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November 2025



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See page 6-7 for details.



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COMPASS



City of Parkland Community Page

Pine Tree Estates

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It's All About

Grateful For So Much!

We all know the theme of most November publications, but I'd like to be so bold as to avoid some of the sappy stuff and add some humor. Guess what? I'm grateful. I hope you are, too! I'd like to give thanks for things I often forget to say, and will definitely not be mentioning over turkey. Thank God that I didn't get pulled over when I missed the stop sign, my make-up wasn't on yet, and was only wearing pajamas. Thanks to my dog and horses who are always excited to see me. Thank you to my amazing husband for trudging to the barn in the early morning rain to fix fences and a water main (country living at its finest) in a flooded, mucky horse stall.

Thanks for the freedom to worship in whatever way we choose in this Land of the Free and Home of the Brave!

More importantly, November is the time for us to be grateful for the brave men and women who are the backbone of our armed forces. Thanks to every person who has put their own life at risk to protect our country, our freedom, and our children. Please acknowledge someone you know who serves or has served in the military on Veterans Day, November 11... or take the time to honor them during the entire month of November. They serve us EVERY day. Let's give them 30 in 2025.

God bless your family and each and every one of our troops,

Shellie & Scott

This Month's Digital Issue

Spectator™ Magazine

7660 NW 82nd Ter. • Parkland • FL • 33067

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Distributed by

US Mail &
Baron Express
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On the cover:

Laura's Ultimate Pilates & Fitness, Celebrating 15 Years.
See Pages 6 and 7.

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Community!

Mastering Leadership at Home and in Community

By Shellie Miller Farrugia

In the heart of every thriving family and community lies effective leadership, rooted in three essential disciplines: skill management, time management, and emotional management. These principles, often associated with corporate boardrooms, hold equal power in the living rooms and neighborhood gatherings where lives are shaped. Parents, coaches, and volunteers who master them don't just guide—they inspire growth, strengthen bonds, and build resilient foundations for the future.

Skill management begins with a commitment to personal growth that ripples outward. The most effective leaders in family and community life give their very best effort to those they serve, not through sporadic heroics but through consistent, reliable actions. This starts with embracing the mindset: "To do more, I've got to be more." Whether it's a parent learning new ways to support a child's education or a community organizer honing conflict resolution skills, the capacity to develop abilities separates influencers from bystanders.

We fall into three categories: 1) the unlearned, who resist adaptation; 2) the learned, who coast on past successes; or 3) the learners, who evolve daily. The ways that brought you to your role—be it raising young children or launching a local initiative—rarely sustain it long-term. Most plateau when they lose the tension between where they are and where their family or community needs them to be.

True leaders change this by altering daily habits: reading a parenting book, attending a workshop, or practicing active listening. In turn, they model lifelong learning for their children and neighbors, fostering households and communities alive with curiosity and capability.

Time management transforms intention into reality amid life's competing demands. Families juggle school runs, meals, and extracurriculars; community leaders balance meetings with personal responsibilities. Excellence here means working smarter, not just harder—prioritizing what matters most. A mother who carves out uninterrupted family dinners builds deeper connections than one who multitasks endlessly. The best isn't vastly superior to average; it's more consistent.

By delegating chores to empower kids, saying no to distractions, and scheduling quality time, leaders create space for meaningful engagement. This discipline prevents burnout, ensuring parents and volunteers show up fully present, whether cheering at a soccer game or planning a block party. In community settings, it means focusing efforts on high-impact projects, like youth mentorship programs, that yield lasting benefits.

Emotional management anchors it all, navigating the joys and tensions of human connection with empathy and poise. Families and communities thrive when leaders regulate their own emotions to respond thoughtfully—calming a sibling squabble with patience or mediating neighbor disputes with fairness. Self-awareness allows a father to apologize after a heated moment, modeling accountability; resilience helps a PTA president rally after a setback. This emotional intelligence amplifies skills and time by directing them with compassion, creating environments where everyone feels heard and valued.

Leadership in family and community is a daily pursuit of growth, demanding we choose to be learners. By focusing on these three pillars, ordinary individuals elevate their homes and neighborhoods into extraordinary spaces of support and possibility—proving that the smallest, most consistent efforts yield the greatest legacies.



