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YOUR SOURCE FOR POLK COUNTY

OCTOBER 2026 | MONTHLY | FREE | www.polk.news



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FALL COMES ALIVE ACROSS POLK COUNTY

Festivals, classic cars, pioneer history and Halloween fun fill October weekends

POLK.NEWS STAFF REPORT

October brings a full calendar of reasons to explore Polk County. Families can choose farm-style outings, Halloween attractions, downtown gatherings and two of the area's signature weekends.

The Lake Mirror Classic returns to downtown Lakeland Oct. 16-18. Friday's Hot Rod Rendezvous opens from 5 to 9 p.m. Saturday brings the Concours d'Elegance and Downtown Classic Car Show from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. A Sunday road tour closes the weekend. Spectators may view the vehicles free of charge.

Lake Wales Pioneer Days celebrates its 50th year Oct. 24-25 at Lake Wales Park. The living-history festival highlights the people, skills and traditions that helped build the community.

Harvest Holler supplies pumpkins, hay and corn-maze fun in Polk City throughout October. LEGOLAND Florida's Brick-or-Treat adds family Halloween entertainment on select dates. Downtown Lakeland's Fall Night Market and Winter Haven's Hands on Haven are also set for Oct. 24.



YOUR OCTOBER WEEKEND GUIDE

FULL DETAILS: PAGES 11-12

OCT. 2-31

HARVEST HOLLER

Polk City fall weekends

OCT. 16-18

LAKE MIRROR CLASSIC

Three days in Lakeland

OCT. 24-25

PIONEER DAYS

50th year in Lake Wales

SELECT DATES

BRICK-OR-TREAT

Family Halloween fun

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DOLLY PARTON'S LEGACY LIVES ON IN POLK COUNTY

Her books reached local children, her music reached Lakeland and a Polk-born writer helped shape her songbook.

BY POLK.NEWS STAFF



DOLLY PARTON AT THE GRAND OLE OPRY
PHOTO: TECH. SGT. CHERIE A. THURLBY
U.S. AIR FORCE / PUBLIC DOMAIN

Dolly Parton's connection to Polk County went beyond a concert date or a familiar song. Her most lasting local contribution arrived one book at a time, in the mailboxes of young children across Central Florida.

United Way of Central Florida has operated a local affiliate of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for more than 20 years. During the 2024-25 program year, it distributed 29,711 books to approximately 2,500 enrolled children in Polk, Hardee and Highlands counties.

Children from birth through age 5 receive a free, age-appropriate book every month. A child enrolled from birth can build a home library of about 60 books before kindergarten. Parton created the program in 1995 in honor of her father, Robert Lee Parton, who did not learn to read or write.

Polk County also holds a place in Parton's performance history. The RP Funding Center reports that she appeared at the Lakeland Civic Center on Aug. 21, 1978. The city-owned arena carries a new name today, but the concert remains part of Lakeland's entertainment history.

Another musical connection runs through songwriter Bobby Braddock. Born in Lakeland in 1940 and raised near Auburndale, Braddock co-wrote 'D-I-V-O-R-C-E' with Curly Putman. Parton recorded it for her 1969 album In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad). Braddock entered the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2011.

Together, those connections show how Parton's influence reached Polk County in enduring, distinctly local ways.

20+ YEARS
LOCAL PROGRAM

29,711
BOOKS IN 2024-25

ABOUT 2,500
CHILDREN ENROLLED

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FLYING TIGERS' LATE SURGE CLOSES UNEVEN 2026 SEASON

Lakeland missed the postseason, but a stronger second half and several breakout performances gave the defending league champions an encouraging finish.

BY POLK.NEWS STAFF



A late-season recovery gave Lakeland momentum after an uneven first half.

Polk.News-generated illustration; no team or league marks are shown.

Sources: official MiLB standings and statistics; April 2026 game reporting. Verified Sept. 22, 2026.

The Lakeland Flying Tigers entered 2026 as defending Florida State League champions and immediately looked ready for another run. Contemporaneous April game reporting recorded seven consecutive victories to open the season.

The early momentum faded. Lakeland went 24-34 after the unbeaten opening and finished the first half 31-34. Clearwater claimed the West Division's first-half playoff berth, leaving Lakeland to chase the second-half position.

That chase produced a much better stretch of baseball. Through Aug. 30, the Flying Tigers were 30-27 in the second half. They closed the home schedule with a 7-4 victory over Clearwater, completing a third consecutive series win before ending the season Sept. 6 in Bradenton.

Tampa ultimately secured the division's second-half berth, so Lakeland did not return to the postseason. The finish nevertheless highlighted several productive seasons.

Zach MacDonald led Lakeland with 22 home runs, drove in 66 runs and stole 34 bases. Beau Ankeney also drove in 66 while batting .279 with 15 home runs. Edian Espinal posted a .311 average and a .436 on-base percentage, while Jesus Pinto collected a team-high 102 hits and stole 25 bases.

The result was not another championship, but the second-half improvement and the emergence of young contributors gave Lakeland a clearer foundation for the next season.

22 HOME RUNS ZACH MACDONALD	66 RBIs EACH MACDONALD & ANKENEY	102 HITS JESÚS PINTO	.311 BATTING AVG. EDIAN ESPINAL
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FOUR UNUSUAL CASES PULLED FROM POLK COUNTY CRIME HISTORY

Arrests and charges are accusations, not proof of guilt. These archival cases are remembered for their unusual circumstances; confirmed outcomes are included where available.

NOVEMBER 2017 A DUI - ON HORSEBACK Polk deputies encountered a 53-year-old woman riding a horse along busy Combee Road near Lakeland. Deputies alleged that she smelled of alcohol, had difficulty standing after dismounting and recorded breath-alcohol readings of .157 and .161. She was arrested on DUI and animal-neglect charges. Legal observers later questioned whether Florida's DUI statute applied to a rider on horseback. Neither the woman nor the horse was reported injured.	DECEMBER 2022 911, PLEASE HELP US MOVE Deputies responding to a 911 call at an unoccupied Poinciana home found a man and woman inside. According to the Polk County Sheriff's Office, the woman said the pair wanted help moving belongings from the home - and hoped deputies would give them a ride to the airport. Instead, both were arrested. The man was charged with burglary and theft; the woman was charged with residential burglary.	MAY 2014 LOST WITH A STOLEN GPS A man called 911 after becoming lost on Deen Still Road and encountering wild hogs. Deputies said he had an outstanding warrant and was carrying a backpack containing property taken from a vehicle. Among the recovered items was a GPS device - the very sort of equipment that might have prevented him from getting lost. Deputies arrested him after locating him in the darkness.	SEPTEMBER 2013 KEROSENE, A GRILL AND 2,998 QURANS Deputies stopped a Florida pastor as he traveled through Polk County towing a trailer carrying 2,998 kerosene-soaked Qurans inside a large grill. He intended to burn them publicly and was arrested on an unlawful fuel-transportation charge. A circuit judge dismissed that charge in 2014, finding that the circumstances did not violate the cited Florida fuel statute. An appeals court later upheld the dismissal.
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Sources: contemporaneous reporting from The Associated Press, The Washington Post and local law-enforcement accounts.

