



**BEFORE THEY WERE VILLAGERS | C5**  
Phillip Poole flew over 120 combat missions and received five medals from the U.S. Air Force.

6 a.m. 73°  
9 a.m. 76°  
12 p.m. 84°  
3 p.m. 88°  
6 p.m. 88°  
9 p.m. 80°

**MADDIE CUTLER ON CHARITY | C1**  
Operation Shoebox is asking for donations to send care packages to active military overseas.



TOP WORLD AND NATION NEWS

## SENATORS URGE SPENDING TO MAKE, SAFEGUARD AI, A5

**Accross the Nation:** Biden, Trump agree to two campaign debates. **A3**

**Around the World:** Argentina's inflation eases to single-digit rate. **A22**

**In Politics:** Senate primaries set up marquee races and likely flips. **A14**

SPORTS NEWS

## MCILROY BACK AT SITE OF HIS LAST MAJOR TITLE

Rory McIlroy has momentum as he heads into the PGA Championship and tries to end a decade-long drought in the majors. **B1**

LOCAL NEWS

## HOT CHICKS CLUB CELEBRATES PAST, PLANS FUTURE

The club is kicking off fundraising for its annual event that raises money for UF Health Leesburg's free mammogram voucher program. **C1**

LOCAL NEWS

## HABITAT FOR HUMANITY HOSTS WOMEN BUILD

The home for this year's event will be Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter's 300th home built since the charity was established in 1989. **C3**

OUR TOWN | A GROWING POPULATION



George Horsford | Daily Sun

Villages south of State Road 44, including the Village of Richmond, are helping drive population growth in Wildwood, which is one of Florida's fastest-growing cities.

# Wildwood Sets Pace For Florida

By MIA STEPHENS | Daily Sun Senior Analyst

New growth continues to reshape the city of Wildwood, and Villagers like Lisa Dilldine are the driving force.

"I hit the lottery," she said. "I just absolutely love The Villages."

Because of The Villages, Wildwood is once again one of the fastest-growing cities in the state.

The city has experienced a surge in

population since 2016. That's when The Villages expanded into the area with the Village of Fenney. Then came added villages in the section known as Southern Oaks, which now encompasses the majority of new developments south of State Road 44.

Please See **WILDWOOD, A9**

### BY THE NUMBERS

**11,000**

The approximate number of new Wildwood residents from 2018 to 2023.

**3rd**

Wildwood's place among Florida's cities in terms of percentage growth.

**156%**

The percentage increase in Wildwood's population in the five-year period from 2018 to 2023.

## Villages Community Remembers Fallen Law Enforcement

Officers read the names of those who died in the line of duty last year at the annual Peace Officers Day ceremony.

By VERONICA WERNICKE | Daily Sun Senior Writer

As the pipes of Sounds of Scotland finished a melody, a moment of silence fell over the crowd in honor of the 138 law enforcement officers nationwide who died in 2023.

Veterans Memorial Park of The Villages hosted its annual Peace Officers Day ceremony Wednesday to pay tribute to fallen officers.

"We're here to honor our law enforcement officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice," said Dominic Orlando, a retired New York Police Department sergeant. "As we read their names, we must also keep in our thoughts and prayers their families that suffered their deaths the most."

Peace Officers Day, observed May 15 each year, honors law enforcement officers at all levels who died in the line of duty. The week in which May 15 falls is known as National Police Week, marked by several national events to honor officers.

In Florida and across the country, American flags and state flags were at half-staff Wednesday to honor the fallen officers.

Of the 138 officers who died in 2023, 15 were from 9/11-related illnesses. However, the leading causes of death were 48 from gunfire and

Please See **PEACE, A8**

### ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Taylor Strickland

**As The Villages hosts more well-known acts, such as Rick Springfield in March, predatory ticket pricing and reselling have become common, according to The Villages Entertainment's executive director Brian Russo.**

Ticket prices are doubled or even tripled by some scalpers, he said, and fraudulent vendors sell duplicates of the same ticket. With these concerns in mind, The Villages Entertainment has come up with a plan to protect its customers from potentially losing out on hundreds of dollars.

