

FREE

April 2026

FIRST COAST SENIOR LIVING

Pulse of the Good Life



Marine On A Mission

**Al Bagocius is the
Mayor for Older Adults**



**When Water
Takes Over Canvas**

**Chasing
Wings**
Birdwatching
is a Peaceful
Vacation



HAPPENINGS AT THE ZOO

APRIL EVENTS



EDUCATION

Nature's Newbies

Multiple dates in April!

We invite little ones and their caregivers to explore nature through free-choice play, songs, stories and more!

Stroller Safari

4/7 and 4/11

Pack up the stroller, put on your walking shoes and bring your little one on an early learning adventure as we stroll through the Zoo.

City Nature Challenge

April 24-27

Be part of the worldwide challenge by using the iNaturalist app to document wildlife you spot around Northeast Florida!

Adult Zoo Camp

4/25 @ 9 a.m.

Spend the day at Adult Zoo Camp with behind-the-scenes access, hands-on activities and plenty of fun while learning about wildlife and conservation.



jacksonville zoo
and botanical gardens

SPECIAL EVENTS

Dinosauria

Now through August 2!

Explorers of all ages are invited to journey back in time and come face-to-face with more than 40 life-size dinosaurs. This is the largest Dinosauria in Zoo history, a prehistoric adventure you won't want to miss!

World Penguin Day

4/25 @ 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Celebrate World Penguin Day at the Zoo with family-friendly activities and fun ways to learn about penguin conservation. Included with General Admission.

MEMBER INFO AND OTHER HAPPENINGS

Bunny Bash

4/4 @ 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Celebrate spring with us at Bunny Bash, a special ticketed Easter event exclusively for Zoo members! Join us for a fun-filled morning of sweet treats, crafts and a chance to meet a very special guest, the Easter Bunny.

Yoga with Penguins

4/11, 4/18 and 4/25

Unwind in a truly unique setting at Tuxedo Coast! Stretch, breathe and meditate as Magellanic penguins glide through their beautiful habitat. This is open to both adults and children, making it a perfect family-friendly way to relax and reconnect with nature.



jacksonvillezoo.org

Publisher's Note

April arrives like a promise: longer days, and a world that's ready for you. This month, we turn our attention to health and self-care, not as a checklist, but as a way to live fully. Our region offers many invitations to do just that. Parks where concerts keep your heads bobbing and countless free events remind us that life doesn't have to be expensive to be rich.

Music venues present energy, galleries display unexpected awe, and every place else offers a kind of luxury that requires nothing but showing up. These experiences are reminders that vitality isn't dictated by age; it's a choice, one that happens every time we step outside, pick up an instrument, or follow the rhythm of a local festival. Don't let the old man in. You are only as old as you feel, and staying active, physically, socially, and creatively, is the clearest expression of that truth.

Within these pages, you'll find stories and features that speak to the life you're living now: practical tips for health and wellness, profiles of people who refuse to slow down, and guides to the best ways to experience the city and its surroundings. Take what matters, skip what doesn't, and let yourself find pleasure in the simple and the extraordinary alike.

April is not a gentle suggestion; it's a call to action. Life at this moment is yours to own. Don't hand it over to anyone else.

Cheers,



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SCAM OF THE MONTH

Stop Paying for That!

Five Things to Eliminate from Your Budget

Today's economy changes faster than we can blink. It's easy to fall into spending habits that no longer serve us, especially for those of us who grew up in a time when certain costs didn't exist. Being aware of how our money is spent isn't about being cheap, it's about being wise. Here are five things worth reconsidering paying for, so you can protect your cash and avoid unnecessary expenses.



1. Tipping for Takeout Orders

Tipping has its place especially for good table service. But when you're simply picking up food at the counter, the expectation to tip fifteen to twenty five percent has quietly crept in. It may feel uncomfortable to decline, just remember you're not receiving full service. A small tip is fine if you feel inclined, but don't feel pressured by a screen prompt to pay more than necessary.

2. Unused Subscriptions

Streaming services, magazine subscriptions, fitness apps, these small monthly charges can quietly drain your bank account. Take a few minutes to review your statements. If you're not actively using a service, cancel it. Many people are surprised to find they're paying for three or four services they rarely touch.

3. Extended Warranties

Retailers often push extended warranties on electronics and appliances, but many of these products rarely break within the covered period. Plus, most items already come with a manufacturer's warranty, and some credit cards offer additional protection. Before saying yes, ask yourself if the extra cost is really worth it.

