River Garden News



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Summer 2026
Volume 94

RIVER GARDEN SENIOR SERVICES

A beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation and Foundation of Northeast Florida

Published by River Garden Senior Services
11401 Old St. Augustine Road
Jacksonville, Florida 32258
904.260.1818
www.rivergarden.org

Our Mission

To provide a wide range of quality senior care services in residential, outpatient and community based settings.

To create a comfortable and dignified home for seniors, serving all in our care with excellence regardless of financial resources.

To serve people of all faiths, while maintaining an environment supportive of Jewish identity and informed by Jewish values.

To act as a valuable senior services resource for the entire community.

Front Cover Photo:

Staff, volunteers, residents, members and guests all enjoyed National Mascot Day! Here, Adult Day Manager, Erica Hickey and Melanie Ruggiero, Director of Home and Community-Based Services , greet Jaguars mascot Jaxson D'Ville during his visit at River Garden. Go Jags!

If you have a resident story or feedback you'd like to share, please let us know. We also welcome opportunities to meet with senior groups in the community to discuss our programs & services. Please contact Kari Bell. kbell@rivergarden.org or 904.288.7855

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River Garden is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation and Foundation of Northeast Florida.

River Garden Continues to Lead Patient Advocacy Education



River Garden was proud to host a Medicare Town Hall bringing together top federal and state leaders encouraging all to fight fraud and protect our program dollars. Thank you to the speakers, including Kim Brandt (CMS), Anthony Figliola (HHS), Special Agent Christian Jurs (OIG), Horace Dozier (CMS), Mary Lazare (ACL), and Ann Chansler (FDEA). We also appreciate the beneficiaries and professional colleagues who attended, including Michelle Branham (DOEA), Kim Smoak (AHCA), Timothy Helms (Medicaid), Linda Levin (Eldersource) and representatives from Novitas, First Coast Service Options.

Inside Line

By Mauri Witten Mizrahi, Chief Executive Officer



Dear Friends,

Jewish tradition teaches us *on three things the world stands: on Torah, on service and on acts of loving kindness.* This teaching beautifully reflects the values that define River Garden. From even before The River Garden Hebrew Home was founded, volunteerism—acts of loving kindness—has been a cornerstone of who we are. Beginning with The Ladies Hebrew Sheltering Aid Society, today known as the River Garden Auxiliary, this spirit of service continues to inform and guide us.

This summer, we are proud to carry that legacy forward by welcoming 32 teens into our teen volunteer program. By engaging the next generation in meaningful service, we strengthen not only our organization but the future of our community itself.

The River Garden Expansion and Enhancement Project promises to also strengthen the future of our agency and community. Within the next few months, we will begin refurbishing the River Garden resident rooms and the existing apartments at The Coves. In coming months, the project will also include adding more independent living apartments. Increasing The Coves from 80 to 120 units will address the consistently high demand for independent senior living on our 40-acre campus. We will also be adding a new 24-unit assisted living for memory care building which will enhance the services River Garden is able to provide. Improving the grounds and outdoor gathering spaces will create an environment that fosters independence, wellbeing, and social connection. Please read more about our Project on the following pages.

For 33 years, the annual River Garden Foundation Gala has provided essential financial support to River Garden Hebrew Home. We are excited to share that planning is underway for the 34th River Garden Foundation Gala—*An Evening of Southern Mystique*—to be held on November 21, 2026, at The Prime Osborn Convention Center. Gala Co-Chairs Faye Mizrahi and Joy Pollock Nebel, together with their invaluable Gala Committee, are creating what promises to be a memorable evening of elegance and intrigue.

Similarly, for 30 years, the annual River Garden Classic continues its remarkable legacy of supporting staff education. This year, $142,075 was raised at the golf tournament held on April 27, 2026, at Deerwood Country Club. Thank you to event Chair Tom Harris and Hardage-Giddens Funeral Homes and Cemeteries for generously sponsoring the event.

On March 22, 2026, we proudly celebrated The Home's 80th anniversary. This is a milestone that reflects decades of excellence. The nursing care center continues to maintain a 5-star rating and has recently received an 11th Governor's Gold Seal Award for Excellence in Long Term Care, affirming our enduring commitment to quality.

We extend our appreciation to Marsha Pollock, Anniversary Day Chair, for leading a successful River Garden Senior Services Annual Meeting, where trustees and officers were elected and installed. We are especially pleased to welcome Deborah 'Debby' Kaye as the newly installed President of The Home Board and look forward to her leadership.



We were honored to welcome AHCA Secretary Shevaun Harris and AHCA Deputy Secretary Health Quality Assurance Kimberly Smoak, who officially presented our 11th Governor's Gold Seal of Excellence for Long-Term Care award to our staff. Steve Bahmer, CEO of LeadingAge Southeast, and Mayor Donna Deegan shared congratulatory remarks. All are pictured here with CEO Mauri Mizrahi (far left) and Hebrew Home Board President Debby Kaye (far right).

As we reflect on both the milestones behind us and the opportunities ahead, we are reminded that each of us plays a vital role in sustaining and strengthening this community. Together, through dedication, generosity, and service, we will continue to build on a legacy that spans generations.