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The Power of Pilates with Laura

By Shellie Miller

A fitness enthusiast since the age of sixteen, Laura Simoncini has always maintained her focus on health and wellness. Twenty years ago, after giving birth to twin boys, she found herself frustrated trying to lose her “baby fat.” A friend suggested Pilates [pi-LAH-teez]. The more Laura learned, the more she was drawn in. As she practiced, her body transformed—stronger, leaner, and more to her liking. She soon realized that many people who exercise regularly suffer from back pain and stiffness simply because they lack a strong core. “What really changed me was when I had my twin boys. I could not get rid of my belly fat!” she says. For Laura, and many other postpartum mothers, Pilates proved to be the key.

Laura moved to Parkland fifteen years ago, drawn by its A-rated schools for her sons. Soon after, she opened one of the area’s first original businesses in the Parkland Commons Plaza—Laura’s Ultimate Pilates. Today, it’s a true community landmark. “We are a full-equipment studio,” she explains. “There is mat work and equipment work. To be fully certified as a Pilates instructor, you need both. While Mat Pilates works the core of the body, the machines also incorporate core strength, but add further emphasis to the arms and legs, allowing for a ‘Total Body Workout.’” She stresses that Pilates lengthens and tones muscles without adding bulk. “Nothing will change your body like Pilates,” she says confidently.

Her studio now offers more than thirty group classes a week, limited to ten participants. One-On-One privates are available for clients who want more of an individual approach designed around their specific goals and needs. Each experience is customized to a client’s individual ability. Students range in age from a seven-year-old ice skater to clients in their eighties. Laura’s passion shines through as she describes her work and her team:



Laura Simoncini,
Founder & Instructor

“We have all walks of life here. We train professional athletes as well as people who just want to change the way they look and feel about their body.”

Longtime student Alison Mirer, who has attended classes for more than a decade, says, “Laura’s Ultimate Pilates only gets better as time goes on! Every class is different and challenging. Laura cares deeply about her students and their results. She’s not a typical group instructor—she makes sure everyone gets a complete, full-body workout.” Fellow student Helen Lee agrees: “I love going to Laura’s Ultimate Pilates because every instructor brings unique energy and style. No two sessions ever feel the same, and that variety keeps me inspired, challenged, and always excited to come back.”

Laura encourages anyone curious about Pilates to come try a class and experience its benefits firsthand. With a wide range of packages and pricing options, newcomers can easily find a program that fits their schedule and goals. “You’ll walk out of here with better posture and a sense of accomplishment,” she promises. “The hour flies by!”

Looking ahead, while classes will continue to benefit clients, Laura is also excited to announce the studio’s upcoming Certified Teacher Training Program, launching in January. “I started this studio fifteen years ago, and now we’re expanding into a Pilates Teacher Training Facility,” she says proudly.

Whether you’re looking to transform your body, improve your health, or become a Certified Instructor, Laura’s Ultimate Pilates offers an inspiring place to begin.

For more information please see the ad on opposite page or visit www.LaurasUltimatePilates.com



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Meet The Koval Family



The Koval family is all about faith, fun, and staying active. Coral Springs residents Kevin and Maria Koval are proud parents to two energetic boys—Jionni, 13, and Joseph, 11—and their lovable Labrador Retriever, Cannoli, who they describe as “the sweetest thing ever.”

Kevin is a Principal and senior executive headhunter at a global executive search firm, where he connects top leaders with premier opportunities in the real estate industry. Maria has been shaping young minds for more than two decades as a 5th grade Math Honors teacher at American Heritage School in Plantation. “Teaching is truly my calling,” she says. “I love watching my students grow in confidence, curiosity, and a love for learning.”

Both Jionni and Joseph attend American Heritage, where they thrive academically and athletically. Jionni, an eighth grader, plays golf for his school and basketball for the City of Coral Springs. When he’s not on the court or the course, he enjoys riding his E-bike and spending time outdoors. Sixth grader Joseph is equally passionate about sports—he plays travel soccer, baseball, and basketball, always bringing great energy and teamwork to every game.

Athletics are truly a family affair for the Kovals. Kevin has spent more than seven years coaching youth sports and currently serves as the Athletic Director for the Coral Springs Basketball Club. He also plays in a men’s hockey league and enjoys basketball himself. Maria shares his enthusiasm for fitness and mentorship. “I love working out, playing soccer, and tutoring kids,” she says. “Helping children build confidence and reach their full potential is one of the most rewarding things I do.”

As a family, the Kovals love adventure—especially cruises and beach getaways. “Whether we’re traveling, enjoying the sunshine, or just relaxing at home, we always make time to laugh, connect, and enjoy each other’s company,” Maria shares.