4. Premium Cable Packages

Traditional cable bills can be shockingly high, with added channels you never watch. With so many streaming alternatives available, it may be time to cut back or cut the cord entirely. Even switching to a basic package could save hundreds of dollars a year.

5. Bank Fees

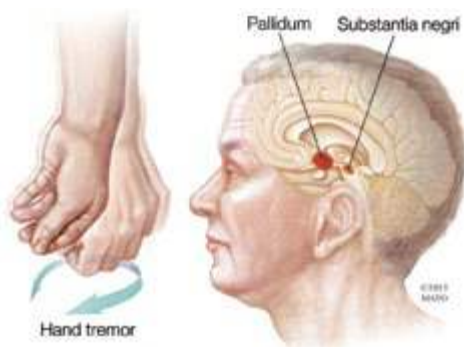
Monthly maintenance fees, ATM charges, and overdraft penalties can add up. Many banks now offer no-fee accounts for seniors. It's worth shopping around or speaking with your current bank about better options. Your money should be working for you not disappearing in avoidable fees.

Every dollar saved is a dollar that can be used for what matters: travel, hobbies, family, and peace of mind. Being intentional with spending isn't about going without; it's about making sure your money is going exactly where you want it to go. ☺

Understanding Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's disease is a chronic, progressive neurological disorder that primarily affects movement and coordination. It develops as nerve cells in the brain deteriorate, especially those that produce dopamine, a chemical critical for smooth, coordinated motion. This decline leads to hallmark symptoms such as tremors, muscle stiffness, slowed movement, and balance difficulties. As the disease progresses, many people also experience non motor symptoms like depression, sleep disturbances, and changes in speech and thinking.

At the Mayo Clinic, specialists emphasize that Parkinson's is not the same for each individual. A diagnosis often involves careful medical history review, neurological exams,



and sometimes imaging or genetic testing.

A Mayo Clinic neurologist, Dr. Eric Ahlskog, M.D., Ph.D., explains, "The focus of the Movement Disorders Clinic is to treat the symptoms of Parkinson's

disease, which we can do fairly well up to a point — not everything is perfectly responsive, but overall we do pretty well treating both the movement problems as well as some of the antecedent conditions that occur with it."

Ongoing research at the Mayo Clinic aims to better understand genetic, environmental, and biological factors that contribute to Parkinson's disease, improve early detection, and develop novel treatments to slow progression. ∞

PARKINSON'S DISEASE SUPPORT RESOURCES

Parkinson's Disease Association 954-952-0429

Jax Hope Parkinson's Support Groups 904-801-5535; support@jaxhopeinc.org; jaxhope.org

Mandarin Parkinson's Support Group Contact Kathryn Donaldson: 904-710-1449; serving4_him@yahoo.com

West Side Support Group Contact Kathy Lowery: 904-699-5134; Klowery4561@live.com

Orange Park Parkinson's Support Group Contact Gregg Hummer: 808-313-0966; ghummer57@yahoo.com

UF Health / ReBloom Support Group Contact Mimi Keith: MaranaSue.Keith@jax.ufl.edu

Parkinson's Foundation 1-800-4PD-INFO; parkinson.org

American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA) apdaparkinson.org

Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research michaeljfox.org

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Stand, Bend, Stretch!

Build Strength and Stability in Minutes a Day



Cheryl Sapora, Avondale resident, practices stability on a glacier in New Zealand.

Easy, everyday exercises can improve balance, coordination, and confidence when you're at home or out in nature.

It sounds simple, maybe even too simple, but standing on one foot is one of the easiest and most effective ways to test your strength and stability. Take a moment: stand near a stable object and lift one foot off the ground. Can you hold it for ten seconds?

Twenty? How steady do you feel?

This small movement does more than challenge your balance. It engages your muscles, joints, and focus, giving you a clear picture of how well your body is working together. It doesn't matter if you're hiking along a trail, stepping over a stream, or walking on the beach with shifting or uneven sand, having that control makes every step smoother, safer, and more confident.

Cheryl Sapora of Avondale, pictured here on a recent trip to New Zealand, is an avid yoga practitioner. "Yoga often involves standing on one leg, slow transitions, or holding poses with eyes closed," says Cheryl, "all of which train your body to 'know' where it is and adjust automatically to maintain stability."

Just a few minutes a day can make a noticeable difference. Here's how to get started.

1. Start Safe

Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart near a stable object like a chair or countertop. Lift one foot a few inches off the ground and focus on a steady point in front of you. Hold for ten to twenty seconds, then switch sides.

