

So take a good look at our city and picture what it would be like without the St. Johns River. Impossible to picture, isn't it? Be thankful for it and for people who fight for it every day.

UPCOMING RIVER EVENTS

River Boat Trip

Saturday, November 5, 10 am- noon

Come aboard with us and learn all about the St. Johns River as we head into the Ortega River! Boat leaves from Friendship Fountain. Suggested donation: \$15 Adults, \$5 Children (under 12). Reservations required: 256-7613 or kelly@stjohnsriverkeeper.org.

Black Creek Outfitters PINT NIGHT to benefit the St. Johns Riverkeeper

Friday, November 11, 6- 9 pm

Purchase your pint glass at Black Creek Outfitters before the event or the evening of for only \$10, which ALL goes to the Riverkeeper. This price includes one free fill-up from the guys at Intuition Ale Works who will be at Black Creek for the party. Have a good night enjoying live local music, beer and hors d'oeuvres.

10th Annual Oyster Roast

Friday, November 18, 7 pm; Garden Club of Jacksonville, 1005 Riverside Avenue

Join us for live music, a silent auction, fabulous food by Pastiche and succulent oysters! Tickets are \$125 each or \$75 for ages 35 and under. Proceeds from the event help fund our effective advocacy, outreach and education programs. Buy tickets on our website: www.stjohnsriverkeeper.org/how-to-help/2011-oyster-roast.

Oyster Roast After-Party

Walkers on King Street, 10 pm

After enjoying lovely oysters and beautiful views of the river at our annual Oyster Roast, join the Riverkeeper's young professionals group, Rising Tides, for a free after-party!

Please email listings for consideration to anna@eujacksonville.com by the 15th of each month.

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AMATEUR NIGHT AT THE RITZ

A cultural expression exchange in the heart of LaVilla

BY LILTERA R. WILLIAMS

"I'll see YOU at the Ritz!" It's an inviting exclamation of joy for those in the know. At the Ritz, they foster creativity and provide of a platform of expression and promotion for talented locals. EU recently got the chance to speak with the Executive Director of the Ritz Theatre and reigning Amateur Night host, Ms. Carol Alexander, about this spectacular monthly event. She provided details about its development and shared key facts about the theatre's history and traditions. "I just want this place to be a haven of nurturing and development for the youth, and as they grow old they can learn about culture and art while keeping this place alive," she proclaimed.

The new Ritz Theatre and Museum was constructed in 1999 on the site of the 1929 Ritz Theatre movie house in the historic community of LaVilla, known as the Harlem of the South from the 1920s to the 1960s. The modern facility currently functions with a mission to "research, record and preserve the material and artistic culture of African American life in Northeast Florida and the African Diaspora, and present in an educational or entertaining format, the many facets that make up the historical and cultural legacy of this community."

Modeled after Amateur Night at the Apollo in Harlem, inside a repository of history and a neighborhood hot spot, Amateur Night at the Ritz occurs the first Friday of every month. Auditions are generally held the second Thursday of each month for contestants who either "have talent or don't have talent," but are brave enough and possess the desire to put their abilities on display for the local community audience. During the live show they are granted three minutes and 30 seconds to showcase their potential. Adults are judged by the audience with celebratory claps or disinterested boos, and youth contestants are fittingly judged by the judging panel, a combination of community leaders, local members with an interest in the arts, and McDonald's sponsor representatives.

Due to the nonrestrictive age limit, a broad range of performers, including jugglers, singers, rappers, spoken word artists, dancers, and even a light artist who strategically controlled multiple neon sticks, have graced the stage over the years. In the first round, contestants are vying for first, second and third place cash prizes of \$100, \$50 and \$25 respectively. During the semifinals, the prizes rise to \$150, \$100 and \$75, and contestants who are talented enough to make it to the finals have the opportunity to win a first place prize of \$500.

The neon sign and the wall in front of the box office are the only original components of the former Ritz Theatre, and as a way to preserve the mystique and energy of the past, Ms. Alexander encourages each contestant to "rub the magic," a rock that was saved from the construction site as the old theatre was being torn down, before taking their place on the stage. Each contestant experiences a transfer of energy from the legacies of historical figures, such as Cab Calloway, Sarah Vaughan, Gloria Lynne and Langston Hughes, who all passed through on their way to other popular hotbeds during the Harlem Renaissance era.

Former contestant Larreasha Williams, who sang Beyonce's "1 + 1" in the September 2, 2011 showcase, found out about Amateur Night a week prior to the audition date when she saw an advertisement on a McDonald's coupon. When asked what she hoped to gain from the experience, she jokingly responded, "I just wanted to have a good time and enjoy myself and see if I really had a fighting chance to be the next headliner of a future worldwide tour." Larreasha now participates in open mic nights around the city to improve her craft and to gain more notoriety. She hopes to join the ranks of other former contestants who have gone on to demonstrate their talent outside of Jacksonville, including a young teenager who currently has his own show in a hotel in Japan and a dancer who traveled with the popular circus act Cirque du Soleil. Two former Amateur Night contestants have also performed live at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem.

Ms. Alexander strongly believes that "Young people need to be able to develop a sense of who they are by recognizing how important it is to preserve and enlighten," and she continues to amplify the passion that she developed for African American culture while growing up in Philadelphia. "I breathe it, I talk it, I think it, I wear it," she stated. The strategic programming and vision set in place at the Ritz Theatre and Museum highlights the richness of our diverse community and serves as a foundation for locals to celebrate, communicate and cultivate that richness for years to come.

Amateur Night tickets are affordably priced at \$5.50 and usually sell out the Wednesday before each show. For more information about Amateur Night or any other event held at the Ritz Theatre and Museum, call 632-5555 or visit www.ritzjacksonville.com.

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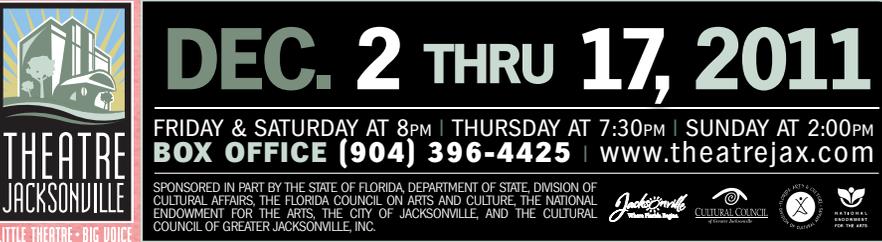
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