The Kovals are also deeply connected to their community and faith. They attend Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church and say the sense of belonging there mirrors what they appreciate most about Coral Springs. “We love how the city takes care of its residents,” says Kevin. “It’s a safe, family-centered place that truly feels like home.”

Their family motto is simple: live with faith, kindness, and teamwork. As Maria puts it, “I love helping kids reach their potential—in school and in life.” Kevin adds, “Coaching young athletes keeps me inspired every day.” For Jionni, “I’m always up for a game, a challenge, or an adventure.” Joseph sums it up perfectly: “I love playing sports and having fun with my friends!”

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By Ashley Ferraro

Dr. Gabriela Rifkin

Brings Physician-Led Aesthetic Care to Parkland's Bella Vista

When Dr. Gabriela Rifkin, MD, opened Bella Vista, she set out to create a practice devoted to non-surgical aesthetics, a longtime passion rooted in her background as a physician and microsurgeon. After years practicing ophthalmology and performing oculoplastic procedures, she envisioned an intimate, concierge-style setting where she could provide individualized care and build lasting relationships with her patients.

Located on the border of Parkland and Coral Springs, Bella Vista offers a range of non-surgical cosmetic treatments, including Botox and fillers, microneedling, platelet-rich fibrin (PRF) therapy, and advanced laser services. Every procedure at Bella Vista is performed by Dr. Rifkin herself, a board-certified ophthalmologist and microsurgeon with years of experience treating the delicate structures of the face.

Dr. Rifkin wanted Bella Vista to be a place where patients receive personalized, one-on-one care. "It's just me," Dr. Rifkin said. "Every patient is seen, evaluated, and treated by me. I love building real relationships with the people I care for and watching their progress over time."

The result is a warm, patient-centered environment where individuals can feel comfortable and confident at every step, from consultation to follow-up.

A Parkland resident, Dr. Rifkin lives locally with her husband and two children. She opened Bella Vista in early 2024 after years of practicing ophthalmology in South Florida. Her background in oculoplastics, a subspecialty focused on surgical and medical aesthetics of the eyes and face, naturally led her to pursue her passion for cosmetic medicine.

What makes Dr. Rifkin's approach so effective is her

emphasis on holistic, individualized care. "When people come in asking for something like Botox, I always take the time to understand what they're really hoping to achieve," Dr. Rifkin explained. "Often, it's not just about treating wrinkles—it's about restoring balance and rejuvenation in a way that looks natural and feels true to them. My goal is to guide patients toward the right combination of treatments, whether that's Botox, PRF, or energy-based therapies, so we can create results that make them feel more like themselves."

Among her favorite treatments are PRF therapy and IPL laser treatments. PRF uses the patient's own blood to promote healing and collagen production without introducing chemicals or synthetic materials. IPL, or intense pulsed light, helps address sun damage, redness, and pigmentation, which are common concerns in sunny South Florida. The treatment can also provide relief for dry eye symptoms.

Dr. Rifkin's advanced training as an ophthalmologist and surgeon ensures a deep understanding of facial anatomy, precision in every treatment, and the ability to respond to any medical concerns that arise. For patients, that expertise translates to peace of mind and consistently excellent results.

Bella Vista also offers flexible payment plans through Cherry, allowing patients to spread costs over several months. Complimentary consultations are available to discuss goals, explore options, and create a personalized treatment plan.

Bella Vista is located at 5411 N. University Drive, Suite 203, Coral Springs. For more information or to schedule a consultation, visit bellavistafla.com or call 954-507-0343. See ad on opposite page.





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WINTER BASEBALL & T-BALL

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For more info. visit. www.csall.com, or call (954) 369-4813. coralspringsamerican@gmail.com

CHALLENGER BASEBALL LEAGUE

Strives to reach disabled kids and their families at no cost. For more info, call (954) 345-9329.

NORTH SPRINGS LITTLE LEAGUE

For more info go to www.northspringsll.com

Basketball

CORAL SPRINGS BASKETBALL

Year round play check for sign up dates.
www.CSBCHOOPS.com or call (954) 360-1200 or Barry Popock (954) 599-6660

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Call or Text 954-501-4985 to Register and more info. Instagram [csbc_femalehoops](https://www.instagram.com/csbcb_femalehoops)

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CORAL SPRINGS FLAG FOOTBALL CLUB

For more info, call 954-406-0660, email info@csffc.org or go to www.CSFFC.ORG

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See ad below.