I hope you enjoy this season's issue of the River Garden News. Our future is bright.

Mauri

The River Garden Expansion and Enhancement Project

For over 80 years, River Garden has been a trusted senior services leader and provider. Long known for an unwavering commitment to excellence, we have created and continue to nurture a warm, caring community where the people we serve are treated with dignity and respect.

Following a comprehensive multi-year strategic planning process involving all River Garden boards, community leaders and national experts, the River Garden Senior Services Board adopted a forward-looking 2026-2031 Strategic & Operating Plan to guide the thoughtful evolution of programs and services across our 40-acre campus. **Our purpose is to ensure a vibrant future for River Garden Senior Services by continuing to meet the identified needs of our Northeast Florida community.**

Through the strategic planning process, we learned that Northeast Florida is growing and aging, and that there is a need for expanded housing and supportive services on our campus.

We are excited to share our vision with the entire community! As we invest in our future, our commitment to excellence and creating a community where everybody is somebody remains central to every decision we make.

Thank You for Celebrating with Us!

River Garden 80th Anniversary Day. Nearly 1,000 residents, families, volunteers and staff enjoyed the afternoon fun.



Details of 'The Project'

The future of our 40-acre River Garden campus is one of wellness and living fully. As we expand and enhance our facilities, programs and services, we remain committed to our mission and to honoring foundations.

Strategic enhancements will focus on five elements: refurbishing resident rooms in the nursing home, modernizing existing independent living apartments and amenity spaces at The Coves, adding 40 new independent living apartments apartments, making the grounds more pedestrian friendly and adding assisted living for memory care as a new service to the campus.

1. **Nursing Home Upgrades:** Enhancements to public areas and resident rooms will ensure that the Home remains warm, contemporary and fully equipped to best serve the community.
2. **Renovating The Coves:** Updating the existing apartments and improving amenity spaces including but not limited to dining and fitness areas, will enhance and grow our successful and thriving independent living community.
3. **Expanding The Coves:** Our current waiting list and local trends reinforce the need for more independent living. Like the current 80 apartments, the additional 40 apartments will be designed to foster independence, wellness, social connection and ease of living.
4. **Campus Enhancements:** Investing in campus walkways, outdoor gathering spaces and the lakeside promenade will create meaningful opportunities for movement and enjoyment of the beauty of our natural environment, supporting emotional, physical and spiritual well-being.
5. **Addition of Assisted Living for Memory Care:** There is demonstrated need and demand for a specialized assisted living for memory care on the River Garden campus. The addition of a new one-story building with 24-private suites will create this specialized assisted living model.



Renovations to the rooms in the Home are a top priority. Selected finishes will reflect a calm, modern and cohesive palette built around soft neutrals, warm wood tones and clean lines.

RIVER GARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Hebrew Home

Celebrating the Golden Years

On a daily basis, River Garden is full of interesting people and wonderful enrichment activities. Each resident has a rich history. One newer monthly program called "Golden Years" celebrates a few residents each month. Here are a few of their mini-memoirs.



Originally from Darlington, South Carolina, **Bessie** built a long and hardworking life rooted in dedication and family. She worked as a meat cutter at Crystals and later at the Woolworth factory, where she helped produce gun holsters and mini blinds. Even after retiring at 70, her strong work ethic kept her going—she continued working in the meat and seafood department at Publix until the age of eighty.

She is the proud mother of three children—two sons and one daughter—and grandmother to twelve grandchildren. Her family lovingly calls her "Me Maw," a name that reflected her warmth and the deep affection she inspired.

Her favorite fast food is Zaxby's chicken tenders and coleslaw, and her favorite dessert is pound cake with black walnuts. She enjoys collecting cards from friends and family, keeping each one as a reminder of the love surrounding her. *(Pictured with Buster, a favorite performer.)*



Suzanne was born in York, Pennsylvania. The eldest of four, she grew up in a happy, lively household where she and her sister often teamed up to get their two brothers into harmless trouble.

She completed nursing school at Mt. Sinai Nursing School in Cleveland, ultimately completing her career in Hospice and Palliative Care in Jacksonville.

She is the proud mother of two daughters and one son, and the joyful grandmother of nine grandchildren. She loves reading, watching movies, meditating and spending time outdoors. She also loves collecting dragonfly pictures.

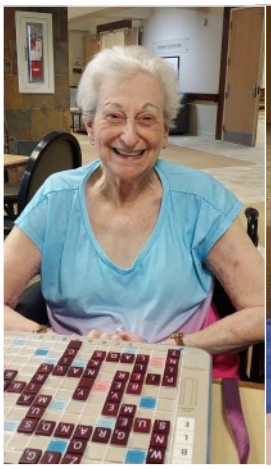
Her favorite foods are Italian and Chinese, especially dumplings. At River Garden her days are grounded in prayer and meditation, practices that bring her peace, gratitude and strength.



Affectionately known as "Mrs. Wonderful," **Henrietta** was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, where her bright personality and caring nature first took root. Before marriage, she worked as a Medical Assistant at Jamaica Hospital Medical Center in Queens. After marrying her beloved husband Sal, she devoted herself to being a full-time homemaker. Their marriage lasted an extraordinary 63 years, and together they raised three children—two sons and one daughter.

