First Coast Report

NOVEMBER 2026





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Our family enjoyed a nice October as my daughter celebrated her birthday month. Demi turned 18 on Halloween ... my wife calls her our "Boo Baby". My son participated in the Evergreen Pumpkin Run in Jacksonville. It was a huge event that featured both 5k and 10 mile races. Spencer finished ninth overall and second in his age group in the 10 mile race. We are very proud of both of them.

It was a very wet October in NE Florida. Many areas had experienced low rainfall totals for the year, so this precipitation was much needed for some. Hurricane Isaias made landfall near Destin, Florida and caused quite a bit of damage in Florida. Hopefully that will be the last major storm of the year!

I recently sent an email to many of you asking if you could help me out. As you may know, after being with Watson Realty for ten years, I changed brokerages. Unfortunately , many of my reviews did not follow me. Online reviews, especially Google Reviews, have become a very important part of an online Realtor profile. I now have a Google business account and here is the link. Thank you to everyone who recently sent a review.

https://g.page/r/CZnaA6R_8d2gEBI/review

If you would like me to try and email your original review to copy and paste, please let me know. If I can find it, I will gladly email it to you. As always, I truly appreciate your continued support.

John Lawrence, Broker Associate

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FLORIDA SCHOOL CHOICE VOUCHERS

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Florida's universal school choice voucher program, greatly expanded by House Bill 1 in 2023, allows state education funds to follow any K-12 student regardless of income. The program provides an average of $8,000 to $9,500 per student annually via Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). The program is a subject of debate among parents, educators, lawmakers, and tax payers.

Proponents argue that the program gives parents ultimate control over their child's education by using funds for private school tuition, homeschooling, and specialized educational therapies. Some contend it gives students more options for those in struggling public schools by having an opportunity to seek higher-performing private alternatives. Once enrolled, these students frequently achieve academic growth comparable to national averages.

Opponents say the program is draining public funding and placing a severe financial burden on the public school system. The program cost $4.9 billion in 2026 alone. Analysts warn it could create a projected $6.9 billion state budget deficit by 2028 while stripping resources away from neighborhood public schools. Because there are no income caps, a substantial portion of the universal funds has gone to wealthier families whose children were already enrolled in private schools or homeschooled. For low-income families, a $9,000 stipend often fails to bridge the gap for elite private schools where tuition can exceed $20,000.

Private schools accepting vouchers are not subject to the same strict regulations as public schools. They lack statewide standardized testing mandates, certified teacher requirements, and mandatory accreditation. A recent audit revealed that the Florida Department of Education was unable to account for $270 million or locate 30,000 participating students. Another huge cost that public schools must provide by law is transportation, an element private schools aren't required to furnish.

Critics point out that public tax dollars are heavily funding religious private schools. Additionally, private schools maintain the legal right to reject any student, leading some to argue that "school choice" actually belongs to the institutions rather than the families.

Personally, I believe in school choice for every parent, but I am not sure this choice should be publicly funded. Public schools, operating under state mandates and requirements, are not competing on a "level playing field" and this creates serious planning and budgeting issues.

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NOVEMBER 2026 ... AREA EVENTS

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NOVEMBER 2026 ... AREA EVENTS

NOTE: THESE ARE CLICKABLE LINKS THAT WILL TAKE YOU TO THE EVENT PAGE

Nov. 1-8 - Meet Me in St. Louis @ Alhambra Theatre - (Jacksonville)

Nov. 3 - Savannah Ghost Pirates vs. Jax Iceman @ VyStar Arena - (Jacksonville)

Nov. 6 - Grace Potter @ Jacksonville Fairgrounds Ampitheater - (Jacksonville)

Nov. 6 - Rock the Pantries Food Drive @ The Amp - (St. Augustine)

Nov. 7 - KIX Country Fest 2026 @ Flagler County Fairgrounds (Bunnell)

Nov. 7-8 - Right Whale Festival @ Main Beach Park - (Fernandina Beach)

Nov. 9 - A Flock of Seagulls @ Ponte Vedra Concert Hall - (Ponte Vedra)

Nov. 12 - Hotel California: A Salute to the Eagles @ Florida Theatre - (Jacksonville)

Nov. 13 - Mannheim Steamroller Christmas @ Jax Center for Performing Arts - (Jax)

