

# Connections

February 2017



ST. JOHNS  
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CHAMBER  
OF COMMERCE

Ponte Vedra  
Recorder  
Not your average newspaper, not your average reader



THE PLAYERS Championship & TPC Sawgrass  
**A Renovated Welcome**

Photo Credit: PGA Tour

## Letter from the President

Can you believe it is nearly March already? It seems like only yesterday we were celebrating the beginning of a new year and soon it will be spring! Time flies when you're having fun and we have enjoyed a wonderful start to 2017.

In January, the Ponte Vedra Beach (PVB) Division hosted its first Health & Wellness Expo, located at the Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach. The event was a success, as a steady stream of guests visited with around a dozen different health-conscious organizations. Thank you to all of the businesses that participated; because of the expo's success, we plan on growing it to include more of our members in the future.

On Friday, Feb. 24, we are headed out to Elkton for a morning on the farm at the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce EDC Quarterly Breakfast. This unique event will be held in the processing center at Blue Sky Farms and has sold out, as we can only seat just more than 200 guests. Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam is the honored guest and the event will also feature a livestock gallery and farm expo as we celebrate and inform members of the importance of the agricultural industry to St. Johns County. According to the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS)' St. Johns County Extension

Office, agricultural industries generate more than 18,000 jobs or 22.8 percent of St. Johns County's total workforce and have an economic impact of more than \$171 million. Clearly, it is a major part of St. Johns County's economy and an important part of our success.

I also hope you will join me for the Annual Membership Breakfast that will focus on creativity in marketing and the power of branding. Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp Owner Ken Babby, who has been recognized for his innovative marketing approach, will be the featured presenter. The young owner of multiple franchises will take the stage at the Renaissance World Golf Village Resort on Thursday, March 9. We hope that you can join us!

Lastly, I wanted to thank Lin Jones who will be leaving her post as the Ponte Vedra Beach Division director to explore an opportunity in Indiana. I have appreciated her hard work and we wish her the best of luck.

We are already working to fill Lin's role and hopefully will be able to make an announcement soon! Thank you for supporting the Ponte Vedra Beach Division and the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. As always, you can reach me at [isabelle.rodriguez@sjcchamber.com](mailto:isabelle.rodriguez@sjcchamber.com) or call (904) 829-5681.



**Isabelle Rodriguez,**  
President and CEO, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

## Recurring St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Events

**Chamber Before Hours:** Held the second Wednesday of the month, this networking event introduces a new host business at each gathering.

**Chamber at Noon:** Held on the third Wednesday of the month, the event begins at 11:30 a.m. with registration. Members then have the opportunity to network before enjoying lunch. Each Chamber at Noon event includes an educational component, such as health care reform. The event also provides time for the sponsoring company to be recognized before a captive audience. It is a cost-effective way to get your company known among members and guests.

**Chamber After Hours:** Chamber After Hours events are held every fourth Wednesday of the month, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Each month has a different host location, making for a lively and enjoyable event. Most After Hours are free, or a nominal fee is charged

to members and guests. Chamber After Hours is the perfect way to showcase your business location and amenities!

For more information about chamber events, visit [www.sjcchamber.com](http://www.sjcchamber.com) and click on the Upcoming Events link.

**Power Networking Luncheon (PNL):** Held on the second Tuesday of every month, this business-to-business networking luncheon program allows participants to introduce their business to all attendees. Remember to bring a small gift or door prize to promote your business. The event is open exclusively to chamber members, and seating is limited to the first 50 respondents each month.

### Chamber Business Councils

**Agricultural & Environmental Council:** Meeting on the fourth Thursday of every other month, this council aims to promote, educate and provide a forum to advance agricultural and environ-

mental issues and show how these industries contribute to our quality of life. Council programs focus on our agricultural heritage and the economic contribution that this industry brings to the county. Environmental programs focus on promoting and addressing issues associated with our natural and environmental resources, sustainable development, permitting, conservation and eco-tourism.

**Historic St. Augustine Council:** Held on the second Friday of every month, council meetings are designed to bring members the most current information on tourism trends. The sessions also spotlight local and state initiatives that have economic impact on business in the historic district and work to make the nation's oldest city a better place for residents and visitors.

**Small Business Council:** Held on the fourth Tuesday of every month, this council works to support small businesses throughout

St. Johns County. The council also strives to increase commerce while educating and serving as a resource to small business owners and their managers.