She enjoys a variety of hobbies, including watching TV, cooking and crafts. Some of her favorite dishes to make are manicotti, eggplant parmesan and stuffed artichokes. She has a sweet tooth for cookies, and her favorite dessert is cheesecake.

At River Garden, she loves participating in ceramics, pickleball, word games and bingo. A fan of classic music, she especially loves Frank Sinatra; his song "My Way" holds a special place in her heart. *(Pictured with Jaxson D'Ville on Mascot Day.)*



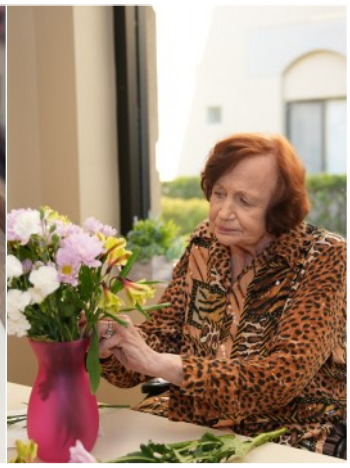
Bunny enjoys a game of Scrabble with volunteer Karen Sterman on a Tuesday afternoon.



Spring has sprung! Evelyn makes flowers out of spoons and tissue paper!



Eric is quite competitive with table-style bowling, focused on the fast-rolling shots that send the miniature pins flying.



Patty loves the weekly flower arranging activity, made possible thanks to the donations from Trader Joe's.

Health and Wellness is a Team Effort

Living well at River Garden depends upon the ongoing partnership between the resident, family and the staff. Family participation begins at the initial orientation and continues during regular care conferences and consultations, as needed. Our interdisciplinary team works collaboratively to provide cohesive, integrated care that supports every aspect of a resident's well-being. Nurses, physicians, therapists, social workers, dietitians and life enrichment staff communicate regularly. By combining their expertise, they address medical needs, emotional support, nutrition, mobility and daily engagement. Monthly at Resident Council meetings and quarterly at Family Council meetings, the team answers questions and offers feedback in order to assure the best quality of life for all of our residents.



Front: Dietitian Ashley O'Grady, Director of Rehabilitation Bob Mentz, Social Worker Kara Buergert, Beauty Salon Director Linda Woitas.
Back: Director of Nursing Stephany Bebout, Director of Life Enrichment Jenny Ross, Director of Jewish Life Nancy Davis, Chaplain Laura Platzer.

RIVERGARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | The Coves Independent Living

Living the Good Life

Our independent living apartments offer connection and convenience, blending privacy with a vibrant social atmosphere. Amenities, activities and supportive neighbors help make every day feel easy and enjoyable. It's a place where neighbors become friends for life.



Carole & Larry Ort enjoyed the special evening with an intimate tableside 4 course dinner, thoughtfully created for a truly memorable Chef's Table experience.



These ladies are delighted to share the special Chef's Table dinner at The Coves, where Chef Norberto treats everyone to a memorable evening filled with the aromas and flavors of Italy! (L-R) Louise Leve, Judy Merzon, Randee Richman, Ellen Leiman, Mimi Kaufman, Bette Hickey, Pat Rosenthal, Jo Marks.



On Mother's Day, we enjoyed a beautiful brunch at The Coves as we celebrated all the amazing mothers in our lives. It was a wonderful day filled with special touches that made all the women we cherish feel celebrated. Pictured: Eleanor Reeves with daughter Laura.



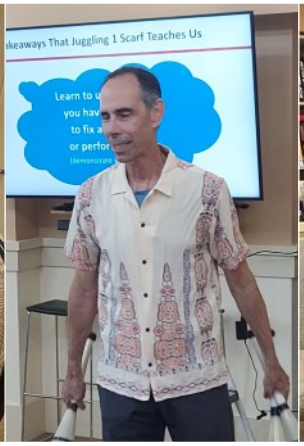
For Father's Day, we switched gears and embraced a fun sports-themed brunch, gathering to honor our all-star dads. The atmosphere was lively and full of team spirit as families enjoyed great food and warm conversations. Pictured: Manfred Katz with son Mike.





The Coves Groves is the newest addition to dining at The Coves! Inspired by farm-to-table trends, lead gardener Susan Viola reveals the garden name, and supporting members plan to help tend the herbs and vegetables. Here's to healthy eating!







If you're inspired by crafting, learning something new, like juggling, or gaming on Kentucky Derby Night, The Coves has it all!
(L) Ruthie Nachman lets her imagination bloom with the sea glass succulent project. (C) Learning to juggle with Len Ferman.
(R) Marilyn was all smiles as she cheered on her favorite horse, Mare-ilyn Monroe, to a winning finish at The Coves' Kentucky Derby celebration!







Outings to parks, The Pickle Factory and the Dillards Outlet keep members busy, adding fun and variety to their days.

To learn more about living at The Coves, please contact us.
www.rivergarden.org/the coves
sdymond@rivergarden.org or 904.292.2683

RIVER GARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Adult Day Program



Adult Day Programs offer a safe, structured, socially engaging environment for older adults who need daytime support while still living at home. They give participants meaningful activity and connection, and they give family caregivers time to work, rest or manage other responsibilities.