2. Gradually Challenge Yourself

As you get more comfortable, you can add small variations:

- Hold the position a little longer
- Reduce your hand support
- Turn your head slowly from side to side
- Practice during everyday activities at home, like brushing your teeth, or folding laundry

Pro Tip: Try closing your eyes while standing on one foot but be ready for a challenge. Without visual cues, your body must rely entirely on your muscles and inner sense of balance. It's surprisingly harder than it sounds! Start slowly and stay near a chair or countertop for safety. Even a few seconds with eyes closed strengthens your stability in ways that standing with eyes open can't.

3. Pay Attention to Both Sides

One leg may feel steadier than the other, and that's normal. Practicing both sides regularly helps even out differences and builds confidence in your movements.

The beauty of this exercise is its simplicity. A few small moments each day can strengthen muscles, improve coordination, and help you move confidently across trails, parks, or soft, shifting sand.

While you're waiting for your morning java at home or, like Cheryl, taking in the experience of standing on an ice shield, that sense of steadiness allows you to take in the moment. One foot and a few seconds makes a big step toward moving through the world with confidence and ease. ∞

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By Susanna P. Barton, MS Gero

GRAND PLANS

Mastering Aging How Society Must Adapt to Meet Our Needs

The older adult population in the U.S. is increasingly diverse and serving them requires a better understanding of their unique backgrounds and experiences.

If there's one thing I learned during my Gerontology master's program, it's that the older adult population in the U.S. is increasingly diverse and serving them requires a better understanding of their different backgrounds and experiences.

These are historic times! According to the ACL's 2023 Profile of Older Americans, by 2040 the number of older adults who identify as non-Hispanic White will decline from 75 percent to 60 percent. Hispanic, Asian American, Black, Native American and multiracial older adults are set to increase between 76 percent to 118 percent depending on the demographic. This group demands more than a cookie-cutter approach to care. The data means all of us need to sharpen our empathy and understanding, when we're drafting policies or legislation, advocating for services, designing programs or outreach



services or doing the hardest work of all – family caregiving. Every step along the way requires professionals and care providers to consider the multilayers of factors that influence every individual's situation.

The ACL study showed women, who statistically outlive men, make up nearly 60 percent of the 65+ population. LGBTQ+ adults are also on the rise although it is a more difficult number to track. Understanding the increasing diversity of older adults is essential. It shapes how needs are identified; services are delivered and outcomes are achieved.

As the U.S. demographic landscape continues to shift, organizations and individuals that can't adapt to these changes or recognize differences risk are becoming irrelevant to the communities they serve. Approaches ensure services are person-centered and aligned with the lived experiences of all older adults. And that's a Grand Plan that works for everyone! ☺

GROW LIKE A LOCAL

Gardening in Northeast Florida requires an understanding of the region's humid climate, sandy soil, and extended growing season. With the right plant choices and watering habits, home gardeners can produce healthy crops throughout much of the year.

During spring and summer, heat-tolerant vegetables perform best. Tomatoes, peppers, okra, eggplant, cucumbers, and sweet potatoes grow well in high temperatures. As the weather cools in fall and winter, gardeners should switch to crops like lettuce, spinach, kale, broccoli, carrots, and strawberries. Herbs such as basil, rosemary, and thyme can also thrive with proper care.

Watering is especially important in this region because sandy soil drains quickly and does not hold moisture for long. It is best to water deeply two or three times per week rather than giving small amounts every day. This helps roots grow deeper and strengthens plants. Watering early in the morning reduces evaporation and lowers the risk of disease.

Adding mulch around plants helps keep soil moist and protects roots from heat. Mixing compost or organic matter into the soil improves its ability to retain water and nutrients.

With steady care and seasonal planting, gardeners in Northeast Florida can maintain productive gardens year-round.



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BY MISHELLE GRANT

On any given morning in Jacksonville,

you might find Al Bagocius doing something simple like sharing a cup of coffee, making a phone call, or stopping to check in on a neighbor. But look a little closer, and you'll see something more: a man who has quietly become a lifeline for older adults.

Bagocius doesn't wear a cape. He doesn't need to. A retired Marine of the United States military, he carries himself with the same steady commitment that defined his service, only now, his mission is different. Today, it's about people. Specifically, it's about making sure older adults are seen, heard, and supported.

That's why *First Coast Senior Living* is proud to announce a new partnership with Al, one that feels less like a business decision and more like a natural alignment of purpose. With over a decade of service working with seniors, Bagocius brings not just experience, but heart. The kind of heart that shows up, and never forgets a name.