Nov. 13 - The Putnam Jubilee @ Coventry Oaks Farm (Palatka)

Nov. 13-15 - International Petanque Tournament @ Harborfront (Amelia Island)

Nov. 14 - Fall Arts & Crafts Festival @ Town Center (Palm Coast)

Nov. 14 - Vendor Market @ Palatka Horsemen's Club - (Palatka)

Nov. 14 - Florida Key Lime Pie Festival @ Francis Field - (St. Augustine)

Nov. 20 - Gary Hoey's Rockin Holiday Tour @ Cafe Eleven - (St. Augustine)

Nov. 21 - Palatka Beer Festival @ Riverfront Park - (Palatka)

Nov. 21 - Fall Fun at the Ranch @ Split Oak Ranch - (Bunnell)

Nov. 21 - Blackberry Smoke @ Florida Theatre - (Jacksonville)

Nov. 21-22 - Jacksonville Chocolate and Coffee Festival @ Prime Osborn Center - (Jax)

Nov. 22 - Given to Fly - The Pearl Jam Experience @ Colonial Oak - (St. Augustine)

Nov. 25 - The Stray Cats @ Florida Theatre - (Jacksonville)

Nov. 28 - 7th Annual Beach Art Walk @ St. Augustine Beach Pier - (St. Augustine)

Nov. 29 - Tennessee Titans @ Jacksonville Jaguars @ EverBank Stadium - (Jax)

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FLAGLER COUNTY UPDATE

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FLAGLER COUNTY UPDATE

Flagler Beach Pier

The concrete pylons drill down from 80 to 125 feet, strong enough to resist a 500-year storm. The concrete structure rises 28 feet above sea level, 10 feet higher than the wooden structure it replaced. The electrical and plumbing work are getting all connected, including turtle-friendly lights. Next are the handrail and deck panel installations with timber decking designed to break away during a catastrophic storm event to help reduce the loads forced on the structure.The pier is on course for a spring opening. The Flagler Beach City Commission decided that there would no longer be an access charge, at least not in the first year or two. It will be open to all from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Waterfront Park

A new place to gather, more room to park, and easier access to the waterfront are now part of the experience at Palm Coast's Waterfront Park. Construction took about a year and brought several new amenities to the park. The 3,600-square-foot pavilion provides covered space and picnic tables for families and groups to enjoy. Designed with Florida's weather in mind, the pavilion was built to withstand wind speeds of up to 135 mph. Its pressure-treated southern yellow pine construction was selected with durability and long-term maintenance in mind. The project also added 100 parking spaces across approximately 1.29 acres and improved pedestrian access throughout the park, including connections to the kayak launch.

Project Butterfly Landfill

A highly contested proposal for a 610-acre landfill west of Bunnell on County Road 45 is heading back to the Bunnell City Commission. Following a 3-1 planning board approval that residents claim lacked transparency, 18 separate appeals were filed. A comprehensive special hearing was set for October 28, 2026, to address sweeping community concerns regarding groundwater contamination, agricultural impacts, traffic, and plummeting property values.

Seminole Woods Commercial Hub

New site plans have been submitted for the busy intersection of Seminole Woods Boulevard and Sesame Blvd. The mixed commercial project will feature a new gas station, a fast-food restaurant, and local retail spaces. The site will feature a prominent 150-foot cell tower to help improve digital infrastructure for the surrounding Seminole Woods and Grand Landings neighborhoods.



JOHN'S VIEWPOINT

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Valued Friends and Customers ... Thanks for taking the time to read my newsletter!

I was able to help three different buyers with their home purchases in October. One was a first time home buyer that purchased in Fruit Cove. They were transferring for a job in Jacksonville and we were able to find a great home for them in St. Johns County and now they can start building equity instead of paying rent.

Another couple has enjoyed visiting St. Augustine on vacation over the years and decided they wanted to purchase an investment property that they could also use during their visits here. We found a fully furnished home that will be a turn-key short term rental property for them to enjoy.

The third closing was a brand new construction home with Drees Homes. I first met this family several years ago and we looked at a lot of different neighborhoods. They purchase the last lot available in the neighborhood and were able to build their dream home. I was able to help manage the build and provide video updates as they were out of state.

MY ACTIVE LISTINGS



VIEW LISTING



VIEW LISTING

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