**South Beaches Council:** With meetings on the third Thursday of every month, the South Beach Council is designed for chamber members with a professional or general interest in the South Beaches area. The council is characterized by its dedication to the community and advocacy for local business issues.

**Tourism & Hospitality Council:** Meeting on the first Wednesday of every month, this council aims to further enhance the abilities of St. Johns County tourism businesses to provide first-class service to their visitors. The council aims to achieve this by being a resource for industry-specific training and educational opportunities.

## Membership Breakfast to explore creativity in marketing

Creativity in marketing and branding will be the focus of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Annual Membership Breakfast, to be held Thursday, March 9 at the Renaissance World Golf Village in St. Augustine.

The featured presenter will be Ken Babby, owner of multiple sports franchises including the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp (formerly the Jacksonville Suns). The 36-year-old founder of Fast Forward Sports Group was named one of Sports Business Journal's 2016 "Forty Under 40," recognizing

excellence and innovation in sports business careers.

The event starts at 8 a.m. with guest registration, followed by the program at 8:30 a.m. Admission is \$30 for chamber of commerce members, \$40 non-members. To register, visit [www.sjcchamber.com](http://www.sjcchamber.com) or call (904) 285-2004. Event sponsors include Neville Wainio CPAs, The Network Operations Company, Gas South, Haven Hospice, Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum, Tobacco Free St. Johns and Southern Exposure Real Estate Services, LLC.



## Chamber of Commerce establishes public policy committee

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce has formed a public policy committee (CPPC) aimed at helping the chamber react quickly to urgent business issues and advocate more effectively on behalf of the local business community.

Comprised of local business, community and governmental leaders, the committee will advise the chamber's board of directors regarding policy positions, help draft the organization's annual legislative agenda and assist with advocacy efforts at the local, regional, state and federal levels. In addition, the chamber's Economic Development Council (EDC) will work closely with the committee to support the organization's implementation of advocacy services and programs for its membership, including nonprofits and the community.

"We are striving to be the sturdiest advocate for the good businesses throughout our county, our region, and beyond," Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Rodriguez said. "The formation of the CPPC is a natural progression of the chamber's business advocacy efforts. Having the expertise

and point of view from members representing different industries will strengthen and speed up our advocacy process. It will allow us to dive deeper on each issue and leave no stone unturned when representing our members."

Government Relations Manager Bob Porter said the CPPC will work closely with the Economic Development Council to make recommendations to the board and provide the chamber's governing body with a clear picture of any issue that may need to be decided.

"It is our intention to make sure the board of directors has all the necessary information and the expert opinions of the members of the public policy committee to make these very important and often difficult decisions," Porter said.

Public Policy Committee members include: Chairman Jason Barrett, executive vice president and chief administrative officer, Flagler Hospital; and members Michael Scine, CPA, Scine & Scine; Lou Noir-Jones, senior vice president, Wells Fargo; Bill Curtis, attorney at law, Law offices of Bill Curtis; Richard Lovelace, senior vice president, commercial



St. Johns County Chamber photo

**Members of the Chamber of Commerce's Public Policy Committee meets with State of Florida CFO Jeff Atwater during a presentation held at Davidson Realty in the World Golf Village. From left: Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Rodriguez, Rob Matthews, Atwater, Beth Sweeny, Bill Curtis and Victor Raymos.**

services, The Stellar Group; Len Weeks, owner, Len Weeks Construction-Design-Development; Mary O'Brien, owner, Keen, LLC; Rick Kendust, state and local government affairs manager, Northrop Grumman Corporation; Mark Nighbor, vice president, marketing and communications, Advanced Disposal; Mark Litzinger, director of finance, bud-

get and management, City of St. Augustine; Beth Sweeny, governmental relations coordinator, St. Johns County Public Schools; Rob Schlingmann, general manager, The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Beach; and Isabelle Rodriguez, president and chief executive officer, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.

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The Ponte Vedra Beach Division Ambassador of the Quarter is Regions Bank's Matt Price. The commercial banking relationship manager, Price has lived in Ponte Vedra since 2015. A native of Albany, Georgia, he graduated from Georgia Southern University and has 15 years of banking experience.