PROTECT WHAT MAKES YOUR HOUSE A HOME

CONTENTS AND PERSONAL-PROPERTY COVERAGE FOR HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS

YOUR BELONGINGS
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Personal-property coverage may help repair or replace covered belongings after theft, fire or vandalism.

Ask about protection for furniture, clothing, electronics and other everyday household contents.



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NOT EVERY SEX OFFENDER IS BARRED FROM HANDING OUT HALLOWEEN CANDY

Florida law is narrower than many parents may realize - supervision still matters.



THE ASSUMPTION IS WRONG

Parents should not assume that every person previously convicted of a sexual offense is legally prohibited from distributing Halloween candy. Florida law prohibits certain offenders under probation or community control from distributing candy or other items to children on Halloween without prior court approval. The restriction applies only to the categories described by law; it is not a blanket rule covering every past sexual-offense conviction.

PARENTS REMAIN THE FIRST SAFEGUARD

The safest practice is for parents or another trusted adult to accompany younger children, know the route and recognize the homes being visited. Children should never enter an unfamiliar residence to receive candy. Older children traveling without an adult should stay together, follow an agreed route, carry a charged phone and check in at set times. Organized church fall festivals, community celebrations and trunk-or-treat events can offer defined boundaries and designated organizers, although adult supervision still matters.

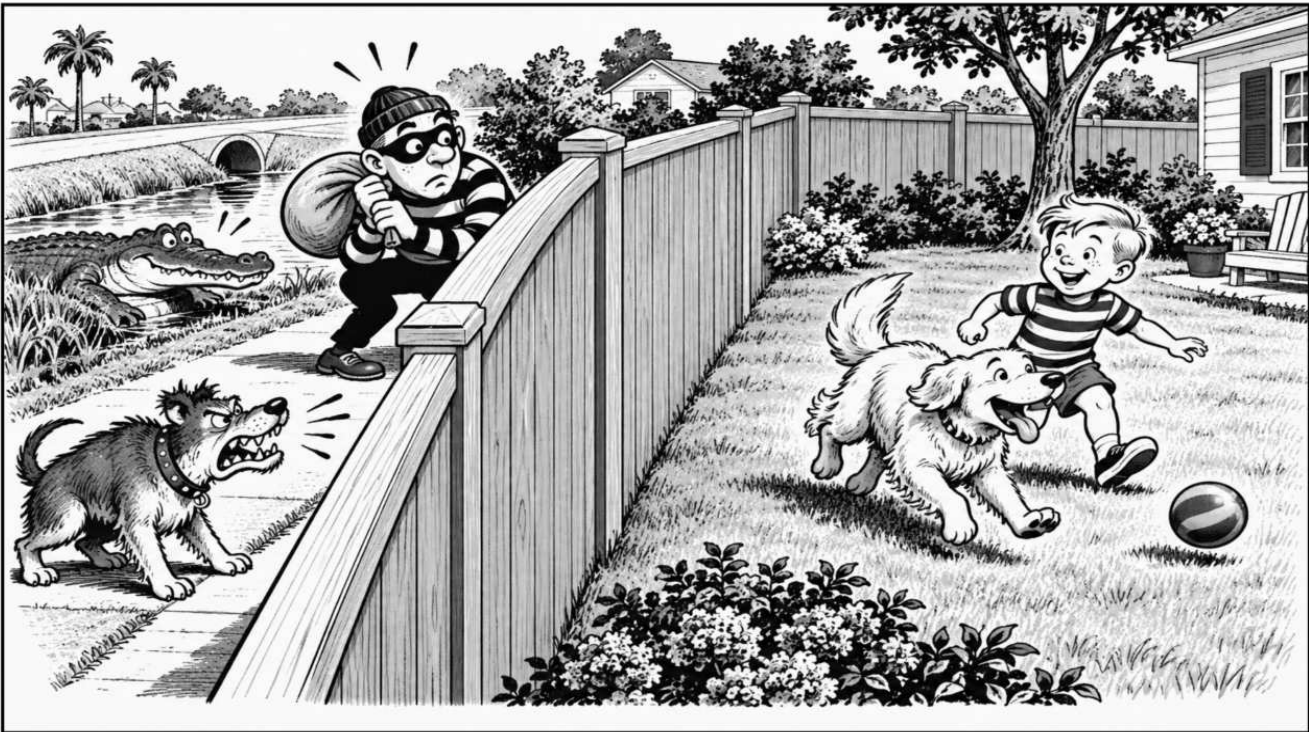
ARREST IS NOT CONVICTION

A person who has merely been arrested or charged has not been convicted. This article addresses prior convictions and legal supervision requirements, not unproven accusations. Someone who has completed supervision, falls outside that statutory category or receives court approval may not be subject to that particular prohibition. Separate court orders or supervision conditions can also differ.

KNOW BEFORE THEY GO

- ESCORT YOUNG CHILDREN**
Stay with them throughout the route.
- KNOW THE HOMES**
Use familiar stops whenever possible.
- STAY OUTSIDE**
Never enter an unfamiliar residence.
- KEEP GROUPS TOGETHER**
Set a route, return time and check-ins.
- CONSIDER ORGANIZED EVENTS**
Fall festivals and trunk-or-treats offer defined spaces.
- FALL FESTIVALS & TRUNK-OR-TREATS**
See October calendar, pages 11-12.

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MONEYCENTRAL EDITORIAL | SPCX MARKET REVIEW

MR. ELON'S WILD RIDE

SPACEX STOCK BLASTED OFF, PLUNGED AND CLIMBED BACK. WHAT MAY COME NEXT?



Original MoneyCentral editorial illustration.

FROM BLASTOFF TO WHIPLASH

SpaceX priced its June 12 IPO at \$135. It closed day one at \$160.95 and reached \$225.64 on June 16. By Aug. 3 it had fallen to \$104.83. The Sept. 24 close was \$148.03 - 9.7% above the IPO price, but 34.4% below the high.