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For more info contact Mike at 954-540-8970 or visit www.buzzardslacrosse.org

Running

NORTHWEST BROWARD ROAD RUNNERS

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For more info. go to www.nwbrcc.com or email jaygee725@gmail.com

Soccer

CORAL SPRINGS RECREATIONAL

The official Recreational Soccer Program in the City of Coral Springs. Play from November through the first weekend in March. Boys and Girls U06-19U are welcome. Play at Mullins Park, Coral Springs. For more info: www.csys.org, email: csysadmin@csys.org or call Mimi Milton at 954-341-6391.

CITY OF CORAL SPRINGS SPRING TRAVEL SOCCER CLUB

The official Travel Soccer program in the City of Coral Springs. Boys & Girls U8-U11. City of Coral Springs

Softball

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Private Schools & Camps

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Is an accredited, college-preparatory, independent, non-sectarian school serving families of the pre-kindergarten through high school age groups. For more info, call (954) 247-0011 or [www.NBPS.org](#) See page 15.

Dance

DANCE THEATRE

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Fitness

LAURA'S ULTIMATE PILATES & FITNESS

Transforming bodies since 2010. All Levels Welcome, Group Classes & Private Sessions. **Please visit** [www.LaurasUltimatePilates.com](#) or call (954)575-2121. See article and ad on pages 6-7.

Special Needs

PARKLAND BUDDY SPORTS

Find out about league offerings and activities. [www.ParklandBuddySports.com](#)

CHALLENGER BASEBALL LEAGUE

Open to all special needs kids and their families at no cost. For more info, call (954) 345-9329 or [www.challengerbaseballofbroward.com](#)

THE FRIENDSHIP JOURNEY

Provides programs & facilities for children and young adults with special needs, while creating awareness and sensitivity. For more info, contact [hello@thefriendshipjourney.org](#) or [www.thefriendshipjourney.org](#)

Volleyball

SAND TURTLES VOLLEYBALL CLUB

Beginner sand volleyball training for kids and adults. Call Mark Lewkowicz for more info. (954)345-0500. [www.sandturtlesvolleyball.com](#)

Parkland P-Rec

PICKLEBALL

Pickleball is a racquet sport that combines elements of badminton, tennis and table tennis. Players use solid paddles to hit a whiffle ball over a net. Yearly fee: Residents \$45/Non-residents \$54. P-REC – 10559 Trails End (located inside Pine Trails Park)

Scouting

Scouting offers Year Round Activities for Boys and Girls in K to 12th Grade
Find a local unit at [www.beascout.org](#)

Seminole Nation

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Cypress Park Tennis	(954)345-2100
Mullins Park Pool	(954)345-2170
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Tackle Football & Cheerleading

PARKLAND RANGERS TACKLE FOOTBALL & CHEERLEADING

Football Contact: 786-236-0948 or info@parklandrangers.com
Cheer contact: 786-236-0948 or cheer@parklandrangers.com.

Flag Football

PARKLAND FLAG FOOTBALL
For more info, see www.parklandflag.com

Lacrosse

PARKLAND REDHAWKS
For more info go to www.parklandlacrosse.com
BUZZARDS MEN'S LACROSSE CLUB
For more info contact Mike at 954-540-8970

Soccer

PARKLAND REC SOCCER
For more info, visit www.parklandsoccer.net

PARKLAND TRAVEL SOCCER CLUB
For more info, call (754) 240-9005 visit www.parklandtravelsoccer.com or emailinfo@parklandtravelsoccer.com.

Private Schools & Camp

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Is an accredited, college-preparatory, independent, non-sectarian school serving families of the pre-kindergarten through high school age groups. For more info. call (954) 247-0011 or www.NBPS.org See page 15.

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THE FRIENDSHIP JOURNEY

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Adult Softball

For more info. contact Parkland Parks & Rec. Manager Bruno Battel at 954-757-4103

Scouting

Scouting offers Year Round Activities for

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Leisure Services	(954)757-4105
Field Conditions	(954)757-4110
Park Ranger	(954)575-1007
Youth, Teen, & Senior Programs	(954)757-4129
City Hall	(954)753-5040
Tennis	(954)757-1910
P-REC	(954)757-4105

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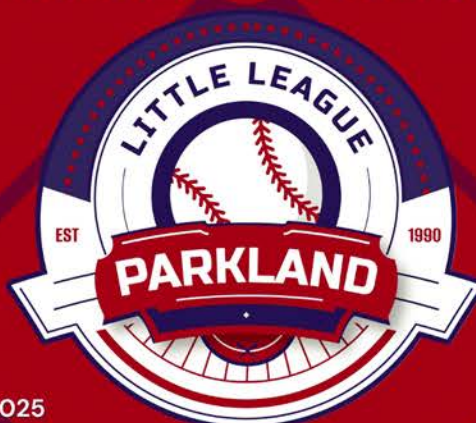
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www.parklandlittleleague.com

REGISTRATION OPENS OCTOBER 1, 2025

Parkland Little League Spring 2026
Registration is open from October 1st
through November 30th 2025.

