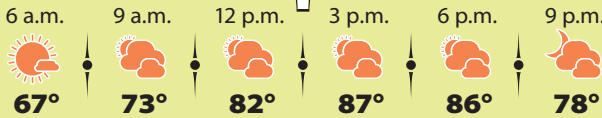




BEFORE THEY WERE VILLAGERS | C5
Ed Applegate worked in several divisions at General Motors for nearly 40 years.



SYLAISHA TAYLOR ON NATURE | C1
CleanUp Eustis is hosting an event Saturday at Ferran Park on the shores of Lake Eustis.



TOP WORLD AND NATION NEWS

FUTURE IS NEAR FOR SELF-DRIVING TRUCKS, A5

Across the Nation: FDA brings lab tests under federal oversight. **A2**

Across the Nation: Hush money trial judge holds Trump in contempt. **A3**

Across the Nation: Protesters in custody after university calls police. **A10**

ARTS & CULTURE

ICEHOUSE READY FOR ANOTHER SEASON OF FUN

The IceHouse Theater in Mount Dora recently unveiled a laugh-filled set of productions for its upcoming 2024-2025 season. **A16**

SPORTS NEWS

VHS BASEBALL TEAM BEATS CRYSTAL RIVER

The team beat Crystal River 5-1 and now has the opportunity to win a district title, something no one on the team has done — yet. **B4**

INSIDE TODAY

FIND OUT HOW TO SAVE BIG ON YOUR NEXT TRIP



OUR TOWN | ARTS AND CULTURE IN THE VILLAGES



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

Gary Powell, of Significant Productions, entertains the crowd on the organ Tuesday during the Lobby Lunch concert for the ninth anniversary celebration of The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

The Sharon Celebrates 9 Years of Entertaining

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND | Daily Sun Senior Writer

The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center turns 9 this year, and residents from in and around The Villages lined up outside the theater Tuesday to commemorate the milestone at Significant Productions' special Lobby Lunch event.

Once inside, additional seating and tables were set up to accommodate the volume of people coming through the doors. Whitney Morse, artistic director for Significant Productions and granddaughter

of The Sharon's namesake, said she had no idea so many people would attend.

Held in The Sharon's lounge, the free luncheon featured musical performances by a number of SigPro staff members as well as giveaways, prizes, theater tours and dessert from Nothing Bundt Cakes.

Please See SHARON, A6

DeSantis Signs Bills, Expands Program to Combat Opioid Threat

New legislation will protect law enforcement officers from fentanyl exposure and raise awareness of opioids.

By VERONICA WERNICKE | Daily Sun Senior Writer

Two new bills in Florida are expanding protections and resources in the fight against opioids.

Gov. Ron DeSantis signed the two pieces of legislation April 8 and announced an expansion of the Coordinated Opioid Response network.

"I'm signing legislation to keep officers safe on the job and to further combat the opioid epidemic," DeSantis said.

Under the first bill, SB 718, an adult who recklessly exposes law enforcement officers and other first responders to fentanyl can be charged with a second-degree felony, carrying a



DeSantis

penalty of up to 15 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

"This is nasty stuff," DeSantis said. "You have situations where law enforcement personnel are responding to these situations that fentanyl may be involved in and they really are putting themselves at risk."

The bill also grants greater protection from prosecution for people who seek help "in good faith" if they believe

Please See DESANTIS, A7

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Taylor Strickland

The month of May marks a series of firsts at The Tracy Performing Arts Center at The Villages High School.

For many years, VHS's annual spring musical, as well as its choir, band and dance performances, were held at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. This year, students get to show off all their hard work on a stage of their very own, starting with the VHS production of "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" running Thursday through Sunday.

Directed by Mark Lehnowsky and Kirstin Ritch, "Sweeney Todd" is not only the first high school musical to happen at The Tracy, but its actors are also the first class to do its senior show at the new theater.