THE ELON FACTOR

Musk's companies have repeatedly pushed through moments when failure looked likely. SpaceX reached orbit only after three failed Falcon 1 flights. In the past, those betting against his ability to deliver have often come up short. That record does not erase risk, but it gives supporters a rational reason to believe he may again turn daunting obstacles into opportunity.

WHY BULLS STILL SEE UPSIDE

Q2 revenue reached \$7.8 billion, up 92% year over year, while Starlink subscribers doubled. Bulls see launch leadership, recurring broadband revenue, government work, Starship and AI as powerful growth engines. If execution follows ambition, today's turbulence could reward patient investors.

WALL STREET: BUY, WITH ASTERISKS

Most tracked analysts lean Buy. Goldman targeted \$205; Morgan Stanley \$300. The asterisks are capital needs, Starship execution, valuation and insider-share releases. Investors are betting on the Elon factor - and on bold promises becoming reality.

\$135.00 IPO PRICE JUNE 12	\$225.64 POST-IPO HIGH	\$104.83 POST-IPO LOW	\$148.03 SEPT. 24 CLOSE
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Sources: SpaceX and SEC filings; market data through Sept. 24; MarketWatch, AP and Wired reporting.

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Before buying, selling or holding, consult a qualified investment professional about your individual circumstances.



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FLORIDA COSTS: 20 YEARS OF CHANGE

Statewide pay rose sharply - but rent climbed faster, and housing remains the pressure point.

MEDIAN GROSS RENT	AVG. WEEKLY PAY
+107.8% \$872 to \$1,812 2006-2024	+89.1% \$740 to \$1,399 2006-2025

WHY THERE IS NO ONE FLORIDA INFLATION NUMBER

BLS does not publish a single statewide Florida CPI. These are verified statewide measures - not national figures relabeled as Florida.

FLORIDA SNAPSHOT

OFFICIAL STATEWIDE DATA

Minimum wage 2006-Sept. 2026		+134.4%
Median gross rent 2006-2024		+107.8%
Average weekly pay 2006-2025		+89.1%
House price index 2006 Q2-2026 Q2		+78.1%
Household income Median 2006-2025		+70.6%
Regular gasoline July 2006-July 2026		+29.8%

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

Rent is the standout. Florida's median gross rent - rent plus utilities - more than doubled, rising faster than average weekly pay and well ahead of median household income.

Single-family home prices rose 78.1% on FHFA's repeat-sales index. Regular gasoline rose 29.8% in the same-month July comparison, far less than the statewide pay measures.

THE BOTTOM LINE

HOUSING IS THE SQUEEZE.

The data do not show that every Florida bill rose at the same pace. They do show rent outpacing household income and home prices keeping pressure on would-be buyers. Individual results vary with location, insurance, taxes, health care, child care and when a home was purchased.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau ACS; BLS QCEW; FHFA Purchase-Only HPI; U.S. EIA; Census/FRED; FloridaCommerce.

Not charted: insurance, groceries, medical care and child care; no consistent statewide 2006 - 2026 series was used.

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Verified offers from institutions serving Polk County

AXIOM BANK 13-mo. promo \$500 min.	4.15% APY
HANCOCK WHITNEY 24-mo. promo \$1,000 min.	4.00% APY
MIDFLORIDA CREDIT UNION 36-mo. special \$1,000 min. members	4.00% APY
TRUSTCO BANK 9-mo. CD \$500 min.	3.85% APY
VALLEY BANK 9-mo. promo \$500 min. new money	3.85% APY

Informational only - not investment advice. Consult a qualified financial professional. Rates can change; confirm APY, eligibility, penalties and renewal terms with the institution.

CHECKED SEPT. 22, 2026 | OFFICIAL INSTITUTION SOURCES

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SEPTEMBER 2026: IN MEMORIAM



Photo: Gage Skidmore / CC BY-SA 2.0

JOURNALISM & ACTIVISM

Gloria Steinem, 92

MARCH 25, 1934 - SEPT. 2, 2026

Journalist and activist Gloria Steinem helped make feminism a central part of American public life. She co-founded Ms. magazine and the National Women's Political Caucus, wrote influential essays and books, and spent decades organizing for equal rights. Her family said she died peacefully at her New York home.



Photo: Larry Bessel / L.A. Times / CC BY 4.0

FASHION & ENTERTAINMENT

Bob Mackie, 87

DIED SEPT. 14, 2026

The costume designer turned sequins, feathers and theatrical wit into pop culture. His work for Cher, Carol Burnett and Diana Ross earned nine Emmys and a Tony. His representative said Mackie died of pneumonia.



Photo: P.B. Rage / CC BY-SA 2.0

MUSIC & THEATER

Duncan Sheik, 56

DIED SEPT. 17, 2026

The 'Barely Breathing' singer found a second career in theater. His Spring Awakening score won Tony and Grammy awards. A representative said he died after heart failure led to cardiac arrest.



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MORE NOTABLE LIVES REMEMBERED



MUSIC
Chad Gilbert, 45
DIED SEPT. 20, 2026

Photo: LostLikeTearsInRain / CC BY 3.0

The founding guitarist of Florida pop-punk band New Found Glory helped shape the group's energetic sound for nearly three decades. Gilbert also produced records and wrote songs for other artists. His family said he died peacefully in his sleep after years of treatment for adrenal cancers; it did not state an immediate cause.

FASHION
Presley Gerber, 27
DIED SEPT. 20, 2026

The model and son of Cindy Crawford and Rande Gerber began runway work as a teenager and later appeared in major fashion campaigns. Gerber also spoke publicly about mental health and recovery. Authorities said he died at a Santa Monica rehabilitation facility. The medical examiner had not determined a cause or manner of death by press time.



ART
Peter Max, 88
DIED SEPT. 14, 2026

Photo: U.S. government archive / Public domain

The artist's radiant colors, cosmic imagery and optimistic figures became visual shorthand for the 1960s and '70s. Max's designs appeared on posters, postage stamps, aircraft and major sports events. His son said Max died after living with advanced dementia. His work helped bring pop art into everyday American life.

LITERATURE
Annie Dillard, 81
DIED SEPTEMBER 2026

The author of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction with a book that joined close observation of nature to spiritual inquiry. Dillard also wrote poetry, essays, memoir and fiction. Her literary agent said she died of natural causes at her home in South Wellfleet, Massachusetts.



PUBLIC SERVICE
Jon Kyl, 84
DIED SEPT. 16, 2026

Photo: U.S. Congress / Public domain

The Arizona Republican served nearly three decades in the U.S. House and Senate and became a leading voice on Western water policy. Known for detailed legislative work, Kyl briefly returned to the Senate in 2018 after John McCain's death. A family friend said he died from a neurological disorder after a dementia diagnosis.