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## Ponte Vedra Eye Associates welcomes Dr. Alison Webb



**Dr. Alison Webb** earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Florida State University and her Doctorate of Optometry Degree from Nova Southeastern University, graduating with honors. Dr. Webb completed externships in pediatric and primary care, as well as ocular disease and geriatrics. She also completed a hospital – based ocular disease residency at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Webb is a member of the American Optometric Association, Florida Optometric Association, and a member of the Beta Sigma Kappa Optometric Honorary Society. We are proud to have her joining the team at **Ponte Vedra Eye Associates**.

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## Renovated Welcome: THE PLAYERS Championship & TPC Sawgrass

### By St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Staff

If you've played the famed Stadium Course or spent time at TPC Sawgrass recently, then you know. The home of THE PLAYERS Championship has made a few changes and for those of you familiar with Championship Drive, the sleepy gateway to the recently renovated clubhouse and newly updated championship golf course, the differences are striking.

Today, as you bend toward the clubhouse and cover the last few hundred yards to the front door, perfectly manicured green space and golf course will fill your field of vision. This effect is the result of a strategy to create a sense of drama and anticipation as you approach the 77,000 square-foot Mediterranean style clubhouse and one of the world's most celebrated golfing cathedrals – again – for the first time.

“The PGA TOUR and THE PLAYERS Championship are always looking at ways to elevate the experience for players, fans, proud partners and sponsors,” said Jared Rice, THE PLAYERS Championship executive director. “When the renovation project was conceived, we identified the entry experience as an area of opportunity for significant

improvement.

“The renovation team consulted with experts on event entrances and found that a positive entry experience is important to the perception of an event or attraction,” Rice continued. “With that in mind, we set out to make the entry experience as grand as the clubhouse itself, with an emphasis on making the entry impactful for the players and their families. As the final touches are made, we couldn't be more excited with how it has turned out.”

St. Johns County Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Rodriguez noted, “THE PLAYERS Championship and PGA Tour puts St. Johns County and Ponte Vedra Beach on the world stage and is an important economic driver in Northeast Florida. Therefore, it is a great benefit to us locally that an organization that important to our community is so forward thinking. THE PLAYERS Championship gets better every year and it's not by accident. We could not have a better ambassador and we are proud to be the home of this great event and organization.”

The dramatic new entrance is not the only thing the PGA Tour has been busy renovating at THE PLAYERS Stadium Course. As has been well documented, upgrades

have been made to all of the course's green complexes and a design change will make the renovated 12th hole a stirring portent to one of the most exciting finishing stretches in professional golf.

“THE PLAYERS Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass is the purest test in golf and the home to our flagship event,” Rice said. “With such lofty positions in the golf landscape, we are always looking at ways to improve the course.”

The changes to the property, from both a competitive standpoint as well as for the fans, have been carefully planned for years, he added.

“We consulted with PGA TOUR players, past winners of THE PLAYERS, experts in golf course design and of course Pete and Alice Dye as we mapped out the improvements,” Rice said. “We don't take the responsibility of changing this world-class facility lightly and are proud of the process we went through that yielded these significant alterations.”