"Over the last year or two, it has really come to our attention

Please See **TICKETS, A8**

### EXPLORE & EXPERIENCE

OUT & ABOUT IN THE VILLAGES

## Try This Today: See Lake Miona from a New Angle With the Water Ski Club

The Villages Water Ski Club is going on its 16th season, and it's stronger than ever with about 24 current members. Club members ski on Lake Miona from 7 to 10 a.m. every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, welcoming skiers of all levels. Club President Bob Smalley, of the Village of Ashland, has overseen the group since its inception and attends every skiing session. It is preferred that participants have their own ski equipment, but Smalley offers equipment for those who need it. Those who are interested can contact Smalley at smalleyrobt@aol.com.

—Greg Hughes, Daily Sun



Rachel Govola | Daily Sun

IN ENTERTAINMENT

## Learn the Basics Of Activities With Lessons

Find out more, **D1**

**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**

LOVIN' THE LIFESTYLE

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

Recipes	D1
Comics	D4
Puzzles	D5
Advice	D7
Television	D8
Horoscope	D9



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from the front page

PEACE

Continued from A1

23 automobile crashes, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page, which keeps track of law enforcement officers' deaths.

This was the first year since the pandemic that COVID-19 wasn't the leading cause of death, Orlando said.

Three of the 138 officers worked in Florida: Chief of Police Anthony Rickerson, with the Jasper Police Department; Sgt. Michael Kunovich, with the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office; and Police Officer Charles Herring, with the Pembroke Pines Police Department.

During the ceremony, VMP board members, officers from local law enforcement agencies, including Lady Lake Police Department and Sumter County Sheriff's Office, and others read the names of all the officers who died last year.

Orlando, president of the NYPD 10-13 Club in The Villages, acknowledged that 58 law enforcement officers already have died in the line of duty in 2024.

He ended his speech by reading the poem "A Hero's Welcome" by Robert Longley. "Take your place of honor among those who have gone before and know you will be remembered from now and evermore," he read.

Pat Breeden, SCSO undersheriff, was among the dozen people who read the names this year. It was humbling for him, he said. "They're truly heroes," he said. "They deserve all the honor they can get."

Members of retired police groups in The Villages like the NYPD 10-13 Club and the Association of Retired Police and Fire Personnel of The Villages attended to pay their respects.

Along with the officers'



Rachel Govola | Daily Sun

**Kevin Connors, left, a Village of Tamarind Grove resident and treasurer of the NYPD 10-13 Club in The Villages, and Steve Hunt, police chief with the Lady Lake Police Department, present the wreath during the Peace Officers Day ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park of The Villages.**

COMING SUNDAY

Pick up a copy of Sunday's Daily Sun for a special report on how law enforcement agencies are prioritizing mental health and utilizing new technology to keep officers and the community safe.

names, the names of 25 K-9s who died in the line of duty were read.

Of those 25, one K-9 was from Florida — K-9 Fredy with the Orange County Sheriff's Office, who died in an automobile crash Oct. 16.

Lady Lake PD K-9 handlers Josh Higgins and Ryan O'Neal read the names of the fallen K-9s.

"These highly trained K-9s are an invaluable resource to their law enforcement agencies," said Michael Summers, VMP treasurer. "They will put their life on the line, and they will sacrifice themselves for their partner and for other police officers."

Summers, of the Village of

Poinciana, also noted Wednesday's crowd was the largest ever for the annual ceremony.

Also during the ceremony, Summers gave the opening and closing prayers, the Sumter County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard presented the colors, Orlando served as the guest speaker and the Sounds of Scotland performed several melodies. Lady Lake Police Chief Steve Hunt and Kevin Connors, with the NYPD 10-14 Club, presented the wreath.