Volunteer Head & Assistant Coach
positions are open for registration.

Sponsorship Opportunities Available
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Parkland Little League



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Divisions (based on 2026 age chart)

Rookie (TBall) : 4-6 Years Old
Farm (Coach Pitch) : 7-8 Years Old
Minors (Player Pitch) : 9-10 Years Old
Majors (50/70) : 11-12 Years Old
Juniors : 13-14 Years Old
Seniors : 15-16 Years Old

Spring 2026 Season

Evaluations: To Be Announced
For all divisions except TBall

Practices begin in February &
Games begin in March
Season will run through Late April
Playoffs will begin early May



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Howard J. Gelb, MD

A board certified orthopedic surgeon specializing in adult and pediatric sports medicine and arthroscopic surgery. He has been in private practice since 1995.

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Stress Fractures

By Dr. Howard Gelb

Stress fractures are real fractures (breaks in the bone) that are all too common in today's athletes. The cause of stress fractures is usually found in the patient's history. The most common cause of a stress fracture is overuse. It can occur as a runner picks up their mileage too quickly or changes a running surface from soft to hard. Runners are particularly prone to lower extremity stress fractures due to the nature of the sport. Nutritional risk factors include lack of calcium, protein, and caloric intake. Tennis, basketball and volleyball players can get stress fractures of the feet, tibia (leg) or hip by playing too often. Intensity, frequency, and duration of an activity all play a role in the development of a stress fracture. Upper extremity stress fractures are seen in baseball pitchers, tennis players and softball pitchers. Rib fractures can be seen in crew athletes due to the excessive muscle pull of the serratus anterior muscle. Weight lifters, football linemen, gymnasts and soccer players are at risk for the development of lumbar stress fractures due to the mechanics of their sport, hyperextension of the lumbar spine. The primary symptom of a stress fracture is pain that is activity related. While x-rays are essential for evaluation of the pain, the actual fracture line may not be seen and additional imaging with bone scan or MRI may be needed for diagnosis. The treatment of the stress fracture is generally rest, however for certain fractures surgery may be necessary to avoid non-union (a non healed fracture). Nutritional and menstrual history is especially important for the female athlete. The female athlete triad; amenorrhea, poor nutrition and overtraining are associated with stress fractures and long-term osteoporosis. While athletes are often told "no pain, no gain," this adage is false when dealing with stress injuries. The best thing to do if one is experiencing progressive pain associated with their sport or activity is to rest and be evaluated.

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North Springs Little League proudly celebrates over 30 years of youth baseball. Be a part of the NSLL family. Scan the QR code and register today!

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Parkland Resident Turns 45 Years of Reef Cleanups into Community Nonprofit



By Ashley Ferraro

Over decades of solo dives along South Florida's coastline, Parkland resident and local business owner

Mike Squillace has pulled roughly a metric ton of lead and thousands of pounds of aluminum from local reefs.

"Everything we drop out there ends up somewhere," Mike said. "The lead, the aluminum, even the acid from old phone batteries—it all breaks down and settles into the reef. The little fish eat it, then the bigger fish eat them, and before long, it's in us."

To address this, together with Justin Spute, Mike established Reef Boyz, a Florida-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on reef restoration, marine and beach cleanups, and pollution awareness.

"I've spent decades in the water seeing the damage firsthand, and now I want to make sure the next generation has a chance to fix what's still worth saving," said Mike.

Mike's brother, Dan Squillace, and Justin's father, Chris Spute, also play active roles in the everyday operations of Reef Boyz, creating a foundation built on family. The organization secured its 501(c)(3) status earlier this year, made possible with accounting services from David Crammer and legal guidance from Mark Kesten.

Recent Reef Boys events include cleanups in Vero Beach, Dania Beach, and Pompano Beach. The largest to date partnered with Grandview Preparatory School in Boca Raton, where nearly 90 students participated in a morning shoreline cleanup. Mike ensures that volunteers use bamboo grabbers and buckets instead of plastic tools, emphasizing sustainability at every stage.