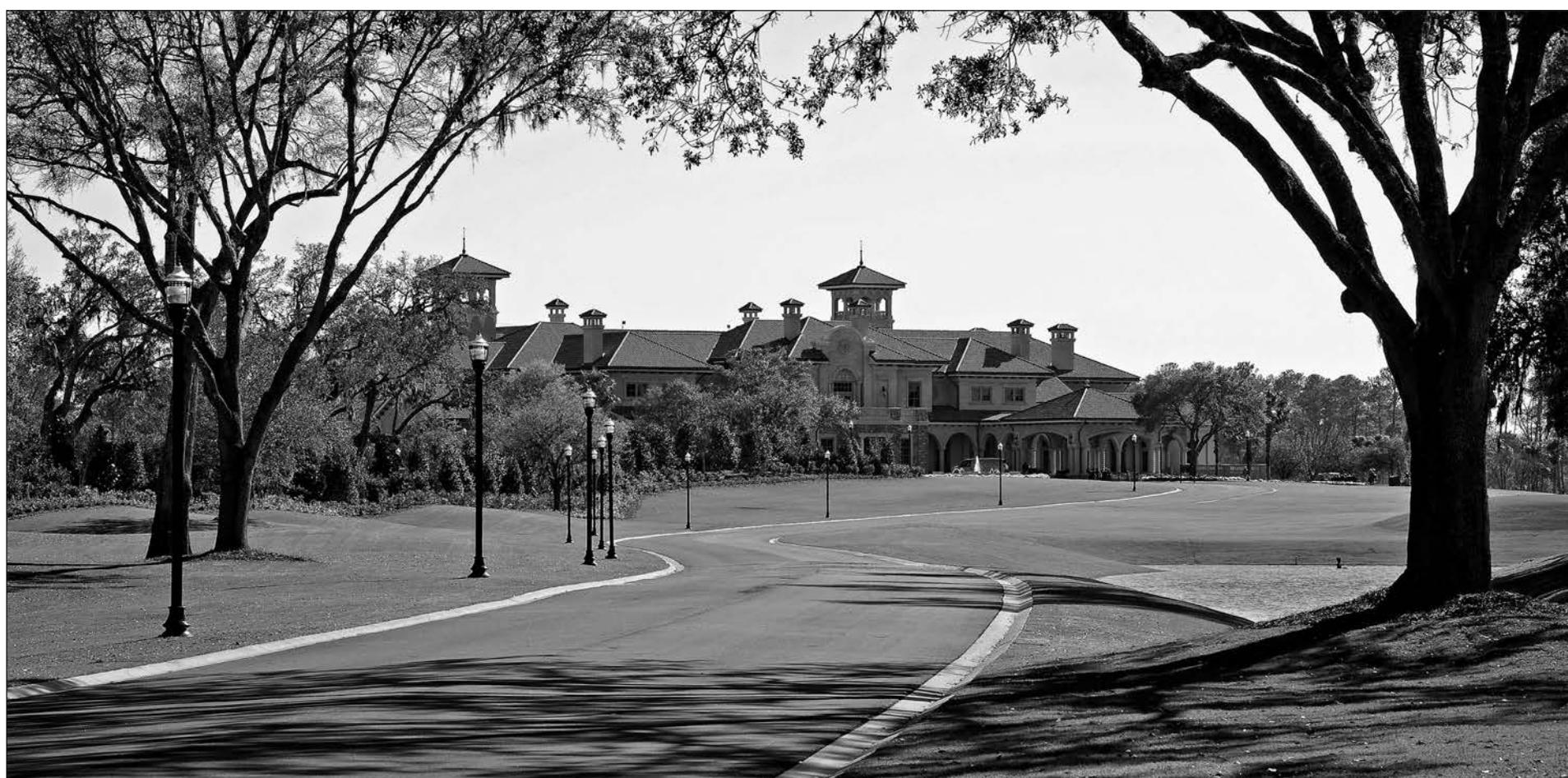
Fans will be excited to hear the Tour has also made a few changes to better connect holes six and seven to what was labeled the “heart of the tournament” and new practice grounds.

As work progresses and crews

continue to relocate and upgrade some of the parking areas that once lined Championship Way, it seems the Tour is looking forward to raising the bar again in 2017.

“Whether it is the entryway, the redesigned, drivable par-4 12th, the new-look 6th and 7th holes, the upgraded practice facility or the new putting surfaces on all 18 of our greens, every change we envisioned has exceeded our expectations,” Rice concluded. “We have had rave reviews since reopening in November and we can't wait for the rest of the golf world to see the Stadium Course for another historic edition of THE PLAYERS Championship this May. The Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass was created with the fan in mind, and all of these improvements only further the original vision of the facility.”

THE PLAYERS Championship 2017 will be held May 9-14. To learn more about the event, visit [www.THEPLAYERSChampionship.com](http://www.THEPLAYERSChampionship.com). TPC Sawgrass offers golf and social membership and is home to both THE PLAYERS Stadium Course and Dye's Valley Course. To find out more about TPC Sawgrass visit [www.TPC.com/sawgrass](http://www.TPC.com/sawgrass).



# Chamber of Commerce hosts Health & Wellness Expo

The Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach was the setting for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce's recent Health & Wellness Expo.

Organized by the chamber's Ponte Vedra Beach Division, the free event brought together representatives of numerous health, medical, wellness and fitness organizations

to share information with local residents. Participating businesses included A1A Pharmacy, Pure Barre, the YMCA, Willness Fitness, Connect Hearing, Balanced Physician Care, Ponte Vedra Plastic Surgery, Ponte Vedra Wellness Center and more. Refreshments were provided by KC's Kitchen.



KC's Kitchen

Photos courtesy of St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce



Dr. Sharyl Truty, Balanced Physician Care



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## Local attorney urges Chamber of Commerce members to implement policies on distracted driving

By Jon Blauvelt

Wayne Hogan, a personal injury attorney at Terrell Hogan Law Office, recently advised a group of local business professionals to implement policies that prohibit employees from using cell phones or other forms of distraction while driving.