On days like this, Breeden hopes the community understands the sacrifice law enforcement officers and their families make.

"This is a dangerous job," Breeden said. "We lose officers every year who are out protecting the public."

For more information about the Officer Down Memorial Page, visit odmp.org.

The next ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park of The Villages is for Memorial Day at 10 a.m. May 27. Those who attend are encouraged to bring chairs and are reminded dogs are not allowed in the park.

TICKETS

Continued from A1

that even though we may not be affected as much as some other venues, there has still been an uptick in scalping and resale of fraudulent tickets," said Sarah DeCapua, marketing manager for The Villages Entertainment.

Across the nation, ticket resellers earn an average cumulative profit of \$41,000 per show by charging an average of two times the original ticket price, according to a recent study conducted by the National Independent Talent Organization. The study also found that some tickets were sold at 10 times the original price.

In The Villages, shows with big-name artists are the primary targets for ticket scalpers. Russo said that The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center was hit hard for a few of its events this year. Scalped tickets for concerts like Rick Springfield and Broadway shows like "The Book of Mormon," "The Cher Show" and "Come From Away" sold for double and triple the face value, depending on the showtime and the seating.

The Villages Entertainment has begun a campaign to stop ticket scalpers, and a big part of that campaign is educating the public.

"What scalpers and scammers will do essentially is purchase tickets online using fake information to create accounts," DeCapua said. "Then they will resell the tickets at a higher price point elsewhere online."

The Villages Entertainment identified the print-at-home ticket option as the primary target for both scalpers and scammers. Russo said that scalpers see there is a show on sale or wait

until it's about to go on sale, then put out an ad offering to sell tickets in a row instead of an individual seat.

"Once they have a buyer, they will turn around and actually buy a seat and send it to that individual," Russo said.

In the case of scammers, DeCapua said multiple print-at-home ticket copies can be created and sold to multiple parties, creating a dilemma for patrons when they get to the venue and their tickets don't scan because someone else with the same ticket already has entered.

To purchase a ticket from The Villages Entertainment's website, patrons must create an account that includes a phone number, email address, home address and proper billing information. By reviewing discrepancies in this account information, The Villages Entertainment can identify suspicious accounts.

"With print-at-home, our best action to take is mitigating the amount of time that a patron holds their ticket," DeCapua said. "This way, if a ticket is purchased online by a scalper using fake credentials, our team has the ability to periodically hold the seats and review the credentials before the ticket gets deployed."

Previously, the print-at-home option meant that patrons would receive an emailed copy of their tickets five minutes after purchase. Now, print-at-home tickets will be sent to the purchaser's email inbox seven days before the show.

Russo said if they don't send the tickets right away, the

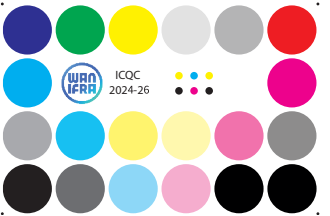
scalpers' window of opportunity narrows. However, both he and DeCapua indicated that the print-at-home option change is just one step of the solution.

"Unfortunately, as the concert and event industry evolves, ticket scalpers and scammers adapt their methods as well," DeCapua said. "What you will see from Entertainment moving forward is really just trying to help educate our patrons on the safest ways to purchase their tickets with us."

Tickets for all events at The Sharon, The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol, Savannah Center, The Show Kitchen and The Villages Grown should be purchased from the official entertainment website, DeCapua said, which is the villagesentertainment.com.

If in doubt, patrons can call The Villages Remote Box Office at 352-750-5411 or purchase tickets in person at one of the three Villages Box Office locations at The Sharon, The Villages Sales Center in Lake Sumter Landing and Brownwood Paddock Square. All are open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

"We want to protect people — that's what this is all about," Russo said. "We're not going to give up, and we're going to make sure they do."



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