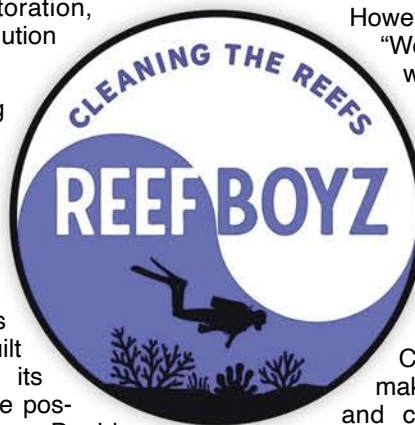
Reef Boys combines education with action. The nonprofit partners with schools to engage students in hands-on learning, helping them understand how everyday litter connects to marine health. For on-water

cleanups, Mike and other trained divers take part in more technical removals.

Reef Boyz's statewide efforts already reach communities from Miami to Melbourne, with plans to expand it's impact globally. By 2030, the organization aims to establish 300 cleanup teams across the United States, prioritizing veteran-run chapters and youth involvement.

The Reef Boyz team envisions a world where coral reefs and major wildlife sanctuaries are free from consumer debris, with corporations held accountable for their impact by contributing to restoration and cleanup efforts.

However, "charity starts at home," Mike said. "We have to begin right here in our own waters before we can expect anyone else to care."



Volunteer opportunities are open to individuals, families, schools, and civic groups. The next community cleanup is planned for December, with details to be announced on Reef Boyz's social media (@reef-boyzfoundation on Instagram).

Community support plays a central role in making this work possible. Early sponsors and contributors include Interstate Battery (Jana & Rob Cannoni), Charles Pence, Fort Lauderdale Landscaping, and All Terrain Landscaping.

Reef Boyz continues to welcome new sponsors and individual donors to help fund equipment, transportation, and other operational needs that keep local cleanup events running year-round. Visit www.thereef-boyz.com to donate, become a sponsor, or learn more.

Outside of his nonprofit work, Mike owns All Terrain Landscaping, a five-star local nursery and landscape design company based in Parkland. His background as a botanist and landscaper complements his environmental mission, reflecting a lifelong commitment to preserving Florida's natural spaces.





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Parkland Buddy Sports: More Than Just Sports - It's a Community of Inclusion & Joy

By Wendy Hunter

When most people think of Parkland Buddy Sports, they think of our signature programs—soccer, basketball, flag football, running, pickleball, tennis, and kickball. But what truly makes Parkland Buddy Sports special goes far beyond what happens on the field or court. It's about connection, inclusion, and the sense of belonging that every participant, volunteer, and family member experiences the moment they join our community.

For more than two decades, Parkland Buddy Sports has provided fee-free sports programs for children and young adults with special needs. Our athletes are paired with “buddies”—student volunteers who offer encouragement, friendship, and hands-on support. What begins as a game often becomes something much greater: a lasting bond built on empathy and joy.

Yet the heart of Parkland Buddy Sports beats year-round, not just during sports seasons. Beyond our athletic programs, we host community events that bring people together in celebration, wellness, and fun. One of our favorite traditions is the annual Turkey Trot, taking place Thanksgiving morning in Tamarac. This beloved event is a chance for families to lace up their sneakers, start the day with gratitude and movement, and support inclusion in our community.

We're looking for our student volunteers and runners to register on our website and we invite all residents in our community to come and join us on race day. Whether you're running, walking, or cheering from the sidelines, your participation helps us make the day extra special for our athletes and families.



And as we look ahead to 2025, excitement is already building for one of our most anticipated gatherings—the annual Valentine's Dance in February. It's a night filled with music, laughter, and friendship as our athletes, families, and volunteers come together to celebrate in style. The smiles, the dancing, and the sense of togetherness remind us why we do what we do—because every child deserves the chance to feel seen, included, and celebrated.

For our student volunteers, Parkland Buddy Sports is also an opportunity to give back in meaningful ways. Volunteers earn community service hours, but what they truly gain is perspective and connection. Many return year after year, often bringing friends along once they experience the joy of being part of something bigger than themselves and some even return as adults volunteers.

At Parkland Buddy Sports, we like to say we're not just building athletes—we're building community. Every game, every event, every smile shared between a buddy and their athlete strengthens the foundation of inclusion and compassion that defines us.