SPORTS
Sandro Mazzola, 83
DIED SEPT. 19, 2026

Photo: Snake90 / Wikimedia Commons / Public domain

The Inter Milan captain spent his entire 17-year professional career with the club, winning four Serie A titles and two European Cups. He scored 22 goals in 70 appearances for Italy and helped win the 1968 European Championship. Inter announced his death after a long, unspecified illness.

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HALLOWEEN FRIGHTS, REAL RABIES THREAT

Bats and black cats help create Halloween's spooky atmosphere. Six confirmed rabies cases show that Polk County's danger is not make-believe.

6 CONFIRMED CASES | 5 BATS | 1 STRAY CAT | THE HALLOWEEN FRIGHT IS PRETEND - RABIES IS NOT

At Halloween, bats and black cats become spooky symbols - silhouettes in windows, props on porches and characters intended to create an eerie mood. That fright is staged. Rabies is real.

Polk County has confirmed six animal rabies cases in 2026: five bats and one stray cat. The cases stretch from Lake Wales to Lakeland, Bartow and Winter Haven, showing that an encounter with a bat or unvaccinated stray animal can bring consequences far more serious than a Halloween scare.

The first three cases, all involving bats, were confirmed in March and April near Masterpiece Road in Lake Wales, southwest Lakeland and Bartow.

The most serious incident came in June, when an unvaccinated stray cat in north Lakeland's Glen Road area attacked five people and a puppy.

A fifth case followed July 30 after a vaccinated Lakeland cat was found playing with a rabid bat near Lakewood Circle. On Sept. 15, a sixth case was confirmed after an Eloise resident picked up what she believed was a mouse - it was a live bat.

Halloween may make bats and cats part of the scenery, but the danger posed by rabies extends well beyond the holiday. Rabies is nearly always fatal after symptoms begin. Never handle bats, stray animals or wildlife behaving unusually, and keep pets from roaming.

WHERE THE SIX CASES SURFACED

MAR. 26 LAKE WALES

Bat near Masterpiece Road

MAR. 31 SW LAKELAND

Bat inside a residence

APR. 11 BARTOW

Bat found near a family cat

JUNE 15 N. LAKELAND

Stray cat attacked 5 people + puppy

JULY 30 LAKELAND

Bat near Lakewood Circle

SEPT. 15 ELOISE

Bat picked up by resident

KEEP HALLOWEEN'S FRIGHT PRETEND - VACCINATION IS REQUIRED

Polk County requires dogs and cats 4 months or older to have a current rabies vaccination and valid license tag.

Vaccination: your veterinarian; Humane Society Shot Clinic, 3195 Dundee Rd., Winter Haven, 863-324-5227;

or SPCA of Polk County Clinic, 863-646-7722. Tag information or animal reports: PCSO Animal Control, 863-577-1762.

Possible human exposure: Florida Department of Health in Polk County, 863-519-8300. Seek medical or veterinary care promptly.

Sources: PCSO Animal Control and Florida Department of Health in Polk County.

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OCTOBER 2026

YOUR MONTH, PLANNED BY THE DAY



WEEKEND FAVORITE • HARVEST HOLLER

SEPT. 18-NOV. 15 • FRI 4-8 • SAT 12-8 • SUN 1-5

950 Tavares Rd., Polk City • Adults \$17; ages 2-12 and seniors \$14; under 2 free
Maze, hayride, animals and farm play • DETAILS harvestholler.com

FRIDAY • OCTOBER 2



First Friday Cookie Carnival
6-9 PM • FREE

Munn Park • 117 N Kentucky Ave., Lakeland
Downtown's five-block First Friday adds a cookie celebration with local bakers, tastings, judging,...
DETAILS downtownlkld.com



Winter Haven First Friday
5-8 PM • FREE

Downtown • 98 3rd St. SW, Winter Haven
Dine and shop downtown after hours, hear live music, browse the night market and visit the...
DETAILS winterhavenfirstfriday.com

SATURDAY • OCTOBER 3



Grace City October Outreach
8:30 AM-NOON • FREE; REGISTRATION OPEN

Grace City Lakeland • 4540 Exploration Ave., Lakeland
Volunteers gather for worship and instructions, then serve with local partners through...
DETAILS gracecity.churchcenter.com



Cars & Coffee
7-10 AM • FREE; FOOD FOR PURCHASE

Bonnet Springs Park • 400 Bonnet Springs Blvd., Lakeland
A relaxed first-Saturday gathering of classics, customs and modern rides in the lot across...
DETAILS bonnetspringspark.com



Rootstock Fall Plant Sale
9 AM-4 PM • GARDEN ADMISSION APPLIES

Bok Tower Gardens • 1151 Tower Blvd., Lake Wales
Shop specialty growers and garden vendors, then enjoy live music and a 10 AM-1 PM hayride....
DETAILS boktowergardens.org



Moonlit Legends
6-9 PM • FAMILY EVENT

Homeland Heritage Park • 249 Church Ave., Homeland
Polk County Parks & Recreation turns the historic park into a cryptids expo with games,...
DETAILS polk-county.net

SUNDAY • OCTOBER 4



Paradise Market Turns Four
10 AM-4 PM • FREE

Camp Margaritaville • 361 Denton Ave., Auburndale
The birthday edition of this Small Business Sunday market brings 40-plus vendors,...
DETAILS margaritavilleresorts.com

TUESDAY • OCTOBER 6



Majesty of Rock
6:30 PM • TICKETED

The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
A live tribute to Journey, Styx and REO Speedwagon recreates the arena-rock harmonies, guitars and...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

THURSDAY • OCTOBER 8



Grace City College Preview Day
10 AM-1 PM • \$5; REGISTRATION OPEN

Grace City Lakeland • 4540 Exploration Ave., Lakeland
Prospective students can attend chapel, explore degree programs, tour the campus, learn about...
DETAILS gracecity.churchcenter.com



Willy Wonka Opens
OCT. 8-NOV. 1 • TICKETED

Theatre Winter Haven • 210 Cypress Gardens Blvd., Winter Haven
Charlie Bucket's Golden Ticket launches a family musical filled with colorful characters, familiar...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

SATURDAY • OCTOBER 10



Plant Pop-Up in Munn Park
8 AM-3 PM • FREE

Munn Park • 201 E Main St., Lakeland
Plant growers and garden vendors fill the park with greenery, blooms and advice for refreshing a...
DETAILS downtownlkld.com



Line Dancing in Paradise
6-10 PM • TICKETED

Camp Margaritaville • 361 Denton Ave., Auburndale
DJ Gonzo and instructor Felicia Jones lead easy-to-learn routines for newcomers and regulars...
DETAILS margaritavilleresorts.com