In joining the team, he will enhance consultative services and marketing efforts, bringing expertise in senior advocacy, community support, and resource navigation for seniors and their families. And in a world where choices can feel overwhelming, that kind of guidance matters.

This collaboration comes at an exciting time. Following *First Coast Senior Living's* recent acquisition of Active After 50 Expo, the region's premier senior expo platform, the organization is expanding its reach and deepening its commitment to providers and the community at large. With Bagocius on board, that commitment feels stronger, and more personal, than ever.

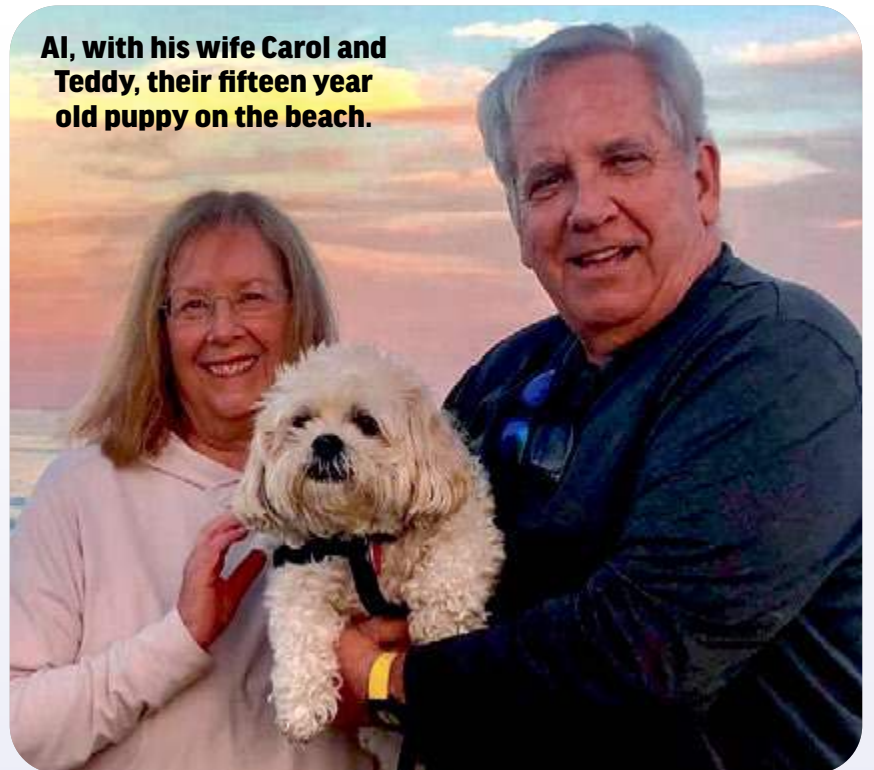
But he isn't slowing down.

"I've sat with families on some of their hardest days, when they don't know what comes next. If I can be the person who brings them a little clarity, or even just a little peace, then I know I'm doing exactly what I was meant to do," says Bagocius.

Through his work with American TelePhysicians, he continues helping skilled nursing facilities and senior communities stay ahead of the curve, especially in areas like chronic kidney disease and dementia. His advocacy extends beyond awareness. It's about action and access.

And then there's his decade-long involvement with the Walk to End Alzheimer's in Jacksonville. Ten years of walking, organizing, posting,

Al, with his wife Carol and Teddy, their fifteen year old puppy on the beach.



encouraging, and doing whatever it takes to bring people together for a cause that touches so many families.

At home, he is simply Al. A husband to his wife Carol, a companion to his dog Teddy, and someone who understands that the smallest moments often matter most.

Around town, though, people call him something else; the unofficial "mayor" of all things related to older adults. It's not a title he asked for. It's one he earned.

And now, with this new partnership, his reach, and ours, will only grow.

Because sometimes, the most powerful change doesn't come from big announcements or bold promises. Sometimes, it comes from one person who cares deeply and shows up anyway.

When asked why he continues to focus on this mission, Bagocius looked me in the eyes and said, "I wore the uniform to serve my country, but this... this is just as important to me. Our seniors built the life we're all living right now. Making sure they're cared for, respected, and never forgotten, that's not a job, that's a responsibility." ∞

Florida State Parks Provide Birdwatching Escapes You Didn't Know You Needed



Around here, spring arrives on wings. By April, the marshes and maritime forests come alive with motion and song, and few places capture this seasonal rhythm better than the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. Spanning thousands of acres of coastal wilderness, this protected landscape offers one of the richest birdwatching experiences in the region, where freshwater wetlands, salt marshes, and ancient live oaks create layered habitat for resident and migratory birds alike.