"This is something to take very seriously," said Hogan at a Jan. 26 luncheon hosted by the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce Beaches Division and the Ponte Vedra Beach Division of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. "From your standpoint, it is something for you to consider because you have, in a business with personnel driving, vicarious liability."

Hogan told the audience that he started speaking about this issue

after a distracted driver killed his friend's daughter in 2009. He said his friend established a program where lawyers across the country visit schools to try to change the behavior of students in regards to the use of cell phones or other devices while driving. Hogan said a collection of lawyers, including himself, have spoken to 500,000 students since the program started.

"Nearly 4,000 people every year die as a result of distracted driving-caused accidents," Hogan said. "Almost half a million people every year are seriously injured as a result of the use of this kind of device or some other device that's in the vehicle. It's an epidemic."

Hogan and his colleagues realized that this issue isn't limited to students. So, they decided to amplify the message to the workforce as well. As a result, his firm created

the Terrell Hogan Law Distracted Driving Awareness Campaign, which offers complimentary distracted driving presentations for both teens and the workforce.

### Business implications

Many companies, Hogan said, expect their employees to answer their phones while driving and are unaware of the potential risks they face. If a company were to be found vicariously liable in a distracted driving-caused accident, Hogan said, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) would fine the business \$70,000 for structuring a workplace that presented these hazards. Next, the company's insurance rates would increase, and the employee's workers compensation costs would kick in. The company could also potentially face a lawsuit and ultimately punitive damages.

To avoid such a situation, Hogan recommended that businesses first avoid structuring employee work schedules in a way that requires them to use their phones while driving. He then advised them to create a policy for their respective businesses, ensure that their employees understand it and agree to abide by it, and develop a plan to enforce and monitor the policy.

"These things are going to happen until we have driverless cars," said Hogan, who offered to speak to any specific business about the issue. "We need to try and do everything we can to prevent them."

According to the Terrell Hogan Law Office website, the Terrell Hogan Distracted Driving Awareness Campaign has reached nearly 6,500 teens and adults on the First Coast through its presentations.



Isabelle Rodriguez, Chris Goerge, Wayne Hogan, Ed Mercel, Amanda Patch and Sarah Hewett



Alexandria Brown, Laura Brown, Courtney Skinner and Robin Giddens Sheppard



Lin Jones, Greg Voss and Sandra Goode



Wayne Hogan, a personal injury attorney at Terrell Hogan Law Office, addresses Jacksonville and St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce members at a joint luncheon about the need for companies and small businesses to implement policies that prohibit cell phone use and other forms of distractions while driving.



Chris Goerge, Stacie Gerrity and Mary Price

## Visit from acclaimed Spanish painter highlights Cutter & Cutter grand opening



Photo by Jennifer Logue

Acclaimed Spanish artist ROYO joins The Cutter Family, gallery staff and representatives from the chamber of commerce as they cut the ribbon on the new Cutter & Cutter Fine Art gallery in Sawgrass Village

### By Jennifer Logue

Local residents had an opportunity to meet one of the art world's noted stars Jan. 20, when acclaimed Spanish painter ROYO visited Ponte Vedra Beach for the grand opening celebration of the Cutter & Cutter Fine Art gallery in Sawgrass Village.

The artist, who traveled from Valencia, Spain for the event, participated in the gallery's ribbon-cutting ceremony before visiting with guests and art collectors, who came to Ponte Vedra to view a special exhibition of works the artist painted especially for the occasion. In addition to attending cocktail receptions held Jan. 20-21, ROYO also signed copies of his book showcasing his works.

"It's significant for Cutter & Cutter to have an artist such as ROYO, a world-class master, join us all the way from Valencia, Spain," said Len Cutter, founder of Cutter & Cutter. "The art world and its collectors know well the impact he has had on our business, and we predict the impact he will have on Ponte Vedra and Greater Jacksonville is about to unfold."

Throughout the gallery's grand opening weekend, guests perused ROYO's works while enjoying the

opportunity to speak with the artist through an interpreter.

"He has a certain aura about him when he comes to town," said gallery partner Mark Cutter. "He has such a knowledge of and love for art history. (Collectors) really come out because they know there's something special about him."

In addition to the portraits for which he is well known, ROYO created a number of landscapes specifically for Cutter & Cutter, many of which depict the cherry, almond and orange trees that adorn the grounds of his home in Spain.