SUNDAY • OCTOBER 11



John O'Hurley: A Man with Standards
1:30 PM • TICKETED

The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
The actor and storyteller blends Great American Songbook favorites with warm, funny memories...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

WEDNESDAY • OCTOBER 14



The Vegas Road Show
7 PM • TICKETED

The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
Cody Stevens and a full live band deliver classic hits, Las Vegas energy and audience prize-wheel...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

OCTOBER 2026

EVENT GUIDE • CONTINUED

THURSDAY • OCTOBER 15



ThunderBeard: ZZ Top Tribute
7 PM • TICKETED
Polk Theatre • 121 S Florida Ave., Lakeland
A bearded blues-rock trio brings the unmistakable guitar riffs, grooves and stage energy of ZZ Top to...
DETAILS polktheatre.org

FRIDAY • OCTOBER 16



Lake Mirror Hot Rod Rendezvous
5-9 PM • FREE FOR SPECTATORS
Lake Mirror Promenade • 121 S Lake Ave., Lakeland
The Lake Mirror Classic opens with hot rods, race cars, custom builds, rock-and-roll atmosphere and...
DETAILS lakemirrorclassic.com



Great Pumpkin Pie 5K
FRIDAY EVENT • 5K \$35; KIDS RUN \$25
TigerTown • 2301 Lakeland Hills Blvd., Lakeland
The Lakes Church hosts a timed 5K and kids fun run with a finisher medal, shirt, pumpkin pie, post-race...
DETAILS golakeschurch.com



NEW MOVIE OPENING TODAY
STREET FIGHTER
Check local theater showtimes.
In 1993, estranged fighters Ryu and Ken are drawn into Chun-Li's World Warrior Tournament and a...
DETAILS paramount.com

SATURDAY • OCTOBER 17



Lake Mirror Concours & Car Show
10 AM-4 PM • FREE FOR SPECTATORS
Lake Mirror & Downtown • 121 S Lake Ave., Lakeland
Rare concours vehicles circle the lake while more than 450 classics, exotics, muscle cars, specialty...
DETAILS lakemirrorclassic.com



Camp Margaritaville Haunted House
7-10 PM • TIMED-ENTRY TICKETS
Camp Margaritaville • 361 Denton Ave., Auburndale
Live characters, surprise scares, an inflatable, activities and food create a full Halloween evening;...
DETAILS margaritavilleresorts.com

SATURDAYS • OCTOBER 17 & 24



Cypress Gardens Water Ski Shows
4-6 PM • FREE
MLK Jr. Park • 275 S Lake Silver Dr., Winter Haven
Former Cypress Gardens performers and the next generation of skiers bring an hour of show-skiing to...
DETAILS cypressgardensskiteam.com

SUNDAY • OCTOBER 18



Lake Mirror Classic Road Tour
8 AM-1 PM • REGISTRATION REQUIRED TO DRIVE
Starts near Lake Mirror • 121 S Lake Ave., Lakeland
The Classic closes with a clue-guided, noncompetitive drive through scenic Central Florida roads. All...
DETAILS lakemirrorclassic.com

SATURDAY • OCTOBER 24



Downtown Fall Night Market
5-9 PM • FREE
Downtown Lakeland • 117 N Kentucky Ave., Lakeland
An evening of local shopping, dining, live entertainment and community brings fall...
DETAILS downtownlkld.com



Lakeland Holiday Expo
OCT. 24 AT 10 AM • OCT. 25 AT 11 AM
RP Funding Center • 701 W Lime St., Lakeland
Shop holiday gifts, art and crafts, explore food and home-improvement vendors, and visit the...
DETAILS rpfundingcenter.com

TUESDAY • OCTOBER 27



Growing Great Tomatoes
10-11 AM
Lakeland Public Library • 100 Lake Morton Dr., Lakeland
A practical library workshop focused on growing healthy tomatoes in Central Florida's climate,...
DETAILS lakelandpl.libcal.com

FRIDAY • OCTOBER 30



Boo Bash: Party in Paradise
6-10 PM • TICKETED
Camp Margaritaville • 361 Denton Ave., Auburndale
A magic show, DJ, costume contest, obstacle course, balloon art, crafts, games and a...
DETAILS margaritavilleresorts.com



Rocky Horror Picture Show
OCT. 30 & 31 • 9 PM • 18+ • TICKETED
Polk Theatre • 121 S Florida Ave., Lakeland
The Lipstick Players return for two Halloween-weekend presentations of the cult...
DETAILS polktheatre.org

SATURDAY • OCTOBER 31



Bok Tower Gardens Boo-tanical Bash
9 AM-5 PM • GARDEN ADMISSION APPLIES
Bok Tower Gardens • 1151 Tower Blvd., Lake Wales
A not-too-scary day of fall fun includes a Monster Mash dance party, pumpkin painting...
DETAILS boktowergardens.org



Saturday Night Rodeo
7:30 PM • TICKETED
Westgate River Ranch • 3200 River Ranch Blvd., River Ranch
A family-friendly arena show features trick riding, barrel racing, bull riding and a...
DETAILS westgateresorts.com

NOVEMBER 2026

YOUR MONTH, PLANNED BY THE DAY

EVERY SATURDAY IN NOVEMBER • 7, 14, 21 & 28



Downtown Farmers Curb Market
8 AM-2 PM • FREE
117 N Kentucky Ave., Lakeland
Produce, baked goods and local makers.



Saturday Night Rodeo
7:30 PM • TICKETED
3200 River Ranch Blvd., River Ranch
Trick riding, barrel racing and bull riding.

SUNDAY • NOVEMBER 1



Willy Wonka — Final Performance
2:30 PM • TICKETED
Theatre Winter Haven • 210 Cypress Gardens Blvd., Winter Haven
The final Golden Ticket tour through Wonka's mysterious factory closes this...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

SATURDAY • NOVEMBER 7



Cars & Coffee
7-10 AM • FREE; FOOD FOR PURCHASE
Bonnet Springs Park • 400 Bonnet Springs Blvd., Lakeland
Bring a favorite vehicle or simply walk the lineup at this casual first-Saturday gathering across from...
DETAILS bonnetspringspark.com

TUESDAY • NOVEMBER 3



Almighty Queen Tribute
6:30 PM • TICKETED
The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
A full-scale rock tribute recreates Queen's soaring vocals, stacked harmonies, heavy...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com



50th Lake to Lake 10K
7:30 AM START • REGISTRATION REQUIRED
Lake Mirror Promenade • 121 S Lake Ave., Lakeland
Lakeland Runners Club marks the race's 50th running with a course linking the city's lakes;...
DETAILS runsignup.com/Race/LaketoLake10k



