


**BEFORE THEY WERE VILLAGERS | C5**  
Irv Butler was a NASA contractor and has a menu signed by the Apollo 11 astronauts.

6 a.m. 9 a.m. 12 p.m. 3 p.m. 6 p.m. 9 p.m.

56° 51° 56° 61° 57° 51°

**MADDIE CUTLER ON GIVING | C1**  
Our Moment Cafe, an Alzheimer's support group, celebrated its fourth anniversary.



**TOP WORLD AND NATION NEWS**

## U.S. NATIONAL DEBT HITS RECORD \$34 TRILLION, A5

**Around the World:** Iranian military ceremony struck by bombing. **A3** | **Across the Nation:** Abandoned Pillsbury Mill site get new life. **A16** | **In Science:** Dutch farmers experiment with floating cow farms. **A23**

**SPORTS NEWS**

### COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS READY FOR TRANSITION

As the College Football Playoffs transitions to a 12-team system, fans will remember the original four-team system as good, but still imperfect. **B1**

**SPORTS NEWS**

### PLAYOFF SEATING IS AT STAKE FOR DOLPHINS

The Miami Dolphins will be in the playoffs no matter what, but there's plenty at stake in their showdown with the Bills on Sunday. **B7**

**LOCAL NEWS**

### BOOSTER CLUB PLANS UPCOMING FUNDRAISER

The group that supports the Wildwood Wildcats is hosting a reverse drawing featuring a grand prize of \$10,000. **C3**

**OUR TOWN | CITIZEN SCIENCE EFFORT**






Left: Members of the Village Birders, Stuart Sacks, left, of the Village of Belvedere, and Elaine Kersey, of the Village of Piedmont, look for birds at Paradise Park during the Christmas Bird Count. Right: A palm warbler, from top, a female American kestrel and a bluebird are spotted during the count.

Photos by George Horsford | Daily Sun

## Citizens First Bank Transitioning Soon To New Leadership

**HOMETOWN BUSINESS PARTNERS**

**Lindsey Blaise will continue to guide the institution's board after seven successful years as its president and CEO.**

By **DAVID R. CORDER** | Daily Sun Specialty Editor

Lindsey Blaise, a long-serving community leader who piloted Citizens First Bank through an unparalleled level of success as a community bank, is stepping down after seven years as its president and CEO. The granddaughter of the bank's founder, the late H. Gary Morse, cited a desire to spend more time with her family for her departure in April. She will remain on the bank's board of directors.

"This summer the board and I started discussing about me wanting to spend more time with my three young children," said Blaise, who earned a master's degree in business administration at Rollins College and began work 14 years ago as a bank intern. "It was a very difficult decision for me to step aside and transition the leadership of the bank." During that discussion, Please See **BLAISE, A8**

## Local Birders Mobilize For Christmas Count

By **LEAH SCHWARTING** | Daily Sun Specialty Editor

"Pied-billed grebe."  
"Oh, that's the first one."  
Six well-bundled volunteers, and one dog, walked Hogeye Preserve Pathway, their murmured conversations routinely interrupted as they spotted more birds for the Christmas count. The men and women strolling in the 44-degree cold Tuesday morning were part of one of the most renowned citizen science efforts in the world. The National Audubon Society's 124th Christmas Bird Count will see volunteers collect data this winter in more than 20 countries throughout the Western Hemisphere. The two Villages counts recently wrapped up, counts where volunteers possibly recorded some uptick in variety. Every bird count is based on a circle, a specific

Please See **COUNT, A9**

**ONLY IN THE VILLAGES**

By Taylor Strickland

**A three-time Emmy Award-winning classical crossover group is coming to The Villages soon to support Villagers for Veterans, a local 501(c)(3) organization founded to help veterans in need.**

The Texas Tenors, made up of country singer JC Fisher, pop singer Marcus Collins and opera singer John Hagen, will perform at 7 p.m. Jan. 11 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. It will be the tenors' third performance in The Villages. "We have been in support of veterans since we became a group," Collins said. "We've done shows in support of

Please See **TENORS, A8**

## EXPLORE & EXPERIENCE

**OUT & ABOUT IN THE VILLAGES**

### Try This Today: Swing For the Fences Playing Softball in The Villages

Start or continue your softball career in The Villages, home of the premiere senior softball league in the United States. Five facilities host men's and women's leagues throughout the year. To place players, like Tim Crowe, of the Zinnia Wealth Management, in the proper division, the league has new players undergo a skills evaluation — with a draft taking place at the start of each season. Games are played at Knudson, Buffalo Glen, Saddlebrook, Soaring Eagle, and Everglades Softball Complexes. For more information, email [softball@districtgov.org](mailto:softball@districtgov.org).

— Greg Hughes, Daily Sun



Rachel Stuart | Daily Sun

**IN ENTERTAINMENT**

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**Plus:** Find the lineup of entertainment at the town squares, theaters and beyond, **D3**

**AT RECREATION CENTERS**

**Happening near you:** From aqua aerobics to Zumba and everything in between, there's fun for everyone, **C8-9**

## LOVIN' THE LIFESTYLE

Plan your perfect day in The Villages, **D1**

Recipes	D1
Comics	D4
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Horoscope	D7
TV Guide	D8
Advice	D9

from the front page



Rachel Stuart | Daily Sun

Lindsey Blaise, left, president and CEO of Citizens First Bank, is stepping down from her position and will be replaced by Jay Bartholomew, the bank's executive vice president and chief banking officer.

