

SEMINOLE HAPPENINGS

A LOOK AT EVENTS AROUND SEMINOLE COUNTY

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Museum of Geneva History

Sundays, Jan. 12 & 26, 2 to 4 p.m., **165 1st St., Geneva.** Free, but donations appreciated. The Museum of Geneva History offers it's newest display, "Challenging Times Are Nothing New" which tells about the freeze of 1894-95, the Spanish Flu, the Polio Epidemic & the present Covid Pandemic. Two large rooms full of such things as local archaeological finds, pioneer crafts, family records, Civil War info & a violano that plays. Learn about the story of Geneva & the Lincoln Conspiracy. Listen to an Edison Phonograph. Buy T-shirts, caps, prints & history books.

Landscape University 2024

Wednesday, Jan. 15, 22, 29, 2 to 3 p.m., **Online.** The Basics of Landscaping - How can you design your landscape to support beneficial organisms? How do you grow plants in a shady area? What are invasive species? What are common fungal pests in the landscape? What can go wrong with plants? This six-week webinar series will cover the answers to these questions and more. Continuing education units (CEUs) are also available for individuals who hold a pesticide applicator license. The cost for attendance is \$10 per workshop. You can register for just one or for multiple seminars. You can also register to attend all 6 classes for a discounted rate of \$35. Pre-Registration Required: <http://seminole-extension.eventbrite.com>. The series agenda is as follows: Jan 22 - Hangry Plants. Jan 29 - What's that Bug? Intro to Insect ID. Feb 5 - From the Ground Up: Healthy Soil Healthy Plants' Feb 12 - Weed Warfare in Florida Landscapes. Feb 19 - Lawn Trends and Alternative Groundcovers.

Florida Tree Trek

Friday, Jan. 17, 9 to 11 a.m., **Spring Hammock Preserve, Longwood.** Celebrate FL Arbor Day by hiking through mixed forests of pine, oak & cypress. Ages 7+. Cost: \$5/person. Pre-registration required for all participants: recreation.seminolecountyfl.gov Questions? Call 407-665-2211.

Fungi Fundamentals

Saturday, Jan. 18, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., **Lake Harney Wilderness Area, Geneva.** Join a local expert for an introductory class on mushrooms and their identification. We'll explore various topics, including basic mushroom biology and their ecological roles, identification techniques, photography and documentation tips, and conservation efforts. The class will include a presentation in the nature center, followed by a hike in search of wild mushrooms. Ages 5+. Cost \$8/person. Pre-registration required for all participants: recreation.seminolecountyfl.gov. Questions? Call 407-665-2211.

Flying Needles

Wednesdays, 5 to 7:30 p.m., **North Branch Library, 150 N. Palmetto Ave., Sanford.** Free. For adults & Teens 15+. Flying Needles offers you a place to knit, crochet, or do other needlework. Bring your own project, share tips & techniques, & learn from each other. Call 407-665-1620.

ESOL

Thursdays, 6 p.m., **North Branch Library, 150 N. Palmetto Ave., Sanford.** Come practice your English conversational speaking skills. Call the Adult Literacy League at 407-422-1540 for more info. Free. For adults.

Get Hook'd on Lake Monroe Fishing Tournament & Seafood Festival

Saturday, Jan. 18, 12 to 7 p.m., **West End Trading Company, Sanford Avenue.** Public fishing will be at Lake Carola in Ft. Mellon Park, for a fishing rodeo for children. Fishing instruction and prizes will be awarded.

47th Annual Central Florida Scottish Highland Games

Saturday & Sunday, Jan 18 & 19, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., **Central Winds Park, Winter Springs.** Join the games, enjoy Scottish food, heritage, dancing and athletics. For more information visit www.flascot.com

GriefShare

Monday January 20, **Palmetto Avenue Baptist Church at 2626 S. Palmetto Avenue, Sanford.** GriefShare is for everyone who is grieving the death of a loved one—whether you've experienced the loss of a spouse, parent, child (infant, young child, teen, adult, unborn), friend, sibling, coworker, or other relative. GriefShare is a support group that is a safe, welcoming place where people understand the difficult emotions of grief. Through this 13-week group, you'll discover what to expect in the days ahead and what's "normal" in grief. Since there are no neat, orderly stages of grief, you'll learn helpful ways of coping with grief, in all its unpredictability—and gain solid support each step of the way. We will start meeting Monday January 20, 2025 for 13 weeks at 10:00 am for the morning session and 7:00 pm for the evening session. We meet in the sanctuary of Palmetto Avenue Baptist Church. Sign up at Griefshare.Sanford@gmail.com or call/text Laurel at 321-316-0553 for more info about the session. This is a ministry outreach of Palmetto Avenue Baptist Church at 2626 S. Palmetto Avenue, Sanford.

Guitar Club

Wednesday, Jan. 22, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., **North Branch Library, 150 N. Palmetto Ave., Sanford.** Jam with fellow guitar players of all skill levels & try your hand at musical improvising. Open to other stringed instruments such as ukulele, mandolin, etc. Fun, interactive program. Free. For adults of all skill levels. Call 407-665-1620 for more info.

Meditation for a Happier You

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2 to 3 p.m., **North Branch Library, 150 N. Palmetto Ave., Sanford.** Can meditation make you happier, healthier & smarter? Research supports meditation's effects on our physical, emotional, mental & spiritual well-being. Learn a simple meditation technique presented by long-time meditator and research, Dr. Mark Young, Professor of Counseling Education at the University of Central Florida. Free. For adults. Call 407-665-1620.

