



BEFORE THEY WERE VILLAGERS | C5
Chris Lipp is a U.S. Army veteran and worked for more than three decades with IBM.

6 a.m. 9 a.m. 12 p.m. 3 p.m. 6 p.m. 9 p.m.
56° 61° 74° 83° 77° 69°

AVANI MAHARAJ ON NATURE | C1
The Villages Astronomy Club will host its "Starry, Starry Night" event Saturday.



IN SPORTS | B1

We know what Mahomes can do, we know what Barkley can do. But if history is any indication, role players will decide which team walks away victorious.



IN LIFESTYLE | D1

Bring an artistic spirit to Trout Lake Nature Center today from 1:30 to 4 p.m. for a watercolor class on how to paint the roseate spoonbill.

Inspired By Nature: Roseate Spoonbill is an adult beginner watercolor class on painting the distinctive Florida wading bird. The class fee is \$50 and includes all the supplies needed for the class.

Day-Break Club Seeks Extra Help for Guests



Rachel Govola | Daily Sun

Volunteer Debbie Williamson, left, of the Village of LaBelle, dances with client David Southern, of the Village of Tamarind Grove, during the Day-Break Club on Tuesday at Odell Recreation.

By ANNE MOSER | Daily Sun Staff Writer

The Day-Break Club of The Villages is looking for a few good men.

Although the club always welcomes new volunteers, right now it is in need of more men for the position. Whether it's every week or once a month, volunteers play a vital role in all aspects of the club.

"Volunteers do a little bit of everything," said club president Sandra Ricciardi, of the Village De La Vista. "Some of their

main responsibilities are to oversee clients' safety and help entertain them."

Founded in 2013, the group offers a safe and supportive environment for caregivers living in The Villages to drop off adult family members with disabilities, such as Alzheimer's or Down syndrome. Activities vary between the group's weekly

Please See **DAY-BREAK, A9**

IN NATIONAL NEWS | A5

WHITE HOUSE TARIFF THREATS TARGET FENTANYL TRAFFICKING INTO U.S.

To avoid tariffs, Mexico and Canada on Monday both agreed to deals that would combat the illicit flow of the deadly opiate into the U.S. The drug is blamed for more than 70,000 overdose deaths in the U.S. annually.

IN WORLD NEWS

HAMAS SAYS TALKS ARE ON FOR NEW PHASE OF CEASEFIRE

Hamas is meeting with international mediators on the second phase of the ceasefire in Gaza that began last month. **A3**

IN NATIONAL NEWS

EL SALVADOR SAYS IT'S WILLING TO TAKE IN U.S. DEPORTEES

The comment from El Salvador's president comes after a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. **A28**

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Taylor Strickland

The end is in sight for The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra's 88 Keys Project. For years, the VPO has rented a concert piano from the Steinway Piano Gallery in Tampa whenever the orchestra hosted a guest pianist. Now, thanks to the generous contributions of donors, the VPO will soon purchase its own Steinway piano.

Please See **ORCHESTRA, A9**



Sophia Lucente | Daily Sun

Flo Hurlburt, of the Village of St. Charles, and Kathy Montgomery, of the Village of Hammock at Fenney, both members of the Tri-County Women Veterans, lay the wreath at the Fourth of July Ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park of The Villages in 2024.

Tri-County Women Veterans Celebrates 25-Year Anniversary

By MADDIE CUTLER | Daily Sun Senior Writer

Members of the Tri-County Women Veterans marked the group's 25th anniversary with a cruise in December, but they also took moments throughout the past year to look back at their more than two decades of friendship and remember all they've accomplished together.

President Betsy Nolan

retired from the U.S. Navy as a captain after serving for 26 years. She joined the Tri-County Women Veterans around 2015 and has enjoyed watching the club evolve.

"I am thrilled to be a part of this organization," said Nolan, of the Village of Bonita.

Please See **VETERANS, A8**

INSIDE TODAY'S DAILY SUN

TEST YOUR NEWS IQ

DRIVER-FREE FREEWAYS, EGG-LAYING AMBITIONS AND A FELINE WILDLIFE THREAT

1. The self-driving taxi service Waymo says it is ready to advance to its latest frontier — Los Angeles' freeways. Before expanding to L.A. in November, the company served Phoenix and San Francisco, where its cars have driven how many miles without a driver? **Page A33**

- a) 1 million miles
- b) 15 million miles
- c) 23 million miles
- d) 30 million miles

2. Former NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg has taken on a new position as a ___ minister in his native country of Norway. **Page A29**

- a) Defense
- b) Finance
- c) Interior
- d) Foreign

TRUE OR FALSE

3. When considering raising chickens in your backyard, it's safe to assume that your county, town or city will allow it. **Page A32**



4. Researchers say that cats are a threat to wildlife in Scotland, killing how many animals yearly? **Page A30**

- a) 1 million
- b) 250 million
- c) 500 million
- d) 750 million

5. Scientists say samples of which near-Earth asteroid contained the building blocks for life? **Page A34**

- a) Ryugu
- b) Sisyphus
- c) Bennu
- d) Apollo



Make it a Great Day!

Weather	C2
Recreation Listings	C6-7
Recipes	D1
Comics	D6
Puzzles	D7-8
Horoscopes	D9
TV Tonight	D10

BY THE NUMBERS

TOP FIVE STATES FOR RETIREMENT, 2025

1. Florida
2. Minnesota
3. Colorado
4. Wyoming
5. South Dakota

Florida was ranked as the best state in the U.S. to retire to, according to a new study by WalletHub. The Sunshine State consistently ranks high as the best state of choice for retirement due to its low taxes for retired people, agreeable weather for sun-seekers and endless recreation and entertainment.

from the front page



Joseph Cooke | Daily Sun

Guest pianist Renato Balsadonna performs with The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra during a classical concert Jan. 26 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.



