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# PONTE VEDRA LEADER

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## Jacksonville Beach city council welcomes the new members

The Jacksonville Beach City Council Monday adopted a declaration accepting the results of the election. Incoming Mayor Chris Hoffman welcomed new council members Fernando Meza, Dan Janson and Chet Stokes during the transition meeting which also bid farewell to two-term Mayor Charlie Latham and council members Keith Doherty and Phil Vogelsang.

Hoffman, who also transitioned from the council to her first official meeting as Mayor, summed up the incoming council including current council member Cory Nichols who was voted in 4-2 as Mayor Pro-Tem.

"Among this council we have two Fletcher diplomas, two UNF degrees, three UF degrees, two Auburn degrees, three Masters degrees, one PhD, eight kids - fun fact only two of us have children - four dogs, four cats, four spouses, two sets of members who have run against each other in past elections and none of us are Jacksonville Beach natives," she said.

"My favorite fact of all is that at least one of us has served on each of our boards - the Planning Commission, the Board of Adjustment, the CRA and the pension board. What we all have in common is that we earned the trust of the voters in Jacksonville Beach. But no matter how many votes we all got, we have one vote when we're on this side of the dais. And that means we need to collaborate, compromise and collectively as a body, do the best we can do for the community we represent."

Vogelsang was elected to his first term Nov. 6, 2012 and again Nov. 8, 2016. During his tenure on the council, he helped implement infrastructure improvements and pedestrian safety, participated in the selection of the new City Manager, helped establish a paid parking program, upgrades to the Jacksonville Beach golf club, shore protection projects and installation of new walkovers and construction of the South Beach Skate Park.

"I didn't think this was going to be emotional but it actually is. I couldn't have done it without my colleagues. We ran on something that was pretty important and turned this city around to get it going in the right direction. I truly believe in my heart of hearts that we have done that and we are passing a good legacy on to the next ones to take our seats," said outgoing councilman Phil Vogelsang. "I

really do love this city. I'm here for good. I'll be back when there are issues that I need to get involved in. Getting involved in politics wasn't something I anticipated doing but I enjoyed every minute of it."

Hoffman presented former Mayor Charlie Latham with the gavel used during his eight years of service, adding that if it seemed only slightly worn, it was thanks to his ability to guide the City Council as a cohesive and respectful governing body.

"To his credit, he really increased the professionalism of this body. He ran a very good, tight meeting giving everyone an opportunity to speak while maintaining decorum. We had a very congenial group here so he didn't have to bang it very often," she said.

Latham announced that next week, he will report to his new position as Director of Environmental Services for Clay County. "I'm excited to take that new challenge on," he said, thanking his wife Kathryn for her support during his two terms as mayor. He also lauded her role in helping transform the Beaches Council on Aging into a thriving non-profit organization serving the senior community. "I also want to thank my dad Bill Latham, the first Mayor of Jacksonville Beach, for being the greatest role model in history."

As a results-oriented body, Latham attributed his successes as mayor to past and present city staff and elected officials who worked alongside him during his leadership tenure. He leaves Jacksonville Beach debt-free, helped increase homestead exemptions for seniors, and guided the city through four hurricanes and a global pandemic.

"Our new staff brings so much to the table. These are the people that do so much behind the scenes and get the work done," he said. "I'm proud of what we've been able to accomplish, especially when you consider the four hurricanes and global pandemic that interrupted our work. We are a debt-free city, and we are definitely better off than we were eight years ago. As my watch comes to an end, I'd like to thank the citizens of Jacksonville Beach for having the faith in me to elect me not once, but twice."

Before bringing the meeting to order, Hoffman added, "I look forward to working with each of you. I ask that you show up, do the work, ask the hard questions for as long as we are given this honor to serve our community."

## St. Johns River Water Management re-elects Burnett as the chairman

The St. Johns River Water Management District's Governing Board re-elected Gen. Douglas Burnett of St. Augustine to serve as its chairman for a second year. The Board also elected Sen. Rob Bradley of Fleming Island to serve as vice chairman; Susan Dolan of Sanford as secretary; and Ron Howse of Cocoa as treasurer.

The other board members are Douglas C. Bourne of Vero Beach, Cole Oliver of Merritt Island, J. Chris Peterson of Winter Park and Janet Price of Fernandina Beach.

Board members, who meet monthly, are responsible for setting the policies for the District's operation. They are appointed by the governor to four-year terms and serve without pay.

Board member profiles and photos are available on the District governing board's Web page.

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## Deck the Chairs opens Sat. with performance by First Coast Wind Symphony

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas in Jacksonville Beach. The 8th annual Deck the Chairs opens at 4 p.m. Saturday with a performance by the First Coast Wind Symphony.

The perennial family event will be on display from Nov. 21 to Jan. 1 featuring 40 lifeguard chairs decked out in their holiday splendor, festive music and a 100-foot octopus crafted from recycled plastics. Deck the Chairs is free and open to the public.

"It should be a great event this year," said City Councilor Sandy Golding. "Something happy for all of us to look forward to."

Local businesses and organizations sponsor and decorate the displays, which are showcased in Latham Plaza and the SeaWalk Pavilion area. The lights are on display from 5 p.m. to 1 p.m. nightly. Deck Together Light Shows are held at the top of every hour from 6 to 9 p.m.

"We're looking forward to the lights but it's going to be a different environment," said event founder Kurtis Loftus. "I'm confident that the more people get involved, the more the community feels good about what we're doing. That's how we're supposed to live."

Beaches Go Green, a nonprofit organization that champions environmental awareness, will unveil a new light program in the Octopus Garden which is synced to music. Improvements were also made to lights and sound at the 30-foot Christmas tree which features approximately 9,000 lights.

However, one major draw will be noticeably absent this year. The Battle of the Bands, which draws up to 1,000 spectators each year, will not be held in conjunction with the Gator Bowl.

"For us, obviously public safety is first and foremost," he said of the popular holiday event. "When we say we are a safe and family-friendly event, we mean it. That's been our mission from day one. We want people to enter into that space and enjoy a nice environment."

Loftus said creating a safe environment is a top priority. Organizers have worked closely with city officials to address the challenges of hosting a popular event that draws crowds up to 60,000 per

said Loftus. "Business has been especially hit hard. Our hope is that the lights and free display will once again bring people into the SeaWalk Pavilion and Latham Plaza park space, and that after visiting with



photo by LIZA MITCHELL

Latham Plaza filled with lifeguard chairs earlier this week as organizations began construction on their chairs for Deck the Chairs.

year during a global pandemic.

Organizers have added extra space between chairs and removed fencing along the sidewalks to allow more distance between patrons. Other safety measures include hand-sanitizing stations, a first aid/isolation tent and informational signs regarding public health policies.

"The COVID pandemic has taken its toll on our Beaches community,"

us, they spend time and money with our friends in the service sector."

The event has a strong economic impact in downtown Jacksonville Beach. Area businesses have reported a nearly 30 percent increase during the annual festivities compared to the years prior to the inception of Deck the Chairs.

For information about programming and volunteer opportunities, visit [deckthechairs.org](http://deckthechairs.org).

### CORRECTION

An article in last week's issue on BEAM serving seniors incorrectly stated that 80 pounds of dodo were delivered to seniors. The article should have read "80 pounds of food were delivered."



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