At dawn, the preserve stirs gently. A soft gold light filters through Spanish moss as wading birds begin their morning rituals. Great egrets and snowy egrets move with quiet precision through shallow water, while great blue herons stand statuesque along the marsh edge. Overhead, osprey glide on steady wings, occasionally plunging into tidal creeks in pursuit of fish.

Spring migration brings a colorful cast of travelers passing through Northeast Florida. Warblers; yellow-throated, palm, and black-and-white, flit through the canopy, their quick movements and high calls challenging even seasoned birders. Painted buntings,

among the most striking birds in North America, appear like flashes of living color along forest edges.

A short drive deeper into the preserve leads to Fort George Island, where maritime forest meets winding tidal creeks. Here, swallow-tailed kites circle effortlessly overhead, their forked tails carving the sky, while red-winged blackbirds call from the reeds below.

For the most active viewing, early morning and late afternoon are ideal. Sunrise offers cooler temperatures and

heightened bird activity, while the hours before sunset bring another wave of feeding and movement. The light during these times transforms the landscape, illuminating feathers, water, and sky in soft, shifting color.

Trails throughout the preserve and on Fort George Island provide easy access to multiple habitats within a short walk, making it possible to encounter a wide variety of species without venturing far. Patience, a good pair of binoculars, and a willingness to slow down are the only essentials.

Here, in the quiet space between river and sea, spring is not just a season, it is a migration, a chorus, and a story carried on every passing wing. 🌿



Birding Tour with the Superintendent at the Timucuan Preserve.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

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12713 Fort Caroline Road Jacksonville, FL 32225
(904) 641-7155 nps.gov/timu

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11241 Fort George Road Jacksonville, FL 32226 (904) 251-2320
floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fort-george-island-cultural-state-park



Aging Well Starts Here

TAKE AN ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

Growing older has long been associated with steady declines in physical abilities and mental agility, but a new Yale University study suggests seniors with more positive beliefs about aging can improve their health over time.

The federally funded 12-year study of more than 11,000 older adults found that people with positive thoughts about aging were significantly more likely to show improvements in both their brain power and their walking speed. Almost half of older adults studied showed measurable improvement in their brain health, physical function or both over time.

“Many people equate aging with an inevitable and continuous loss of physical and cognitive abilities,” said Linda Levin, CEO of Northeast Florida nonprofit ElderSource. “This new research shows what we’ve suspected for a long time: improving later in life is common and should be part of our understanding of the aging process.”

The connection between our understanding of our health and well-being along with improvements in those areas is the motivation behind ElderSource’s new partnership with BetterAge. Through the partnership, ElderSource is offering a free online tool that allows seniors to take a

confidential 10-minute assessment to receive a customized personal health and well-being report. The report includes tips and recommendations to help seniors get the most out of their lives.

The research recently reported in the journal *Geriatrics* tracked participants in a long-term study of older Americans. The findings suggest there is often a reserve capacity for improvement later in life, Levin said. Age beliefs are modifiable. Negative age stereotypes, absorbed from the culture, can have an impact on how healthy a person ages.

Participants completing the online assessments receive a report that not only benefits them but also helps ElderSource and its partner agencies to understand better what’s important in helping area seniors maintain their health.

“Feedback from the assessments will be used to improve the programs and services ElderSource and its partner agencies offer,” Levin said.

According to Levin, local senior centers offer an excellent way to engage with peers, participate in activities to make small steps in improving overall health and well-being and the opportunity to continue to age well.

Take the Survey at <https://eldersource.health-wellbeing.betterage.net/getStarted/>

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Will You “Let the Old Man In”?



There’s a quiet voice that tends to grow louder as the years pass. It whispers things like, “Slow down,” “You can’t do that anymore,” or “That’s for younger people.” I like to call that voice “the old man.” And if we’re not careful, we start listening to it a little too often.

But here’s the truth: aging is inevitable, growing old in spirit is optional.

It’s worth reminding ourselves that the number of candles on our birthday cake does not define the size of our dreams, the depth

perspective can change everything.

I’ve met countless individuals in their 50s, 60s, 70s, and beyond who are launching businesses, traveling the world, learning new skills, and falling in love with life, and sometimes even with new partners. What they all have in common is simple: they refused to accept the limitations that others, or their own fears, tried to place on them.