So, whether you join us on the field, at the Turkey Trot, or on the dance floor this Valentine's season, know that there's a place for you here. Because Parkland Buddy Sports truly has something for everyone—sports, friendship, fun, and most of all, heart.

To learn more about our programs, volunteer opportunities, and upcoming events, visit www.parkland-buddysports.org and follow us on social media @parklandbuddysports. Together, we can make every season a winning one



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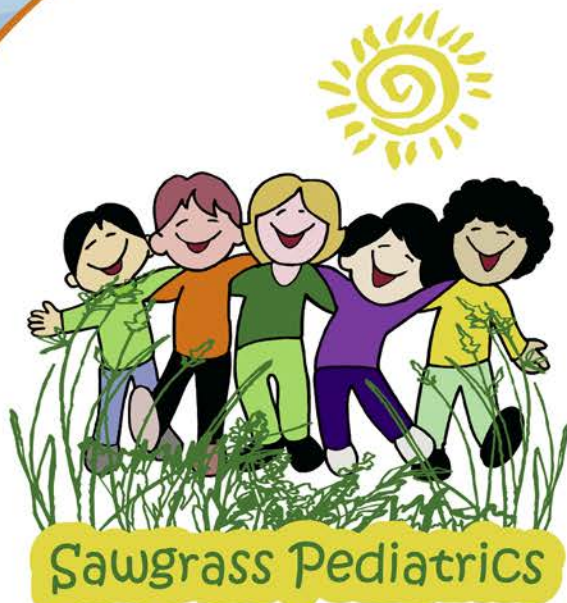
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Pet Safety During the Holidays:



Tips for a Safe & Happy Season

The holiday season is a time for celebration, but it also brings unique challenges when it comes to keeping our pets safe. With festive foods, decorations, and a flurry of activity, it's easy for pets to find themselves in harm's way. Here are some important pet safety tips to help keep your furry friends healthy and happy throughout the holidays.

1. Keep Dangerous Foods Away from Pets

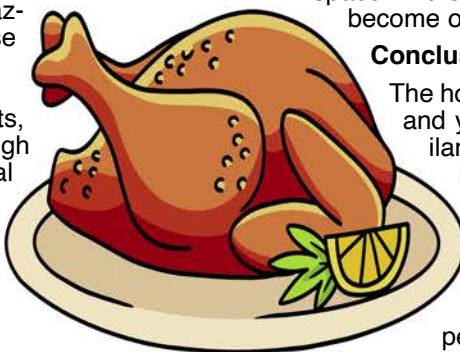
Holiday meals are often a major part of the celebrations, but many of the foods we enjoy can be toxic to pets. Chocolate, a common treat during this time of year, is especially dangerous. Even small amounts of chocolate can cause vomiting, diarrhea, rapid breathing, and in severe cases, seizures or death. Foods that are rich in fat, such as turkey skin or fatty cuts of meat, can lead to pancreatitis in pets, which is painful and can require emergency medical care.

Other foods to keep out of reach include **onions, garlic, grapes, raisins, alcohol, and xylitol** (a sweetener found in sugar-free gum and some baked goods), all of which can be extremely harmful to animals. If you're sharing any food with your pets, make sure it's something specifically designed for their dietary needs, and always double-check for potential dangers before offering a bite.

2. Holiday Decorations and Plants

Holiday decorations are an exciting part of the season, but they can also pose risks to pets. Sparkling tinsel and shiny ornaments may look appealing to your cat or dog, but they can be dangerous if ingested. Tinsel, in particular, can cause blockages in the digestive tract and lead to serious health issues that may require surgery. Glass ornaments can break, posing sharp hazards, and ribbons or strings can cause choking or internal injuries if swallowed.

Poinsettias, while popular holiday plants, are mildly toxic to pets if ingested. Though they typically cause mild gastrointestinal upset, ingesting larger amounts could result in more serious symptoms. Holly, mistletoe, and lilies, which are often used as decorations, are also toxic to pets and should be kept well out of their reach.



3. Watch Out for Electrical Hazards

With the abundance of holiday lights, it's important to be mindful of electrical hazards around the home. Pets, especially curious cats and dogs, may chew on cords, which could lead to electrical burns or even electrocution. Ensure all electrical cords are well-hidden or protected with cord covers. Also, make sure your pets can't access power outlets where cords are plugged in.