**BLAISE**

Continued from A1

Blaise recommended as her replacement Jay Bartholomew, who served as executive vice president and chief banking officer.

"Jay joined us seven years ago to oversee the commercial and retail side of the bank," she said. "He is absolutely a wonderful support and continued to take on more responsibilities. He was the right fit to be my successor as president and CEO."

In his 36-year banking career, Bartholomew has worked at Barnett Bank, First Federal Saving Bank and Colonial Bank. Most recently he served seven years in various leadership roles at the former Branch Banking & Trust Co.

"Throughout my career I played the role as a problem solver; broken culture, broken team, repair it and get it back on track," he said.

"This is an amazing organization that is well-run, has a great reputation and is well-thought of not only by the community but also banking regulators. I'm stepping into something that's already in good hands, and it's a matter of continuing what's been built. We have a great recipe for success, we really do."

The bank is losing a talented executive, said Alex Sanchez, who watched Blaise's rise during his time as president and CEO of the Florida Bankers Association.

"First of all, Lindsey is a very good person," said Sanchez, who today is president and CEO of Tallahassee-based Salva Financial Group. "She's the type of person you want as a leader. She's dedicated. She has tremendous credibility to her integrity. I fully understand and support her decision. It also shows you what type of person she is — a great individual, a great human being. I admit I'm disappointed in the news because I would love to see her continue in the industry. But from a personal perspective, I'm very happy for her and her family."

Under Blaise's leadership,

**TENORS**

Continued from A1

organizations like Homes For Our Troops and the Wounded Warrior Project and now Villagers for Veterans, which we really wanted to do because of the area."

Marie Bogdonoff, founder and CEO of Villagers for Veterans, originally saw the group on "America's Got Talent," where they got their first big break in 2009.

"I had seen them again a few years back, and I reached out to them and asked them if they would be interested in doing a benefit for veterans," said Bogdonoff, of the Village of Pine Ridge. "They said yes."

At the time, the only venue available was the Brownwood Hotel and Spa. To Bogdonoff's delight, the event sold out and the Texas Tenors played to a small crowd of veterans. When asked if they would be interested in returning the following year, the tenors agreed.

Bogdonoff said the trio primarily sing a mixture of country and pop music, with their most recent albums "Outside the Lines," "Rise" and "A Collection of Broadway and American Classics" all debuting at No. 1 on the Billboard charts.

"But what really drove me to them is they have a really great song dedicated to veterans," Bogdonoff said.

The song in question is "You Raise Me Up," which was written by Brendan Graham and made popular by Josh Groban. For the tenors, the song is an intrinsic part of their performances in honor of veterans, and usually is followed by a rendition of "God Bless the USA."

However, Bogdonoff said this year will be different, as the performance is part of the Texas Tenors 15th Anniversary Tour. Instead of strictly patriotic tunes, the tenors will cover all of their greatest hits.

"We try to gear our events to the enjoyment of the community," Bogdonoff said.



The Associated Press

The Texas Tenors return to The Villages for a charity concert at 7 p.m. Jan. 11 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. The concert is in support of Villagers for Veterans, a local 501(c)(3) organization founded to help veterans in need.

"It's a win-win situation — a win for us because we get to raise money, and a win for the community because they get to listen to some amazing music."

Villagers for Veterans was founded in 2015 for the sole purpose of aiding veterans and serving as a liaison between veterans and the rest of The Villages. The organization's goal is to connect veterans with the resources they need to regain their independence and have the opportunity to experience the same lifestyle as others in The Villages.

Joan Roverud Eynard and her husband, Steve, are longtime members of Villagers for Veterans. The Village of Chitty Chatty residents have been to each of the Texas Tenors' previous performances in The Villages, and the Jan. 11 show will be their third.

"They sing a lot of patriotic songs, which is great for our veterans group," Joan said. "They also sing all types of music from country,

pop, classical — we thought the variety of music was amazing."

Steve is a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, so supporting fundraising efforts for veterans always has been important to the couple. As a result, they try to volunteer their time at least once a month.

"For me, it's a double win," Joan said. "I get to go to a great concert and it also helps our Villagers for Veterans."

Villagers for Veterans has four ongoing veterans programs for women, mobility and independence, service dogs and those in need of community connections. For shows like the Texas Tenors concert, more than 97% of the proceeds help fund those programs.

According to Bogdonoff, Villagers for Veterans has raised nearly \$2.5 million for veterans services in the form of delivering specialized chair and mobility devices, acquiring service dogs, building transition housing and helping individual veterans financially.

The group accomplished this without grants or any government subsidies, which Bogdonoff said has all been through the generosity of people attending events like these.

Only a few tickets remain for the Texas Tenors concert. Tickets start at \$45 and can be purchased online at the villagesentertainment.com.

Senior writer Taylor Strickland can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5334, or taylor.strickland@thevillagesmedia.com.

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