Rachel Govola | Daily Sun

Volunteer Marlene Finley, left, of the Village of LaBelle, paints the nails of client and Village of Dabney resident Theresa Lamendola during a Day-Break Club meeting Tuesday.

ORCHESTRA

Continued from A1

During the first classical concert of the year, which featured Italian guest pianist Renato Balsadonna, it was announced that the orchestra recently passed a crucial milestone in its ongoing fundraising campaign.

“Your Villages Philharmonic Orchestra, under the leadership of maestro Pasquale Valerio, is on the cusp of raising the necessary funds to acquire a beautiful, brand-new concert D model grand piano, just like the one you see here today,” said Jonathan Hunt, the Steinway Tampa Bay vice president. “The fundraising goal is in sight, but we still need your help. We ask that you please consider joining our campaign.”

The 88 Keys Project was created in partnership with Steinway & Sons, one of the foremost piano manufacturers in the world. It started in November 2022, when Valerio brought in two Steinway artists to play in the lobby of The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. He repeated the experience two more times, but, until this summer, nothing happened.

The average price for a new Steinway model D concert grand piano is \$200,000. For nearly two years, the fundraiser stalled at \$19,000. It remained that

way through October, when Dean Thronsen, a longtime VPO supporter, announced the status of the campaign and urged patrons to donate. Many contributed, but donations ultimately fell short of the total goal. That changed three months ago, when Valerio started shopping for a good deal on a Steinway and looking for donors in earnest. “I drove to South Florida, and I met a donor who understood my frustration,” said Valerio, music director of the VPO. “He said, ‘If you find someone who can match my \$25,000, you will have my check.’”

Valerio ended up finding not only one person to match the \$25,000 but two. With an extra \$75,000 to boost the existing donations, he turned back to the VPO’s audience. He allowed donors like Thronsen to address the audience before concerts, encouraging them to come together and support the cause.

In December, Thronsen once again urged patrons to donate to the 88 Keys Project. After the concert, he looked over the balcony down into the lobby, where he saw lines of people waiting to write a check and make a donation. He is humbled by the number of people who gave to the VPO. “I had a man who told me his father donated a Steinway organ to the church in central Minnesota some 50 years ago, and it’s still being used today,” Thronsen said. “He said, ‘I

wrote a check because you are not buying a piano, you are buying an exceptional musical instrument that will last The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra for years.’”

At the classical concert, Balsadonna demonstrated the quality of the piano with a performance of Mozart’s “Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466” as well as two additional pieces.

The 88 Keys Project has since reached \$130,000, and Valerio expects more donations to come soon.

This month, he will travel to the famous and historical Steinway & Sons piano factory in New York City and select the VPO’s piano.

Technically, the VPO doesn’t need a permanent concert piano because the orchestra only does three piano concerts every year. But for Valerio, it’s not about necessity—it’s about investing in the community’s future.

“We can rent, but in my vision for the future of the community, we should have a piano that belongs to The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra but is in service of the community,” he said. “We already agreed with everybody that we take only the best they have offer to us.”

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

DAY-BREAK

Continued from A1

meetings, but typically meetings include games, live entertainment and trivia. The primary goal is to give caretakers a break during the day, which is where the club’s name comes from. People who use the service are known as “Day Breakers.” Volunteers assist the leadership team in running weekly meetings and making sure clients are safe and having fun.

While clients are evenly split between men and women, the majority of the current volunteers are women.

“We have some spots to fill after losing a few of our male volunteers,” Ricciardi said. “Male volunteers help the men in the club feel more at ease and give them someone to relate with.”

People can choose how frequently they volunteer. Many of them go to club meetings every week, though some opt to go biweekly or monthly. A typical day starts before the meeting officially begins and ends after the clients have gone home.

All volunteers have different responsibilities that change from week to week, but could include helping clients sign in, assisting with activities or serving snacks and drinks. Another goal is to make sure clients are having fun and participating, whether it means dancing to groovy tunes or playing horse bingo with them.

“A major part of volunteering is keeping clients happy,” said volunteer Steve Robbins, of the Village of Duval. “We have a lot of fun with it.”

As safety is a priority for the Day-Break Club, volunteers follow specific measures to keep clients safe throughout the meeting, such as preventing clients from wandering out of the room.

To help prevent this, some volunteers may be assigned to monitor the doors or accompany guests to restrooms.

“Volunteers will get training on how to redirect people and keep them from wandering,” Ricciardi said.

Another significant part of volunteering is building relationships with clients through one-on-one interactions.

Gerard Desilets, of the Village of Ashland, has

volunteered with the club since 2016. He said one of the many perks is the friendships he’s formed with some of the clients.

“There are three reasons I volunteer—for caretakers, for clients and for myself,” he said. “It’s rewarding to know how much you’re helping others as a volunteer.”

It’s also important to be mindful of clients’ disabilities and know how to accommodate them. Potential volunteers should be compassionate, patient and go out of their way to make clients feel welcome, Ricciardi said.

“You should enjoy people and be willing to socialize with clients,” Desilets said. “You get to know them on a more personal level.”

Volunteers must be Villages residents and have a valid ID card. Those who are interested can call Ricciardi at 203-376-2820. New volunteers can expect an orientation and some training before they officially start their roles.

The Day-Break Club meets at 1 p.m. Tuesdays at Odell Recreation. Visit day-break-club.com or call Ricciardi for more information.

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