River Garden's Adult Day Program has supported families for decades. Participants arrive in the morning for welcoming activities like coffee, newspapers and conversation, followed by a day built around brain games, exercise, creative programs and shared meals. Afternoons wind down with music, relaxation and individual time before pickup. Enrollment can be full-day or drop-in, depending on family needs.

Research from the National Council on Aging shows that adult day programs reduce caregiver stress and improve quality of life for both participants and families.

Adult day programs are typically more affordable than residential care and fees can be paid privately or other resources, like Medicare GUIDE benefits. Families can start with a few days a week and adjust as needed.

If you're considering whether this model fits your caregiving plan, the best next step is to talk with the team and visit the program in person.

Please call Erica Hickey 904.288.7858 or email ehickey@rivergarden.org for a visit or more information.

RIVER GARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Personal Care and Support

River Garden Personal Care and Support, formerly known as River Garden Home Health, offers assistance for members of The Coves and can also provide companion services within the Home.

Please call 904.288.7851 if you'd like to talk about options for this added support.



RIVERGARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Rehabilitation

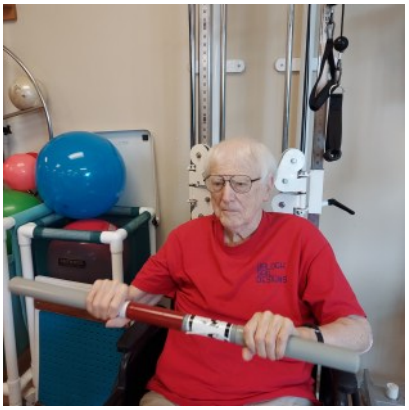
As hospitals discharge patients more quickly than ever, a growing number of families are discovering the benefits of choosing a skilled nursing facility (SNF, pronounced 'sniff') for post-acute, inpatient rehabilitation.

Skilled nursing facilities like River Garden provide 24-hour nursing care, daily access to physical, occupational and speech therapy, and a structured environment designed to support patients recovering from surgery, illness or injury. For many, this level of care offers a safer transition from hospital to home.

Healthcare professionals note that SNFs are especially beneficial for patients who need slower-paced, individualized therapy, closer medical monitoring or help managing multiple health conditions. Unlike inpatient rehab hospitals—where therapy intensity is high and length of stay is short—SNFs allow patients to progress at a pace that matches their ability and medical needs.

Choose River Garden

Patients have the right to choose where they receive post-acute care. "Patient choice is not optional—it's protected," says Aly Brand, Director of Admissions at River Garden. "Hospitals can provide guidance, and you can always ask for a referral to be sent to River Garden."

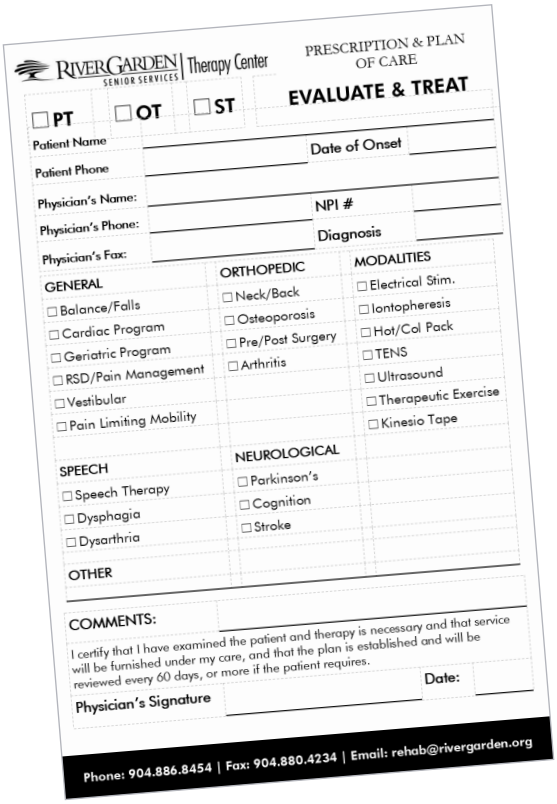


For care partners, SNFs can also offer peace of mind. With on-site medical providers and nurses, plus therapists and support staff, families know their loved one is receiving continuous care while they prepare for a safe return home. River Garden also provides caregiver training, home-safety education and discharge planning to ensure long-term success.

We urge families to remember one thing: the choice belongs to you. If you are in need of post-acute SNF services, request River Garden.

River Garden serves patients from all hospitals. Many insurances are accepted.

Please call 904.886.8420 or email admissions@rivergarden.org.



RIVERGARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Therapy Center

PRESCRIPTION & PLAN OF CARE

☐ PT ☐ OT ☐ ST EVALUATE & TREAT

Patient Name | Date of Onset

Patient Phone

Physician's Name: | NPI #

Physician's Phone: | Diagnosis

Physician's Fax:

GENERAL
- ☐ Balance/Falls
- ☐ Cardiac Program
- ☐ Geriatric Program
- ☐ RSD/Pain Management
- ☐ Vestibular
- ☐ Pain Limiting Mobility

ORTHOPEDIC
- ☐ Neck/Back
- ☐ Osteoporosis
- ☐ Pre/Post Surgery
- ☐ Arthritis

MODALITIES
- ☐ Electrical Stim.
- ☐ Iontopheresis
- ☐ Hot/Col Pack
- ☐ TENS
- ☐ Ultrasound
- ☐ Therapeutic Exercise
- ☐ Kinesio Tape

SPEECH
- ☐ Speech Therapy
- ☐ Dysphagia
- ☐ Dysarthria

NEUROLOGICAL
- ☐ Parkinson's
- ☐ Cognition
- ☐ Stroke

OTHER

COMMENTS:

I certify that I have examined the patient and therapy is necessary and that service will be furnished under my care, and that the plan is established and will be reviewed every 60 days, or more if the patient requires.

Physician's Signature | Date:

Phone: 904.886.8454 | Fax: 904.880.4234 | Email: rehab@rivergarden.org

Year round, The River Garden therapy team can help with balance and fall prevention on an outpatient basis.

- **Balance and gait training**
- **Strength-building exercises**
- **Assistive device evaluations**
- **Home-safety recommendations**

Specifically for summertime, we can also can help you learn about:

- **Hydration and heat awareness**, since dehydration and overheating can cause dizziness.
- **Supportive footwear**, especially sandals with proper grip and arch support.
- **Yard and home safety checks**, such as clearing walkways, trimming overgrown plants, and improving outdoor lighting.
- **Low-impact outdoor exercises**, including tai chi, water aerobics, or gentle stretching in the shade.
- **Daily walking techniques** to improve strength, balance, and cardiovascular health.

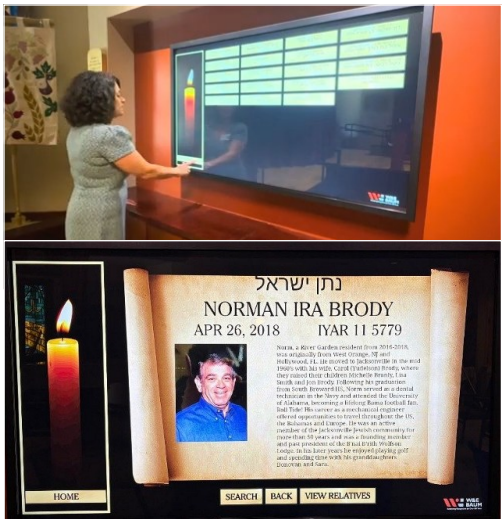
Please call 904.886.8454 to learn more.

RIVER GARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Foundation

Keep the Memory of Your Loved One Close

Honor someone special with a plaque on the interactive digital Yahrzeit Memorial Wall in the Parker Chapel. Each plaque is displayed weekly for yahrzeits and during Yizkor services on holidays, creating a meaningful and lasting tribute. You may also include up to three photographs and a brief biography. Plaques are available for a gift of $500. For more information, contact Michelle Branly, 904.886.8431 or mbranly@rivergarden.org.

Scan the QR code to watch a demo video.



Technology Enhances Daily Life at The Coves

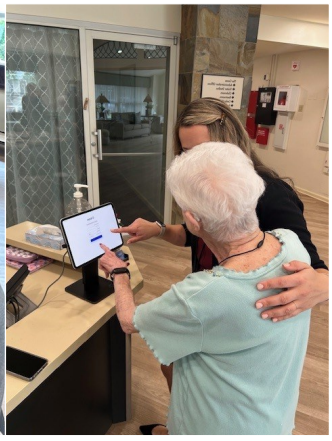
This spring, The Coves at River Garden increased member engagement through a technology initiative funded by a **Red Coats' Community Grant**. In April, iPads and docking stations were installed, giving members access to the Go-Icon Community Engagement application.

After completing small group and one-on-one training sessions, The Coves members quickly began using the devices to check updates, register for activities, and manage tasks like dining orders. The impact was immediate: members became more engaged in community life and more confident using technology. The initiative also supports sustainability by reducing paper use.

We are deeply grateful to THE PLAYERS Championship Red Coats for their generous support of River Garden Senior Services and for helping make this meaningful advancement possible.

THE PLAYERS®





RIVER GARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Foundation | *Guardians of Tomorrow*

Do You Have Questions About Planned Giving? Contact the River Garden Foundation.

Christina Levine | 904.886.8430 | clevine@rivergarden.org

Please remember River Garden and the Jewish Community in your Estate and Legacy Giving

AN EVENING OF SOUTHERN MYSTIQUE

Mark your calendar for an unforgettable evening! The **34th River Garden Foundation Gala** – An Evening of Southern Mystique – will take place on **Saturday, November 21, 2026,** at the Prime Osborn Convention Center. Inspired by the elegance and charm of the South, this year's theme weaves together warm hospitality and subtle intrigue, transporting guests to a moonlit celebration.

This year's Gala is proudly co-chaired by Faye Mizrahi and Joy Pollock Nebel, whose creativity and passion promise to make the evening truly extraordinary. Faye and Joy share a lifelong friendship that began 42 years ago at the University of Georgia, where they were roommates and quickly formed a strong bond. Both have deep ties to River Garden, currently serving on The Coves Board, with Faye also serving on the River Garden Hebrew Home Board.