Walk for Life
8-10 AM • REGISTRATION REQUIRED
First Presbyterian • 175 Lake Hollingsworth Dr., Lakeland
A family-friendly fundraising walk begins with 8 AM check-in before participants circle Lake...
DETAILS victorylakeland.org

FRIDAY • NOVEMBER 6



Lakeland First Friday: Goin' Country
6-9 PM • FREE
Downtown Lakeland • 117 N Kentucky Ave., Lakeland
Munn Park goes country with music, boot-scootin' and free line-dancing...
DETAILS downtownlkld.com



Women of Rock
7 PM • TICKETED
Polk Theatre • 121 S Florida Ave., Lakeland
A live concert celebrates the powerful voices and enduring hits of women who shaped rock music.
DETAILS polktheatre.org



Winter Haven First Friday
5-8 PM • FREE
Downtown • 98 3rd St. SW, Winter Haven
Downtown restaurants, shops, live musicians, market vendors and the...
DETAILS winterhavenfirstfriday.com

WEDNESDAY • NOVEMBER 11



A Salute to the USO
7 PM • TICKETED
The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
A Veterans Day tribute recreates classic USO entertainment with music, comedy and portrayals...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

SUNDAY • NOVEMBER 15



Harvest Holler — Season Finale
1-5 PM • TICKETED
Harvest Holler • 950 Tavares Rd., Polk City
The farm's final fall afternoon includes the corn maze, hayride, animals, cow train, play areas and...
DETAILS harvestholler.com



NEW MOVIE OPENING TODAY
THE CAT IN THE HAT
Check local theater showtimes.
The Cat must cheer siblings Gabby and Sebastian after a difficult move—his last...
DETAILS thecatinthehatmovie.com



Paradise Market
10 AM-2 PM • FREE
Camp Margaritaville • 361 Denton Ave., Auburndale
More than 40 local vendors bring handmade goods, sweet treats and one-of-a-kind finds to the...
DETAILS margaritavilleresorts.com

NOVEMBER 2026

EVENT GUIDE • CONTINUED

TUESDAY • NOVEMBER 17



Divas of Soul
6:30 PM • TICKETED
The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
A live tribute celebrates the powerhouse voices and dance-floor favorites of...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

FRIDAY • NOVEMBER 20



Daisy Fever Rocks the '70s
6:30 PM • TICKETED
The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
A high-energy concert returns to the music, style and guitar-driven sound of the 1970s.
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com



NEW MOVIE OPENING TODAY
THE HUNGER GAMES: SUNRISE ON THE REAPING
Check local theater showtimes.
Panem returns 24 years before the original story, on the morning of the 50th Hunger...
DETAILS lionsgate.com

SATURDAY • NOVEMBER 21



Cypress Gardens Water Ski Show
4-6 PM • FREE
MLK Jr. Park • 275 S Lake Silver Dr., Winter Haven
Show skiers bring classic Cypress Gardens spectacle to Lake Silver. Pack chairs or a...
DETAILS cypressgardensskiteam.com



Line Dancing in Paradise
6-10 PM • TICKETED
Camp Margaritaville • 361 Denton Ave., Auburndale
DJ Gonzo and instructor Felicia Jones lead beginner-friendly routines and keep the...
DETAILS margaritavilleresorts.com



A Night of Grand Ballroom Dancing
7 PM • TICKETED
The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
The Theatre Winter Haven Big Band supplies live waltzes, foxtrots, swing,...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

WEDNESDAY • NOVEMBER 25



Pretty Woman: The Musical Opens
7:30 PM • TICKETED
Theatre Winter Haven • 210 Cypress Gardens Blvd., Winter Haven
The Broadway musical retells Vivian and Edward's unexpected romance with an original...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com



Thanksgiving Meal Delivery
NOON-4 PM • VOLUNTEERS MUST PREREGISTER
RP Funding Center • 701 W Lime St., Lakeland
Victory Church and VISTE organize routes for volunteers to deliver a Thanksgiving meal and...
DETAILS victorylakeland.org



NEW MOVIE OPENING TODAY
HEXED
Check local theater showtimes.
Teenager Billie discovers magical powers and enters a hidden witch realm with her cautious...
DETAILS disney.com

FRIDAY • NOVEMBER 27



Swan Lake: Symphony of Lights
7 PM • TICKETED
Polk Theatre • 121 S Florida Ave., Lakeland
Classical ballet, Tchaikovsky's score and theatrical illumination bring the enduring tale...
DETAILS polktheatre.org

SATURDAY • NOVEMBER 28



Holiday Concert: RUNA
6-8 PM; MUSIC AT 7 • GARDEN ADMISSION APPLIES
Bok Tower Gardens • 1151 Tower Blvd., Lake Wales
The Celtic-American roots group blends Irish and Scottish melodies with bluegrass, jazz,...
DETAILS boktowergardens.org



The Last Five Years in Concert
7 PM • TICKETED
The Ritz Theatre • 263 W Central Ave., Winter Haven
Jason Robert Brown's intimate musical follows a five-year relationship from opposite directions...
DETAILS theatrewinterhaven.com

SUNDAY • NOVEMBER 29



Yoga in the Gardens
9-10 AM • REGISTRATION REQUIRED
Bok Tower Gardens • 1151 Tower Blvd., Lake Wales
An all-levels outdoor class on Camellia Glade combines gentle movement, mindful breathing...
DETAILS boktowergardens.org



BUGS DON'T STAND A CHANCE!

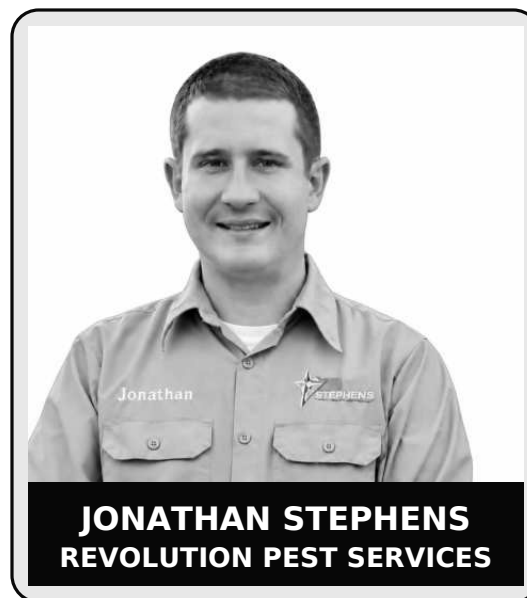
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EVANGELICAL OUTREACH

Evangelical Ministries Put Faith to Work in Lakeland

Churches and Christian outreach organizations provide groceries, meals, clothing, prayer and other practical assistance in neighborhoods across the city.