Genealogy Club

Sunday, Jan. 26, 2 p.m., **North Branch Library, 150 N. Palmetto Avenue, Sanford.** Come learn about genealogy, from our experts and each other, in collaboration with the Sanford Genealogy Club. All experience levels are welcome. Registration is only required if attending through Microsoft Teams. The virtual link provided at registration and emailed one day before event. Library card required to register. Free. For adults and teens ages 15+. In-person and on Microsoft Teams. Call 407-665-1620.

Victim of Domestic Violence?

Confidential support groups at various locations in Seminole County. Call 407-330-3933.

Inspire of Central Florida Life Skills Class



By Bryanna Valderrama
Herald Intern

I will be able to identify my rights. I will be able to practice self-advocacy. This is the learning goal for the self-advocacy and rights lesson in an Inspire of Central Florida life skills class. Inspire of Central Florida located at 1095 Belle Ave. in Casselberry is the largest and longest standing special needs adult training facility in Central Florida. Inspire not only offers the resources for employment opportunities but also offers life skill lessons and activities for the Specialists they serve.

Originally established back in 1980, Inspire started off as a small center with only five Contract Fulfillment Specialists. Through community support Inspire was able to grow into the large facility they are today.

Inspire of Central Florida strives to help their Specialists be independent and productive in their learning and work efforts. Operations Manager Liliana Continanzi, explains how things have changed for Inspire within the past couple of years.

"Things have shifted in the last two to three years," said Continanzi. "The Agency for Persons with Disabilities, who provides the funding for the majority of the individuals we serve really wanted to put an emphasis on providing more than just employment opportunities, but also more life skills."

Continanzi explains that now instead of 100% of the work they do just being contract fulfillment the operations have shifted gears to 90% being life skills and 10% of the Specialists now being Inspire staff that are hired on to the contract fulfillment center.

While Inspire offers multiple programs including: production, wood shop, life skills and Inspire Living, Operation G.R.O.W. deals more with developing career skills and connecting Specialists with compatible careers.

According to the Inspire homepage Operation G.R.O.W. stands for Giving Real Opportunities for Work. The homepage also said it is a volunteer internship program that combines both classroom instruction and real-world experience to provide an environment where the interns can sharpen their career skills and improve their employability. This program was created to be a bridge between high functioning special needs adults and compatible careers with local businesses.

Operation G.R.O.W. Coordinator Kennedy Martin explains more about the phases involved in this program.

"Every individual that comes, we ask them about their goals, everyone is here mainly because they have goals for independence skills typically," said Martin. "Sometimes that can include life skills or sometimes that can include life skills and employment skills."

Martin explains that typically when individuals start, they've never had employment before or they weren't able to keep the job. So, if they come to Inspire and express interest in getting employment then they will have the individuals wait about a month so that the staff can get to know them, establish what their goals are and see what a good fit for them would be.

Once initiated into the program they start at just the Operation G.R.O.W. level. This consists of attending classes and skill and career assessments just to figure out where the individuals want to go. As the Inspire staff feel like their skills are growing through the Monday through Thursday life skills classes, atten-

dance at the cafe and volunteering then the staff can see the progress and see where the individual's skills are strongest for future careers.

The second phase, G.R.O.W. more, involves working on resume skills, building their resume, applying for jobs and interviewing. During this phase the individuals are assigned a job coach who works with them one on one to help them develop their resume further.

Martin explains that the last phase is called G.R.O.W. out and basically what this means is that once the individual secures employment the coordinators push in with them at their place of employment for the job.

"We push in with them for the job and we also work around social security benefits or anything else that might be a hindrance in any other way to someone who's outside of the little bubble we are in," explained Martin. "There's a lot of misconceptions about employing someone with a disability but we work with the managers and educate them a little bit about disabilities in general because truly these guys are the best to employ."

Through partnerships with local organizations and businesses Inspire of Central Florida is able to connect with the community, educate staff and managers of these businesses and break down any barriers or doubts that come with employing an adult with special needs. A big opportunity for that connection is the training Inspire does with the Seminole County Sheriff's Office.

"The Seminole County Sheriff's Office puts all their deputies during their training period through a day here at Inspire and so they get to sit in the groups and interact with the individuals we serve and learn from them," said Continanzi.

Whether it's local businesses, management, deputies or family and loved ones of adults with special needs, Inspire will never turn down the chance to educate, support and connect the work they do with the community.

For individuals with special needs whether they just want to come to Inspire to learn life skills, seek employment opportunities or connect with their community, Inspire staff wants them to feel supported, know that they have many choices and that they can take any program at their own pace.

"It's really all based on choices," said Continanzi. "We really try to help them self-advocate and say if it's not something that you're choosing today it's totally fine we have other options for you to engage in."

In terms of a projected goal, Inspire hopes to be able to build off one of their current programs Inspire Living to partner with individuals to open more group homes. Continanzi explains that this is a great need in the community because a lot of their Specialists are living with elderly parents or families who don't have a plan for them if something happens to them.

If the Specialists don't have anywhere to go, they become wards of the state and go to a group home anyway. The goal would provide the Specialists with the opportunity to live more independently and not have their entire lives be shifted after the passing of a loved one. The Inspire life skills lessons and activities that the Specialists are taking teach them different skills to act independently and contributes to their future living.

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