ROYO is also a collector, Mark Cutter added, noting that in many of the artist's works, his models display antique fans and 150-year-old silk shawls.

"They're not props," he said. "They're a part of his life."

That sentiment was echoed by the artist himself during a gallery talk with collectors and guests. When asked about his inspiration and reasons for painting, the artist gave a brief answer in Spanish, which his interpreter translated.

"It is his life," she said simply. "He has to do it."

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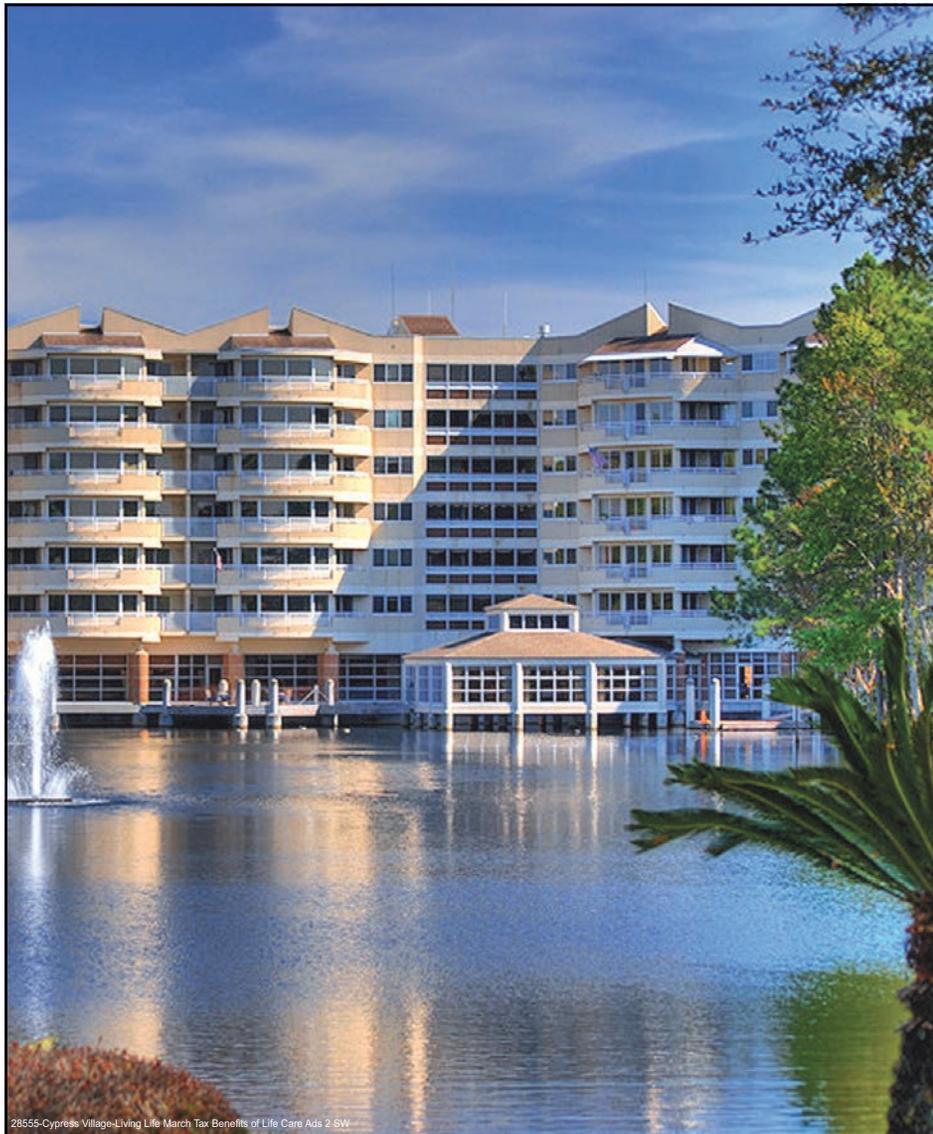
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Source: *Real Value of Joining a Local Chamber of Commerce*  
Shapiro Group, 2012.

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# Seaside Bank celebrates 10th anniversary



Representatives from the Ponte Vedra Beach Division of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce join with Seaside Bank officials to celebrate the bank's 10th anniversary.

Chamber of Commerce photo

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## Small business trends the focus of Chamber at Noon luncheon

Small business trends for 2017 was the focus of the Ponte Vedra Beach Division's "Chamber at Noon" luncheon.