Across Lakeland, evangelical churches and Christian outreach ministries are placing food and practical help close to the neighborhoods they serve.

City of Refuge Church of God in Christ operates its Compassion Pantry at 1102 N. Ruth Ave. Its published schedule lists pantry service Thursdays from 9 to 11 a.m. The ministry provides groceries and gives church members a direct way to serve nearby families.

The Dream Center of Lakeland, 635 W. 5th St., holds food distribution Tuesdays from 4 to 6:30 p.m. and opens its Community Shoppe and Market Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon. The organization also offers Sunday breakfast with a Gospel message, worship with Corridor Church, Bible studies, family activities, classes and neighborhood outreach.

Greater St. Paul's Family Services distributes groceries at 1019 W. 5th St. on Mondays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to noon. The program works with community food partners. Because schedules can change, visitors should call before traveling.

Combee Connection Ministries and Church, 1140 N. Combee Road, combines worship with food, clothing, hygiene supplies, baby items and help connecting people to rehabilitation or family support. Its published pantry schedule begins at 1 p.m. Thursdays. Sunday coffee and fellowship begin at 10:15 a.m., followed by worship at 11.

The ministries differ in size, but share an evangelical understanding of service: practical help offered with prayer, relationships and Gospel outreach. For neighbors facing shortages, that can mean groceries and essential supplies for the week. For volunteers, it is faith put into action. To help, contact the ministries directly about current needs.

EVANGELICAL OUTREACH GUIDE			CALL AHEAD BEFORE TRAVELING
CITY OF REFUGE COGIC 1102 N. Ruth Ave. Thu. 9-11 a.m. 863-940-2061	DREAM CENTER OF LAKELAND 635 W. 5th St. Tue. distribution: 4-6:30 p.m. Wed. market: 10 a.m.-noon 863-413-0088	GREATER ST. PAUL'S FAMILY SERVICES 1019 W. 5th St. Mon. & Thu. 10 a.m.-noon 863-686-8865	COMBEE CONNECTION MINISTRIES 1140 N. Combee Road Thu. pantry begins at 1 p.m. Sun. coffee 10:15; worship 11 863-617-5824



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PASTOR'S CORNER

PASTOR'S CORNER | A MESSAGE OF GRACE AND SALVATION

The Promise of Paradise

READ: LUKE 23:39-43 | BASED ON THEMES FROM C.H. SPURGEON'S 1889 SERMON "THE BELIEVING THIEF"

An original devotional inspired by a public-domain sermon
Three crosses stood at Calvary. On one hung Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God. On the other two hung condemned criminals. One mocked Jesus, but the other recognized the truth.

That man admitted his guilt. He acknowledged that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Then, looking beyond the suffering of the cross, he recognized Jesus as King and said to Him, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

The thief could not repair his past. He could not climb down from the cross, perform good works or prove that he deserved another opportunity. He had nothing to offer Christ except a repentant heart and genuine faith.

Jesus did not tell him to earn mercy. He did not place him on probation or make him wait to discover whether he had been good enough. Jesus answered, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

What an extraordinary promise: Today. With Christ. In paradise.

The thief's salvation did not rest upon a spotless past. It rested upon the spotless Savior beside him. His story reminds us that no life is beyond the reach of God's grace and no repentant sinner is too far gone to come to Christ.

This passage is not an invitation to postpone faith until the final hour. None of us is promised another day. It is an invitation to stop trusting in ourselves and place our trust in Jesus now.

Receiving Christ means more than knowing facts about Him or admiring His teachings. It means acknowledging our sin, turning toward Him and trusting that His death and resurrection are sufficient to save us. The Savior who received the thief on the cross still receives everyone who comes to Him in faith.

If you have never trusted Christ, you can come to Him today. You do not need a better past or a perfect record. You need the Savior.

A PRAYER OF FAITH

Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner and cannot save myself. I believe You died for my sins and rose again. Forgive me, receive me and help me follow You as my Savior and Lord. Amen.

PUT FAITH INTO ACTION

Read Luke 23:39-43. If you have never personally placed your faith in Christ, do not wait for a more convenient time. Turn to Him today.

Pastor's Corner rotates among pastors whose churches maintain an active paid directory listing. Submissions must be original or properly attributed.

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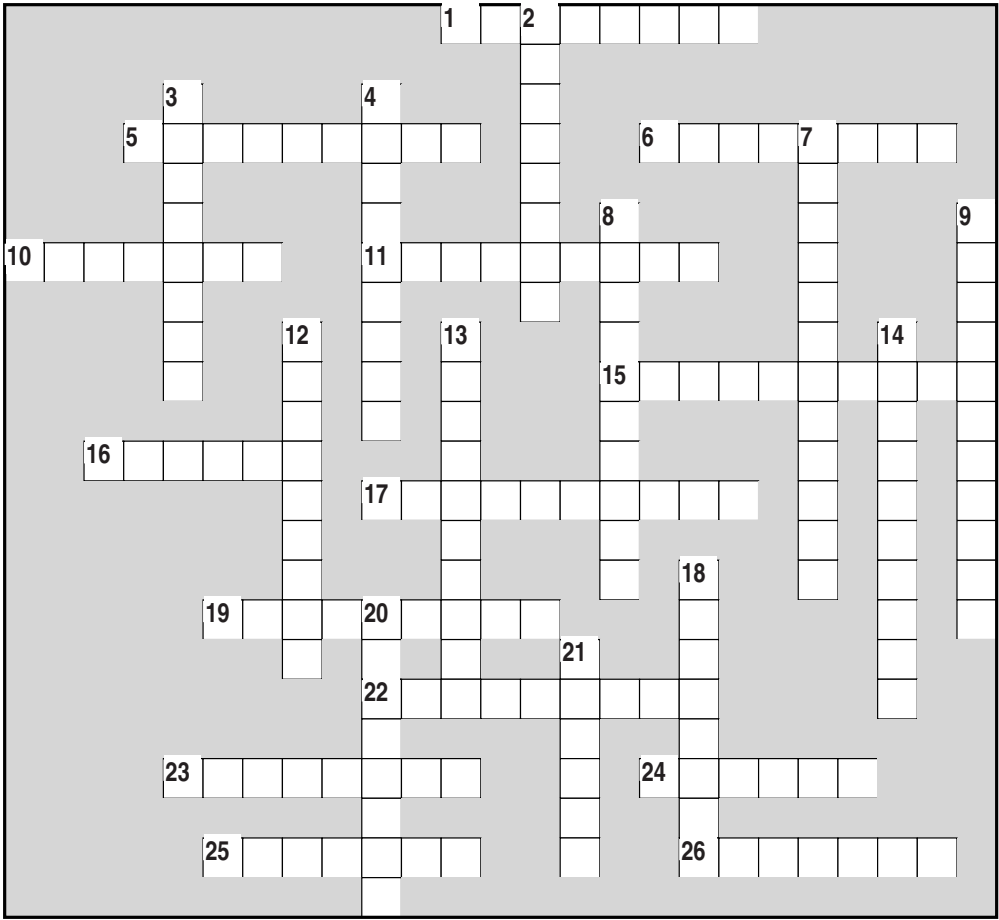
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FUN & GAMES