You see, the “old man” thrives on routine, predictability, and safety. Now, there’s nothing wrong with comfort but

to friends, spend time with family, and don’t be afraid to meet new people. It’s never too late to build community.

Third, stay active, not just physically, but emotionally. Move your body in ways that feel good. Practice gratitude. Set intentions. When you nurture your whole self, you remind yourself that you are still very alive.

I spoke with Harvey Cohen, a seventy five-year-old man who lives in Mandarin. With a warm smile, he said, “I travel because there’s still so much of the world I haven’t seen. I eat well because I want the energy to enjoy it. And I spend time with my family and friends every chance I get because, in the end, those moments are the ones that matter most. I may have fewer years ahead than behind me, but I intend to make every one of them count.”

Stay open. The best chapters of your life may not be behind you; they may be unfolding right now. But you must be willing to turn the page.

The next time that little voice says, “You’re too old,” smile and gently reply, “Not today.”

Because the truth is, you’re not done yet. Not even close. ∞

“I spend time with my family and friends every chance I get because, in the end, those moments are the ones that matter most.”

of our happiness, or the impact we can still make. Life doesn’t stop giving opportunities just because we’ve reached a certain age. Sometimes, it’s just getting started.

“Not letting the old man in” is really about mindset. It’s about choosing curiosity over complacency. It’s about waking up in the morning and asking, “What’s still possible for me?” instead of “What’s no longer available to me?” That single shift in

too much of it can quietly shrink our lives. Growth, and fulfillment live just outside that comfort zone.

So how do we keep the old man at bay?

First, stay engaged. Keep learning. Take a class, read a book, explore a hobby you’ve always been curious about. Your brain doesn’t retire unless you let it.

Second, stay involved. Relationships are the heartbeat of a meaningful life. Reach out

Sounds of Crooked River Blues

John Shilby Whispers in the Reeds

A harmonica can fit in a pocket, but for John Shilby, it opened the door to a lifetime in music. He first picked one up in 1971 as a high school student, teaching himself by ear while listening to songs like “Long Train Runnin’” by The Doobie Brothers and “Heart of Gold” by Neil Young.

“I didn’t have lessons,” Shilby recalls. “I just played along with records until it felt right.”

That instinct carried him forward. While attending William Paterson College from 1974 to 1978, Shilby performed in New York’s Greenwich Village, often playing for tips. “Those nights taught me everything,” he says. “You learn quickly how to hold a crowd.”

His time in college also placed him behind the scenes of major concerts. As a member of the concert committee and a photographer for the school newspaper, he covered performances by Peter Frampton at Madison Square Garden, along with Jackson Browne, Billy Joel, Steve Miller, and Fleetwood Mac. “Being that close to those shows changed how I saw live music,” he says. “You notice every detail.”



John Shilby of Jacksonville Beach



Shilby also spent time learning from blues legend John Mayall. “He showed me the roots of the music and where it comes from,” Shilby says. “That stayed with me.”

Based in Jacksonville, he performs at clubs, private events, and community gatherings. His playing moves easily from traditional blues to modern melodies, shaped by decades of experience.

“The best part is watching people enjoy themselves,” he says. “They could be anywhere, but they’re right there in the moment with you.”

For many people, his story may sound familiar, like a reminder that music can remain a steady companion throughout one’s life. “You don’t stop playing because of age,” Shilby says. “You play because it’s part of who you are.”

John Shilby will perform with Ronnie Gainey at Mudville Grille at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 25. He can be reached by at jshilby2012@gmail.com for information on upcoming gigs and bookings.

Beaches Council on Aging's 8th Annual

Singer Songwriter Showcase

Benefitting Dial-a-Ride and Beaches Senior Network

April 30, 2026 • 5:30 - 8:00 PM
Ribault Garden Club
705 2nd Ave North, Jacksonville Beach

Featuring Live Music from
Mike Shackelford & Friends
Hors D'oeuvres • Drinks • Raffle

\$175 Tickets Available

BEACHES COUNCIL ON AGING

Get Tickets 

(904) 246-1477 • www.BeachesCOA.org



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Haven Hospice has provided compassionate hospice care for patients and families across North Florida since 1979. Our specialized **Dementia Care Program** offers an added layer of support, bringing comfort, understanding and guidance every step of the way.