4. Be Cautious with Holiday Candles

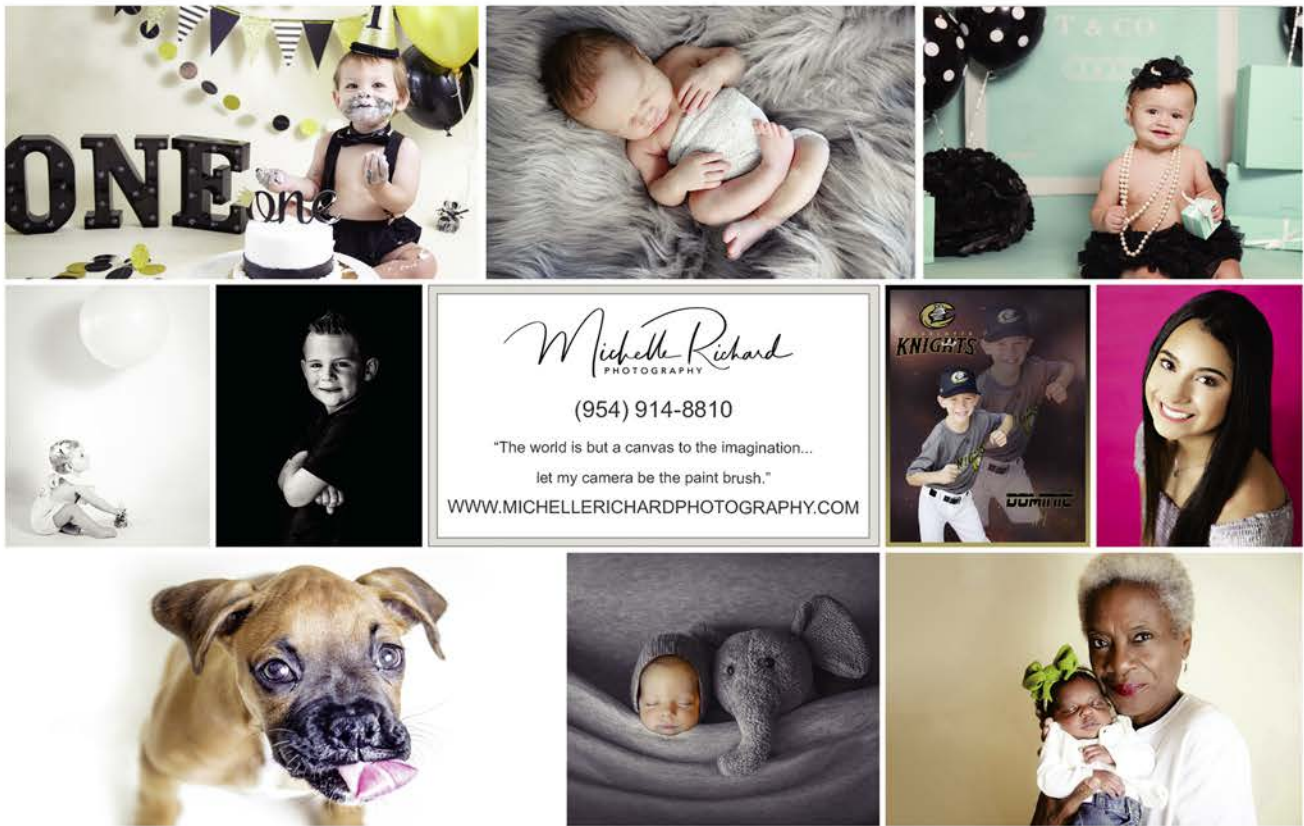
While candles add a cozy atmosphere to holiday gatherings, they also present a fire hazard, particularly if you have curious pets. Cats, dogs, or other pets may accidentally knock over candles or try to bat at the flame. To prevent accidents, use flameless, battery-operated candles or place real candles on high, secure surfaces where your pets cannot reach them.

5. Mind the Stress of Holiday Chaos

The holiday season often involves guests, travel, and changes in routine, which can be stressful for pets. Sudden changes in their environment can cause anxiety, leading to behaviors like hiding, excessive barking, or even accidents in the house. Try to maintain a regular feeding and walking schedule, and provide a quiet, safe space where your pet can retreat if the festivities become overwhelming.

Conclusion

The holidays should be a joyful time for both you and your pets, but it's essential to remain vigilant and proactive about pet safety. By keeping harmful foods, hazardous decorations, and stressors away from your pets, you can ensure that they stay safe and healthy while you enjoy the season. With a little preparation and awareness, you can have a merry, pet-friendly holiday.



Michelle Richard
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