Please See TRACY, A7

EXPLORE & EXPERIENCE

OUT & ABOUT IN THE VILLAGES

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—Greg Hughes, Daily Sun



Sophia Lucente | Daily Sun

IN ENTERTAINMENT

Come Out and Learn to Play Beach Tennis

Find out more, **D1**

Plus: Find the lineup of entertainment at the town squares, theaters and beyond, **A15**

AT RECREATION CENTERS

Happening near you: From aqua aerobics to Zumba and everything in between, there's fun for everyone, **C9-10**



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

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|-----------|------|
| Recipes | D1 |
| Advice | D3 |
| Poetry | D4 |
| Comics | D6 |
| Puzzles | D7-8 |
| Horoscope | D9 |



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from the front page

SHARON

Continued from A1

The event was hosted by Morse, who opened the afternoon’s entertainment with a rendition of “A Way Back To Then” from “[title of show],” a one-act musical about people trying to make it in show business.

“This one really spoke to me, and I think about the song as a love letter to this building in a lot of ways,” Morse said to the assembled crowd. “This building and my grandmother, Sharon, and all of you have made all of my dreams come true and I’m very, very thankful.”

Before it was The Sharon, the building that is now home to one of Central Florida’s premiere theaters was called Church on the Square. Like most churches, it was a place where people would gather in worship and to get married. However, it was also where some of The Sharon’s longest recurring acts and shows made their debuts, like The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra and its annual production of George Handel’s “Messiah.”

Audrey and Sheldon Guss, volunteer ushers and residents of Del Webb Spruce Creek Golf & Country Club, have lived in the area for 20 years and remember that even back then, the place that would eventually be known as The Sharon was an epicenter of arts and entertainment in The Villages.

“They used to have little concerts and there were some individual people who would have little piano concerts in there on Sunday night,”



Marilyn Mays, of the Village of Bridgeport at Lake Sumter, applauds following a song Tuesday at the Lobby Lunch concert for The Sharon’s ninth anniversary celebration.

Audrey said. “I think at that time, it was \$6 to get in.”

Now, The Sharon is a state-of-the-art performing arts center with a seating capacity of 1,022, approximately 35 full-time staff members and more than 200 volunteer ushers. Many of those staff members, who are also performers themselves, took the opportunity to show off their talents at the Lobby Lunch.

Mark Kirschenbaum, production manager for The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol and a regular performer around The Villages, sang “Shiksa Goddess” from the musical “The Last Five Years,” which was one of the first musicals performed at The Studio.

“It’s basically the story of my life,” he said. “Which is a nice Jewish boy falls in love with a non-Jewish girl.”

Kirschenbaum was followed by marketing assistant Jessica Nix, who sang

Etta James’ “At Last,” and assistant house manager Nichole Pollack, who sang “Watch What Happens” from “Newsies.” Each performance earned thunderous applause from those gathered, but none so much as production coordinator Madi Carr, who sang “Don’t Rain on My Parade” from “Funny Girl,” and house manager Alec Speers, who, much to the delight of the crowd, gave a spirited rendition of “In Summer” from the Disney movie “Frozen.”

“Someone asked me one time during a ‘Don’t Tell Nonnie,’ ‘Do you have to audition to get a job at Significant Productions?’” Morse said. “I said ‘No, it just kind of happens.’ A lot of the people who want to work in the performing arts came up performing.”

In addition to the live performances, the event included a chance drawing with prizes ranging from tickets to the “Story of Rock” and the VPO’s opera gala to



Photos by Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

Whitney Morse, artistic director of Significant Productions and host of The Sharon’s ninth anniversary celebration, sings at the Lobby Lunch concert Tuesday.

tumblers and cookbooks from National Geographic writer Dan Buettner and photojournalist David McLain.

Jeannie Bernius was one of the drawing winners. She won the cookbook, “The Blue Zones Kitchen: 100 Recipes to Live to 100,” which she said was perfect, because she loves to cook. The Village of Polo Ridge resident, who is also celebrating nine years in The Villages, came to the event at the insistence of a friend.

Bernius is a regular at The Sharon and attends many of the theater’s shows.

“I’ve seen quite a few and I

love them all,” she said.

After the drawing, Morse finished the event’s entertainment with a few more songs, followed by a talk with the new development director, Yasmeen Stogden, who reaffirmed SigPro’s commitment to bringing state-of-the-art performers and shows to The Sharon.

“With the support of The Villages, Significant

Productions hopes to make an impact in our industry and provide artists a better experience when they come to The Villages,” Stogden said. “To continue doing what we love as an organization, it’s going to take a village — or Villages.”

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

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