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Serving advanced illness needs in North Florida since 1979. Licensed as a hospice since 1980. Haven does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 800.727.1889. Si w pale Kreyol Ayisyen, gen sevis ed pou lang ki disponib gratis pou ou. Rele 800.727.1889.

Things To Do

April 3, 6:00–8:00 PM

Fernandina Beach Sounds on Centre

Centre Street, Downtown Fernandina Beach

Monthly free outdoor live music – bring lawn chairs or stroll downtown while enjoying local performances. Enjoy a mix of genres from jazz to folk as local musicians take the stage under the historic oak trees.

Admission: Free

[facebook.com/SoundsOnCentre](https://www.facebook.com/SoundsOnCentre)



April 4, 10:00 AM–2:00 PM

JaxParks Riverfront Palooza

Riverfront Plaza, Jacksonville

2 West Independent Dr, Jacksonville

Outdoor festival featuring egg hunts, games, activities, and community fun in a scenic plaza by the river. Family-friendly and perfect for a morning walk, sunshine, and community connection.

Admission: Free

[jacksonville.gov/](https://www.jacksonville.gov/) and search Palooza

April 4–5, All Day

Mandarin Art Festival

12447 Mandarin Road, Jacksonville

A classic local fine art and craft festival featuring hundreds of artists, live entertainment, and food vendors. Perfect for a leisurely stroll to browse paintings, pottery, jewelry, and handmade crafts while enjoying live performances.

Admission: Free (optional donation)

[mandarinartfestival.org](https://www.mandarinartfestival.org)

April 6, 8:00 PM

Leonid & Friends

Tribute to Chicago

Florida Theatre, 128 East Forsyth St, Jacksonville

Enjoy classic rock hits performed with precision by this popular tribute band celebrating the music of Chicago.

Tickets: \$30–\$60

[floridatheatre.com](https://www.floridatheatre.com)



April 10–11, All Day / Varies

Fernandina Beach Songwriters Festival

Amelia Island: Various venues

Downtown Fernandina Beach & Amelia Island

Free songwriter showcases with performances, meet-and-greets, and an optional themed boat cruise event. Enjoy intimate performances and behind-the-scenes stories about your favorite songs from talented local and national artists.

Admission: Varies by performance; many free shows

[fernandinasongwritersfestival.org](https://www.fernandinasongwritersfestival.org)



April 10–12, All Day

Springing the Blues Festival

Seawalk Pavilion & Latham Plaza,

75 1st St N, Jacksonville Beach

Annual beachfront blues festival featuring several stages of live music, food vendors, artisan markets, and kids activities.

Admission: Free (VIP seating available)

[springingtheblues.com](https://www.springingtheblues.com)

April 11–12, 10:00 AM–5:00 PM

St. Augustine Beach Art & Craft Festival

350 A1A Beach Blvd, St. Augustine Beach

A seaside weekend art show

featuring jewelry, woodcraft,

stained glass, pottery,

and more. Stroll along the

beachside promenade while

meeting the artists and

seeing live demonstrations

of their craft.

Admission: Free

[visitstaugustine.com/event/arts-and-crafts-festival-pier](https://www.visitstaugustine.com/event/arts-and-crafts-festival-pier)



April 11, 11:00 AM–4:00 PM

29th Annual Taste of St. Augustine

St. Augustine Amphitheatre

1340C A1A South, St. Augustine, FL 32080

Local restaurants serve sample tastings. Includes children's crafts and music. Savor small bites from dozens of eateries while enjoying live performances and family activities.

Admission: \$10 per person; kids 12 & under free; tasting tickets sold separately

[epicbh.org/taste-of-st-augustine](https://www.epicbh.org/taste-of-st-augustine)

April 11–18, Various Times

St. Augustine Race Week

St. Augustine Municipal Marina

1 Avenida Menendez, St. Augustine

Spring sailing series with yacht races, socials, and waterfront parties. Spectators can watch thrilling sailing competitions from the shore or enjoy onshore festivities with food and music.

Admission: Free to watch from shore

[staugustineraceweek.com](https://www.staugustineraceweek.com)

April 16, 5:00–8:00 PM

Third Thursday Sip & Stroll

Southbank Riverwalk, 101 W Bay St, Jacksonville

Riverwalk social event with live music, food trucks, and downtown vibes. Enjoy a casual evening exploring local vendors, riverside views, and live entertainment in a festive community atmosphere.

Admission: Free

[dtjax.com/sipandstroll](https://www.dtjax.com/sipandstroll)

April 4 and every Saturday, 8:30 AM–12:30 PM

St. Augustine Amphitheatre

1340C A1A South, St. Augustine

Local artists, produce vendors, and live music at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre. Shop artisan goods and fresh local produce while enjoying live performances in an outdoor setting.