Held Feb. 15 at Sawgrass Country Club, the luncheon featured a presentation by Marge Cirillo of the University of North Florida's Small Business Development Center. Also on hand was St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce President Isabelle Rodriguez, who presented a farewell gift to departing PVB Division Director Lin Jones, who is relocating to Indiana.



Eric Ross with My Family First contributes a unique door prize: firewood and a pineapple.



Isabelle Rodriguez (right) presents a scarf to departing Ponte Vedra Beach Division Lin Jones, who is relocating to the colder temperatures of Indiana.



Sandra Ingram, Isabelle Rodriguez, Ed Mercel, Marge Cirillo, Lin Jones and Felicia Cox

# Flavor Palette nears one year of business in Ponte Vedra Beach



Flavor Palette Chef and Owner Tommy McDonough, whose Ponte Vedra restaurant serves international sandwiches, creative salads, seasoned french fries, craft beer and wine



Photo by Jon Blauvelt

Flavor Palette opened in the Ponte Vedra Pointe Shopping Center in late March 2016.

## By Jon Blauvelt

As Flavor Palette approaches one year of business in Ponte Vedra Beach, Chef and Owner Tommy McDonough said his international sandwich shop has been extremely rewarding, but like any restaurant business venture, also a roller coaster ride.

“We have our ups and downs,” said McDonough, who opened the restaurant in the Ponte Vedra Pointe Shopping Center in late March 2016. “Overall, it’s been an amazing experience.”

McDonough moved from Philadelphia to the First Coast with his wife and two children to open the shop last year, which he noted has been an adjustment but also a welcome change. Instead of the aggressive, boisterous style of Philadelphia, working and living in Ponte Vedra, he said, has provided his business and his family with a more relaxed and balanced experience.

Yet that doesn’t mean McDonough has completely removed himself from his Philly roots: Flavor Palette’s number one seller, he said, is the “Philly Style” steak sandwich.

“I have it hidden in the middle of the menu, but the word’s out,” said a laughing McDonough, who added that he’s one of the few chefs in the area using ribeye for the sandwich.

Although it’s the top seller, the Philly steak sandwich may be the least adventurous option on McDonough’s

internationally exotic menu. The Flavor Palette owner brings more than 18 years of varied cooking experience to the restaurant, working with chefs from Taiwan, India, Germany, Korea and Belgium, to formulate his style, which he calls “unpretentious, world quality fusion.”

The next most popular item on the menu, he said, is the “Moroccan Chicken” sandwich, which features a north African spice blend and preserved lemon marinade garnished with Kalamata olives, tomatoes, almonds and raisins drizzled with a harissa yogurt sauce on a pita. Other sandwiches include the “Falafel Burger,” “Korean Beef Wrap” and “The Samurai,” to name a few. Flavor Palette also serves salads and sides, with the classic Canadian french fry dish Poutine a staple at the restaurant, as well as craft beer and wine.

Since opening Flavor Palette last year, McDonough said he’s learned there are “two sides of the street,” when it comes to his customer base. There are those, he said, that are more adventurous and sophisticated, and then there are the more particular, steak sandwich sort of visitors. As a result, McDonough said he has worked to accommodate both groups, noting that his two specials the week of Feb. 13 were a chorizo fish cake with chipotle mayo, pickled red onions and cilantro; and a blackened chicken Caesar wrap topped with bacon.

“I’m basically taking the feedback

from both sides of the street and just trying to find the middle ground,” said McDonough, who also cited finding consistent, dependable staff and developing a steady flow of customers as challenges throughout the year.

McDonough previously worked in a variety of culinary and executive chef positions, running kitchens of hotels, international restaurants and most recently as a personal/private chef. He also worked in catering operations, and is now doing so again in Ponte Vedra as of December. He has a few catering jobs a week, he said, which include events ranging from corporate meetings to baby showers.

McDonough added that he’s been

asked to be a catering partner at the first Ponte Vedra Food, Wine and Spirits Festival, which is set to take place in early May at the Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach. In addition, he said he is working with Yelp for two upcoming events at Flavor Palette to introduce the company’s most active users in the Jacksonville area to his restaurant.

Flavor Palette’s official one year anniversary of business is March 26, said McDonough, who noted it’s taken both passion and determination to get to this point.

“We made it to a year,” he said. “That’s a major milestone.”

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