Adding to the evening's allure, renowned mentalist Christophe Fox will provide an engaging and interactive performance, bringing an element of surprise to the celebration.

The Gala plays a vital role in advancing River Garden's mission to provide exceptional care to seniors, regardless of financial resources. It also helps raise awareness of River Garden's unique role as a nationally recognized leader in elder care and a treasured community resource. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and supporters, the Gala has raised more than $6.2 million to date in support of our residents.

We hope you will join us on November 21 for a captivating evening in support of the seniors who call River Garden home.

Reservations and sponsorship opportunities are available at www.rivergarden.org/gala. For more information, please contact Michelle Branly at mbranly@rivergarden.org or 904.886.8431.



Co-chairs: Faye Mizrahi & Joy Pollock Nebel



Gala Committee members, gathered in the beauty of the South.

The **30th River Garden Classic** brought supporters together on April 27 at Deerwood Country Club for a memorable day of golf and giving. Hosted by the River Garden Foundation, the tournament once again demonstrated the strong community support behind River Garden's mission.

This year, 116 players participated and helped raise $142,075. The event's success was made possible through the generosity of individual donors, corporate partners, and longtime title sponsor Hardage-Giddens Funeral Homes & Cemeteries, along with tournament chair Tom Harris. Over the past 30 years, the tournament has contributed more than $2.1 million in support of River Garden.

During the evening reception, Harris spoke about the lasting impact of the tournament, noting that "*the funds raised help provide vital education and training for the team members who care for River Garden residents each day. That investment helps ensure staff have the tools and confidence to provide every resident with dignity and compassion.*"

We extend our sincere appreciation to the River Garden Classic committee, sponsors, volunteers, players, and staff whose dedication made this year such a success. Because of your generosity and dedication, this milestone tournament will make a meaningful difference in the lives of the residents we serve.

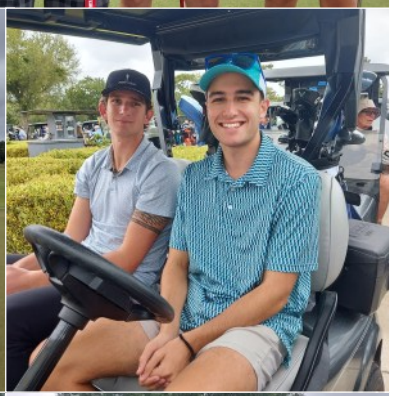




















Gratitude To Our Sponsors

Title Sponsor

HARDAGE-GIDDENS
FUNERAL HOMES, CEMETERIES & CREMATIONS

Dignity Memorial
LIFE WELL CELEBRATED

Eagle Sponsor
Setzer Family

Lunch Sponsor
Frisch Families

Reception Sponsor
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Champion Brands

Hole-In-One Car Sponsor
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AutoNation Ford Lincoln Orange Park

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Risa & Dr. Steven Warfield
Jill & Dr. Michael Weiss

*of Blessed Memory





Save The Date: 31st River Garden Classic April 12, 2027

Jewish Life on Campus

The Jewish Life Department has been busy across the campus, bringing a variety of opportunities for Jewish engagement to River Garden residents, members of The Coves and staff. Our goal is to inform and enhance the Jewish culture of the campus in a variety of ways, including educational, social and spiritual. We offer a wide variety of activities to give residents options to participate in what is meaningful for them, including holiday celebrations, visits from students, films, trivia, discussion groups, book reviews and Torah study with our Chaplain, Laura Platzer.





Leading up to Passover this year Jewish Life partnered with Administration and Dining Services to launch a new education module for staff. We held engaging educational sessions about the holiday of Passover – from its origins to the meaning of "Kosher for Passover" to how we celebrate the holiday on our campus. This effort eased the uncertainty of the holiday for staff, who do a great job helping us keep a kosher campus every day of the year.

As always, River Garden families were invited to attend a lovely Passover seder with their loved one and our service leader, Steve Meisel. During Passover week, our CEO, Mauri Mizrahi, and COO, Bobbie Jo Mentz, prepared fresh matzo brei for the River Garden residents, as well as tableside in The Coves dining room. Residents, staff and members of The Coves alike love this fresh-from-the-pan tasty tradition. Passover is a busy time of year, and we appreciate Dining Services and Life Enrichment for their help in making it lovely and successful.



Back in April our keynote speaker for our annual Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) commemorative program was Susan Wolchok, a third-generation Survivor. Susan is committed to Holocaust education as part of the LJD JFCS Speaker's Bureau, and everyone in attendance was moved by her grandparents' powerful story of survival against impossible odds.





Our residents had the best time back in May thanks to volunteers from Jewish Federation and Foundation of NE Florida! In the lead-up to Mother's Day, ladies from Federation brought a beautiful Spa Day experience to our campus, including manicures, hand and shoulder massages, and a lovely lavender and rose sachet as a memento. In addition to these luxuries, a wonderful part for our residents was the salon-style chat and making new friends.



In May we also celebrated Yom HaAtzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) with our annual Taste of Israel lunchtime buffet for all residents, members of The Coves and staff. We also had a blast partnering with Hadassah to represent River Garden at the community Yom HaAtzmaut celebration at Congregation Ahavath Chesed.



