

# OUR TOWNS

QUESTIONS? Contact Editor Cindy Casey at 386-681-2756 or cindy.casey@news-jrnl.com

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## AROUND TOWN

### McInnis Elementary partners with Food Brings Hope

Louise S. McInnis Elementary School in DeLeon Springs is now partnering with Food Brings Hope, a local nonprofit public charity that fights hunger and poverty among students in Volusia County schools. Students from McInnis will now benefit from the afterschool program Kid-zZone, and will have access to nutritious meals and snacks, tutoring, field trips, weekend grocery bags, student rewards and more. For information about Food Brings Hope, visit FoodBringsHope.org or call Brianna Thompson at 386-843-1161 or email Brianna@FoodBringsHope.org.

also includes 15 self-guided adventures children can complete with their parents any time; these include hiking, biking, fishing and creating artwork. ECHO Rangers is coordinated by the staff of DeBary Hall Historic Site. For information, visit debaryhall.com/ranger.htm or contact Kayce Loooper at 386-668-3840 or klooper@volusia.org.

### Local author celebrates publication

Dylan Emerick-Brown will celebrate the release of his first book, American Exodus, from 2 to 3:30 p.m. Sunday at Arts on Douglas, 123 Douglas St., New Smyrna Beach. There will be a reading from the book and light refreshments. The book will be on sale at the event. For those who can't attend, the book can be ordered at writersunlimited.org. Publication of his book was first prize for winning the Writers Unlimited Agency Young Poets Award. Emerick-Brown teaches English at Deltona High School, where he is the creator and faculty adviser for the student-run literary arts magazine and website, Howl. He was also named Volusia County English Teacher of the Year. For information email David Axelrod at Axelrod@creativehappiness.org, or call 386-337-4567.

### Kids invited to join ECHO Rangers

Children in first through fifth grades may join Volusia County's ECHO Rangers, a hands-on educational program that focuses on the county's ecological, cultural, heritage and outdoor resources. The program is offered from September through May at more than 40 sites including parks, museums, libraries and historical sites. Using a Passport to Adventures guide, children are asked to visit at least eight sites and participate in specially designed ECHO Rangers activities. The program

## VFW auxiliaries become gender neutral

By Nancy Niles  
nancy.niles@news-jrnl.com

Gender neutral are the buzz words floating around the Veterans of Foreign Wars halls these days after an historic move to drop the word "Ladies" from the VFW Auxiliary and open the group to men, women and transgenders.

The national VFW Auxiliary "wanted to make sure that all veterans' family members could join the auxiliary," said DeBary Post 8093 Auxiliary President Shirley Bonds. "That was the main thing, so we can be gender-friendly."

The change was, in part, a response to the number of women in the military, she said. Bonds estimates 25 to 30 percent of VFW member veterans are female. That means a growing population of male family members are looking for ways to contribute and finding few options.

Unlike Florida, which approved men's auxiliaries at the state level, most states had nowhere for the husbands, fathers, brothers and sons of service personnel to show their support.

"After years of the Ladies (Auxiliary) turning (male family members) down, the VFW decided to handle it their way. And



Auxiliary President Deb VanDeventer welcomes Renard Gregoire, one of the Auxiliary's newest male members, after the VFW Ladies Auxiliary became gender neutral. NEWS-JOURNAL/NANCY NILES

that's what they did," said Post 3282 and District Auxiliary President Deb VanDeventer said. "We are now gender neutral."

The change also addresses the concerns of transgender family members that didn't feel comfortable joining the Ladies Auxiliary.

"There are quite a few (transgender family members) in all the posts," VanDeventer said. "Some have been able to become (Auxiliary) members and some of them, I think, feel intimidated."

The former Ladies Auxiliary was founded in 1914. A mere 15 years behind

the founding of the VFW itself. This is the first major change the group has been through since that time and not everyone is thrilled about it.

"I have had a few ladies tell me that they don't like it," VanDeventer said. "The older ones."

But DeBary Post Commander Larry Bonds holds out hope that the men and women will come to work well together.

"We're going through a change and no one seems to like change," Bonds said. "But over time it will be accepted and that's all it's going to take - a little time."

Currently, the Auxiliary has more than 465,000 members. A number the national VFW Auxiliary expects to increase sharply.

"I have three applications so far," VanDeventer said. "All three were in the men's auxiliary."

One of those new members, Renard Gregoire, the founding president of the Port Orange Post 3282 Men's Auxiliary, joined because he said he saw more opportunity with the officially recognized Auxiliary than what was available to the men's group which is unrecognized at the national level.

Gregoire sees himself as a bit of a pioneer, setting an example for the rest of the Men's Auxiliary which will continue to exist for at least the next couple years.

"I always thought we would be stronger as a (single) Auxiliary than as two separate units," Gregoire said. "I think it will be slow to start, but there are a lot of us who have been involved and want to be deeper involved."

A membership drive is going on now through the county. Those interested in joining VFW Auxiliary can contact District President Deb VanDeventer at 386-589-0734 or email vfwpost3282.org for information.

## 'LONG LIVE SPAIN'

# Royals cheered on visit to St. Augustine

By Jason Dearen  
The Associated Press

ST. AUGUSTINE — King Felipe VI of Spain toured St. Augustine's centuries-old Spanish-built castle and other historic sites in his country's former colony before addressing hundreds of well-wishers from a balcony downtown Friday.

Under cloudy skies, the king and his wife Letizia toured the oldest city in the U.S. to celebrate St. Augustine's 450th anniversary and attend a meeting of the U.S.-Spain Council.

Waving Spanish flags and shouting "Long live Spain" in Spanish, throngs of people including children let out of school jammed St. Augustine's central plaza to catch a glimpse of the glamorous royal couple.

King Felipe said he and his wife were touched by the outpouring, and impressed with the preservation of the Castillo de San Marcos, constructed in the



King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia of Spain greet period actors at the Castillo de San Marcos during St. Augustine's 450th Commemoration on Friday in St. Augustine.

17th Century by Spanish forces to defend its colony.

"It is a true symbol of the imperishable ties that bind Spanish and Americans together," he said from a balcony, standing next to Letizia and an actor dressed as a Spanish conquistador.

Because the city of St. Augustine has been continuously occupied

since its Spanish founding 450 years ago, it is recognized as the oldest city in the U.S.

The royal couple was in Miami on Thursday, where Felipe gave a speech at Miami-Dade College during fall commencement.

He also met with President Barack Obama on this trip, and the two discussed refugees.



King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia of Spain are greeted by period actors as they arrive to tour the Castillo de San Marcos during St. Augustine's 450th commemoration on Friday.

The 47-year-old became king last year after his scandal-hit father, former King Juan Carlos, abdicated the throne.

On Friday, Felipe stood on the same balcony that his father used on his visit to St. Augustine 14 years ago.

Jill and David Cole, visiting from London, England, stood shouting their approval of the king and queen. They said they planned their visit for the city's 450th birthday, and were

excited to have a royal visit thrown in.

"We wanted to come here, wave the flag and see the king," Jill said.

Dressed in a gray suit and flanked by Letizia, who wore a floral skirt and navy blue blouse, Felipe walked through the crowded plaza surrounded by security to

lay a wreath at the base of the Spanish Constitution Monument.

The monument was erected in 1814, when the area was still under Spanish control.

"We are deeply touched by your warm affection," the king told the crowd. "I assure you the feeling is mutual."

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