POLK COUNTY CROSSWORD

WRITE ANSWERS WITHOUT SPACES



ACROSS

1. Northern city sharing Polk's name.
5. Polk-Osceola community.
6. Community in Polk's northeast corner.
10. Southwest of Lakeland.
11. Lakeland-area community ending in PARK.
15. Between Lakeland and Winter Haven.
16. Shares its name with a Scottish city.
17. Southern city with a weather-defying name.
19. City beginning with a military stronghold.
22. Body of water plus part of the U.K.
23. Northwest of Lakeland.
24. Between Winter Haven and Auburndale.
25. East of Lake Hamilton.
26. Between Bartow and Lake Wales.

DOWN

2. Home of Florida Southern College.
3. South of Bartow; patriotic-sounding name.
4. Named for a bird and body of water.
7. Lakeland-area community on U.S. 98.
8. A lake plus a man's first name.
9. City of the first Publix Food Store.
12. Northeast Polk city near I-4.
13. Near Webber International University.
14. Municipality ending literally in CITY.
18. Near Kathleen, northwest of Lakeland.
20. Polk city sharing a fruit's name.
21. The Polk County seat.

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USE 1-9 ONCE IN EACH ROW, COLUMN AND 3x3 BOX

1 - EASY

6	3	8				5	
			8			9	
		1	7			6	3
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2 - EASY

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3 - MEDIUM

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4 - HARD

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5 - MEDIUM

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6 - HARD

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FLORIDA WORD FINDER

Words may run in any direction

V	G	N	I	Q	Q	Z	C	S	Y	Q	H	X	Z	S	R	N	X	I	H	B	E	Q	D	F
C	F	G	S	W	Y	A	E	S	G	M	J	B	S	Z	Z	N	Y	R	C	H	D	Z	W	J
X	W	C	C	S	S	T	V	O	A	X	P	M	P	M	Z	J	I	D	Y	F	J	W	Z	G
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Y	Y	H	M	W	X	K	J	A	B	A	G	T	S	C	R	U	B	J	A	Y	A	R	Z	R
S	U	W	E	U	U	Y	F	J	T	R	O	H	B	H	I	B	I	S	C	U	S	U	A	R
D	C	K	O	R	A	N	G	E	Y	H	V	E	H	Y	I	S	H	D	A	L	N	T	I	I
V	N	B	Z	E	O	A	E	L	A	Z	A	R	Y	S	A	N	D	H	I	L	L	C	Z	Y
F	X	F	U	O	F	N	F	M	D	X	Z	N	A	C	I	L	E	P	P	E	I	Z	C	R

ALLIGATOR | CYPRESS | PALMETTO | HERON | TURTLE | TRAIL | ORANGE | SUNSHINE
SANDHILL | LIVE OAK | OSPREY | MAGNOLIA | MANATEE | HIBISCUS | SAWGRASS | BOBCAT
PANTHER | PELICAN | IBIS | AZALEA | SCRUB JAY | SPANISH MOSS

ANSWERS - NO PEEKING

CROSSWORD - ACROSS

1 Polkcity, 5 Poinciana, 6 Loughman, 10 Medulla, 11 Eatonpark, 15 Auburndale, 16 Dundee, 17 Frostproof, 19 Fortmeade, 22 Lakewales, 23 Kathleen, 24 Inwood, 25 Waverly, 26 Alturas

CROSSWORD - DOWN

2 Lakeland, 3 Homeland, 4 Eaglelake, 7 Highlandcity, 8 Lakealfred, 9 Winterhaven, 12 Davenport, 13 Babsonpark, 14 Hainescity, 18 Gibsonia, 20 Mulberry, 21 Bartow

WORD FINDER - START CELL + DIRECTION

ALLIGATOR R6C17 W; CYPRESS R9C12 NW; PALMETTO R10C21 W; HERON R12C3 SE; TURTLE R14C23 N; TRAIL R10C15 N; ORANGE R14C4 E; SUNSHINE R9C11 SE; SANDHILL R15C15 E; LIVE OAK R10C23 NW; OSPREY R3C9 S; MAGNOLIA R5C11 E; MANATEE R9C14 SW; HIBISCUS R13C15 E; SAWGRASS R4C9 E; BOBCAT R5C20 SW; PANTHER R9C13 S; PELICAN R16C19 W; IBIS R7C17 W; AZALEA R15C12 W; SCRUB JAY R12C14 E; SPANISH MOSS R2C14 S

SUDOKU SOLUTIONS

PUZZLE 1

638149257 / 257836941 / 941752638
765398124 / 893421765 / 124567893
472685319 / 586913472 / 319274586

PUZZLE 2

674891352 / 253764189 / 981523476
546179238 / 719382645 / 832456917
365947821 / 128635794 / 497218563

PUZZLE 3

715864923 / 648293751 / 932571684
357618492 / 186942375 / 429735168
561489237 / 894327516 / 273156849

PUZZLE 4

798163254 / 254897361 / 361452798
435928176 / 829671435 / 176534829
513249687 / 687315942 / 942786513

PUZZLE 5

359748261 / 874621953 / 162593478
743286195 / 591437826 / 628915347
916354782 / 435872619 / 287169534

PUZZLE 6

569324178 / 234178659 / 718659324
687935412 / 395412867 / 142867935
453281796 / 821796543 / 976543281

Gillbert

Week 1

There. Nice and spotless.

PAT PAT

Why do you keep doing that?

Making sure she has job security.

FLORIDA MAN

The Florida Yard Sale

Moving north. Everything must go.

YARD SALE

FREE

SPACE WARTS

Week 1: The Leverage Problem

I'm gonna blow up your home world and then you're gonna tell me where the rebel base is.

Now tell me where the base is.

Why would she tell you now?

I mixed up the sequence again, didn't I?

POLITICS

The Poll Position

Do you have a position on taxes?

Absolutely.

What is it?

Whichever way the breeze is blowing.

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