Finally, our summer began with a beautiful Shavuot, the holiday that commemorates the Israelites' receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. In addition to the traditional festival services, everyone on campus enjoyed delicious dairy foods, including our homemade cheesecake bars with cherry topping. Our thanks to Gail Greenfield for bringing us her original Shavuot-themed comedy play – Miracles Happen. A great time was had by the participants and the audience!

If you have any ideas for activities or programs on our campus please email ndavis@rivergarden.org. Shalom, everyone!

L'Dor V'Dor ~ River Garden is a Family Affair!

Guest pianist Dominick Dillon has been a cherished part of the River Garden family for over 15 years, generously giving his time and heart as a visitor and volunteer. His connection to the Home runs deep: his grandfather once served as the pharmacist here, and his grandmother was a beloved resident. Now a college student at the University of North Florida with aspirations of becoming a CPA, Dominick continues to balance his academic pursuits with service to others. Among his many gifts is his talent for music, and he regularly shares beautiful piano performances that bring comfort, joy and meaningful moments to the memory care residents at River Garden.







Naomi Levin (pictured far right) brings brilliance and compassion to our community.

The accomplished and beautiful granddaughter of Mimi Kaufman, a member of The Coves and past Auxiliary board president, Naomi is a Board-Certified Forensic Death Investigator, a role Mimi describes as a "*real-life Bones*" job. In 2025 she shared about her work during a program for members of The Coves.

More recently, she donated dozens of handmade blankets for the residents of the Home. What a labor of love!

Thank you, Naomi and Mimi, for all you do to support River Garden.

RIVER GARDEN SENIOR SERVICES | Volunteers

River Garden has an active volunteer program which greatly enhances the quality of life for residents at River Garden. There are several opportunities available depending on your interests, and many of our special events are made more successful because of the enthusiastic assistance of volunteers.

Please be sure to let us know if you can help on a regular basis or with special events.

Welcome, Sylvia Jaffa!

We are proud to introduce Sylvia Jaffa as the new River Garden Volunteer Coordinator. Originally from Miami Beach, Sylvia earned an MBA from the University of Miami in Coral Gables and a Bachelor's degree from Stern College in New York. She married Andrew Jaffa and moved to Jacksonville in 2001. Prior to joining River Garden, Sylvia worked with her husband and father-in-law, Jimmy Jaffa, in the car wash industry, where she played a key role with marketing, accounting and operations for multiple locations across the city.

Outside of her professional life, Sylvia likes spending time with her poodle Ollie, playing tennis and baking homemade challah. Most of all, she enjoys her family. She and Andrew have three adult children: Their daughter Eliana is a recent University of Florida graduate in biomedical engineering; their son Moses will start his senior year in mechanical engineering also at the University of Florida; and their baby Florida Gator, Micah, enters his sophomore year in computer engineering.

Sylvia always wears a warm smile and enjoys connecting with people and building relationships. We hope you will meet her soon!



Sylvia Jaffa
Volunteer Coordinator
sjaffa@rivergarden.org
volunteers@rivergarden.org
904.260.1818 x7858

Welcome, Travis Stevenson!

Originally from Jacksonville, FL, Travis recently moved back to the Sunshine State from Utah. He has a BA in Spanish from Brigham Young University and a BS in Digital Audio from Utah Valley University. In his free time, Travis enjoys writing fantasy & science fiction, running role-playing games with friends and generally being a big nerd. He is excited to serve as the Junior Volunteer Coordinator at River Garden this summer.





On June 8, we welcomed 32 students who will be serving as teen volunteers this summer. These teen volunteers help with a variety of activities and programs. If you have any questions about our teen or adult volunteer programs, please email volunteers@rivergarden.org.

Celebrating Skilled Nursing Care Week with Staff



Happy Retirement, Yvonne

Yvonne Cooper Williams has served as a cook at River Garden for 28 years. Her dedication to preparing meals has touched everyone of us. We wish her a retirement filled with the same warmth and care she has given to all of River Garden through the decades!



(L-R) Dining Services Director Kurt Strenger with Yvonne and CEO Mauri Mizrahi

Excellence Looks Good On Us



11-TIME RECIPIENT
GOVERNOR'S GOLD SEAL AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE
IN LONG-TERM CARE

River Garden is an award-winning campus welcoming people of all faiths and backgrounds, guided by a mission that has remained constant through the decades.

With over 700 nursing homes in the state of Florida, River Garden has received the elite 'Governor's Gold Seal' since the award program began in 2002. Currently, there are only ten (10) skilled nursing homes with this award.

We want every friend and supporter of River Garden to share our success! Here, Chief Operating Officer Bobbie Jo Mentz and Director of Nursing Stephany Bebout proudly display our 11th Governor's Gold Seal award.