Admission: Free

[theamp.com](https://www.theamp.com) and click on the Community tab

April 22–26, All Day

Florida's Birding & Photo Fest

St. Johns County & Surroundings

Various locations across St. Johns County

One of the most respected birding and photography gatherings in the Southeast – classes, guided tours, photo clinics, and nature walks. Perfect for nature enthusiasts and photographers to see and capture rare birds and wildlife in scenic habitats.

Admission: \$50 registration (includes commemorative festival t-shirt); workshops have additional fees

[floridasphotofest.com](https://www.floridasphotofest.com)

April 24–26, Various Times

10th Annual St. Augustine Plein Air Paint Out

St. Augustine Art Association

22 Marine Street, St. Augustine

Live painting event across historic settings; watch artists at work and enjoy finished pieces. A visual delight for art lovers to see professional painters create works inspired by historic landmarks.

Admission: Free

[visitstaugustine.com/event/plein-air-paint-out](https://www.visitstaugustine.com/event/plein-air-paint-out)

April 25–26, All Day

3rd Annual Cabbage, Potato & Bacon Festival

6195 S US Highway 1, Hastings

Family-friendly weekend celebrating local agriculture, including races, cooking demos, artisan market, Miss Potato Queen Beauty Pageant and live music. A fun community event showcasing rural traditions, local food, and entertainment for all ages.

Admission: Free (some ticketed special events)

[hastingsfl.org](https://www.hastingsfl.org) Click on Things To Do

May 1 – May 3, All Day

Isles of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival

Downtown Fernandina Beach

101 Centre Street, Fernandina Beach

This signature spring fest features the Red, White & Shrimp Parade, shrimp run, seafood booths, live music, arts & crafts, and more. Celebrate the area's shrimping heritage with local seafood, craft vendors, and a lively parade that draws visitors from across the region.

Admission: Free parade; festival area events may have costs.

[shrimpfestival.com](https://www.shrimpfestival.com)





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Upcoming Expos

**Amelia Island
Clay County
Palm Coast
Jacksonville & Beaches
St. Augustine**



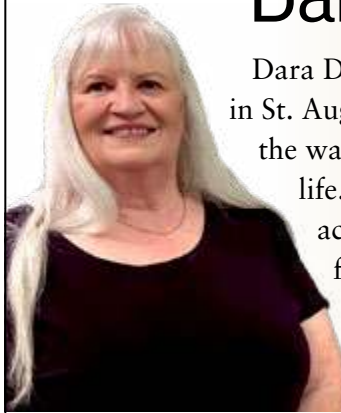
To register as an exhibitor, go to
activeafter50expo.com



PARTING SHOT

By David Patterson

St. Augustine Artist Dara Dodson



Dara Dodson is a contemporary artist based in St. Augustine, Florida, whose work captures the warmth, color, and quiet beauty of coastal life. Known for her expressive paintings in acrylics and oils, Dodson draws inspiration from the landscapes and seascapes, translating everyday scenes.

Her art often features serene shorelines, marshes, and sunlit vistas, rendered with a sensitivity to light and

atmosphere. Through her use of layered color and fluid brushwork, Dodson creates compositions that feel both familiar and dreamlike.

“I’m always chasing that feeling of stillness,” she says. “The kind you get when you’re watching the tide come in or the light change at sunset.”

Dodson is an active presence in St. Augustine’s thriving arts community, regularly exhibiting her work in local galleries and participating in citywide art events. Her involvement reflects a commitment not only to her own creative practice but also to fostering connection among artists and audiences. “Art should feel approachable,” she explains. “I



“Sol Seekers”



“Over the Dunes”

want people to see something in my work that reminds them of a place they’ve been or a moment they’ve felt.”

In addition to landscapes, Dodson has explored figurative

subjects and more conceptual themes, demonstrating a willingness to experiment. Her work has earned recognition in juried exhibitions, underscoring both her technical skill and her artistic voice.

As an educator, Dodson also shares her passion for painting with others, encouraging students to develop their own creative perspectives. “Everyone has a unique way of seeing the world,” she says. “My goal is to help people trust that and put it on canvas.”

Through her paintings, Dara Dodson continues to shape the artistic spirit of St. Augustine, offering viewers a chance to see the beauty that lies in front of us.

To see more of her work visit daradodsonart.com.



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