In order to receive the Governor's Gold Seal Award for Excellence in Long-Term Care, River Garden demonstrated:

- High quality care ranking in the top 2% of all nursing homes in the region
- Excellent record with the state Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
- Evidence of community involvement
- "Best practices" in elder care with no Class I or II deficiencies within 30 months preceding application
- Financial soundness



Thank You, Human Resources

Our Human Resources team brings so much value to our organization. They strengthen communication and camaraderie across departments, recruit talented new staff who help our mission grow, and plan thoughtful celebration events that make everyone feel appreciated. They also deal with the day-to-day tasks that help every staff member succeed. Their work shapes our culture every day, and we're genuinely grateful for all they do.

(L-R) Director Kelli Keeley with Jeannae Gordon and Brandy Stallings

RIVER GARDEN AUXILIARY

Supporting River Garden Hebrew Home / Wolfson Health & Aging Center

Message from Carol D'Onofrio, River Garden Auxiliary President

It is hard to believe that half a year has passed so quickly. We continue to follow the path of our predecessors in our support of River Garden. Please enjoy photos of the Auxiliary's recent events.



The Donor Lunch in February was attended by 118 ladies that enjoyed lunch and a wonderful show where Julia Child came alive on the big screen. It was a wonderful performance by an actress from Women in History.



In March, during Anniversary Day, the Auxiliary awarded Tombola winners as follows:
1st Place ($2,000) - Randy Kammer & Milo Phillips
2nd Place ($1,000 - Joan Levin
3rd Place ($500) - John Kennedy
4th Place ($500) - Janis Fleet



Also on Anniversary Day, the Gift Shop sponsored a Vintage Sale which was a huge success, raising thousands of dollars for the benefit of the nursing home residents.



In May, we had 100 ladies at Game Day. It was another successful event with the ladies enjoying lunch, Mahjong, canasta or one of their favorite games.



Denim and Diamonds, lunch and a sing a long musical program on June 16, with over 100 ladies in attendance was a huge hit.



The Auxiliary continues the momentum into summer with a new evening event - Girls Night Out at Blue Bamboo Restaurant—on July 29. **All are welcome.** Reservations required.

If you are interested in joining the Auxiliary events or learning more about membership, please contact Carol D'Onofrio at 904.705.1849. We would love to have you be a part of our group.

Community Events

Our events are posted on our website and on our Facebook page. Our Caregiver Support Group is always on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 3:30 PM in the Parker Chapel. For other events, visit **www.rivergarden.org** or follow our Facebook page **rivergardenseniorservices** to stay current. Some events require pre-registration. If you have any questions, contact Kari Bell, Director of Communications & Marketing at kbell@rivergarden.org or 904.288.7855.

In Case You Missed It

(Left) Jewish Java with Isabel Balotin is on summer hiatus, but stay tuned for upcoming dates in the fall! Isabel is pictured with Donna Berger, a recent Jewish Java presenter.

(Right) At the end of May, Alex Silverstein shared critical information about cyber safety. Unfortunately, seniors are the most-targeted group for fraud and learning key strategies for protection is critical.





Upcoming Programs

RIVER GARDEN

MEMORY Cafe

WHEN
Sunday, July 19
1:00PM - 2:30PM

WHERE
River Garden
11401 Old St. Augustine Road
Fully accessible parking and bathrooms.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?
The person living with cognitive decline and a care partner attend together. The Memory Cafe is designed to offer support for both people.
Drop-offs are not permitted.

WHAT IS A MEMORY CAFE?
A Memory Cafe is a friendly meeting place for adults living with mild cognitive impairment or dementia and their care partners to spend quality time with others. You can expect a relaxed atmosphere, where you will make meaningful connections through activities, discussion, movement and snacks.

We do not focus on medical conditions or provide counseling. Participants choose what they want to share with others.

RIVERGARDEN SENIOR SERVICES

RSVP REQUESTED
CONTACT: ERICA HICKEY
EHICKEY@RIVERGARDEN.ORG
904.288.7858

Scan to RSVP

River Garden also hosts an Alzheimer's Association monthly support group on the 2nd Wednesdays. Meetings are at 3:30PM and all care partners are welcome to attend.



Tuesday, August 11
10:00AM - 11:30AM

Light Refreshments Served.
RSVP Required.

Please scan the QR code to register or contact Kari Bell at kbell@rivergarden.org or 904.260.7855

RIVERGARDEN SENIOR SERVICES

rivergarden.org | 904.260.1818

A VISIT WITH EDDIE WHISLER
Jacksonville Museum of Science & History

ARE YOU OUT THERE?
HABITABLE WORLDS AND THE QUESTION OF INTELLIGENT LIFE

What kinds of worlds exist beyond our solar system, and how do we find the habitable ones? Astronomers now have evidence of thousands of exoplanets, with new discoveries every year. As we search for life-giving worlds, we're also confronted with a profound fact: whether the universe is teeming with life or we are truly alone, the reality will be mind-blowing. Together we'll explore how scientists hunt for life elsewhere — and why some argue that, if intelligent civilizations exist, we should already know about them.

River Garden - Cohen Auditorium
11401 Old St. Augustine Road, 32258

River Garden Senior Services
11401 Old St. Augustine Road
Jacksonville, Florida 32258
904.260.1818
www.rivergarden.org

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK | SEND US A STORY | PROVIDE 5-STAR REVIEW ON GOOGLE



Please remember River Garden and the Jacksonville Jewish Community in your Estate and Legacy Giving