

# THE BRIDGE

NEW PORT RICHEY  
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cityofnewportrichey.org

16th Edition | April 2024

## CHASCO FIESTA! A CELEBRATION of Culture and Community Still Strong in New Port Richey's

### 100<sup>TH</sup> YEAR!



► At the heart of New Port Richey, a city with a 100-year-old history steeped in legend and lore, the Chasco Fiesta stands firmly as a pillar of its heritage.

In 1922, two years before New Port Richey received its official charter, the first Chasco Fiesta was born of the imagination of one of the city's early champions, Gerben DeVries.

He found a scroll, he claimed, within a clay cylinder along the Pithlachascotee River's banks. On that scroll was a tale recounting the experiences of a Spanish girl and boy, captured and raised by a Calusa tribe in the late 1800s. The pair was accepted into the tribe and later were named "King Pithla" and "Queen Chasco."

Many initially accepted the legend as fact; however, DeVries ultimately disclosed that he had fabricated the tale himself.

“He looked at what Tampa had done with the story of José Gaspar and the already successful Gasparilla Pirate Festival, which had started about 18 years earlier,” says Tomás Monzón, Vice President of the West Pasco Historical Society. “In this new city, with very little history of its own, he realized that he could make up his own story to attract visitors to New Port Richey, which was crucial back in its earliest days.”

The festival's initial purpose was as humble as it was ambitious - to raise funds for a new and permanent library. Now, 102 years later, Chasco Fiesta remains a pillar of the community. And while it has evolved in many ways, it preserves certain elements that honor its legacy.

For one, the annual coronation of a King Pithla and Queen Chasco continues as a symbolic recognition of community leaders and philanthropists who contribute to the city's prosperity. The festival's original mission to draw people and investment to the city also endures, along with its ambition to attract visitors from neighboring communities, injecting vitality into the local economy. And the myth that birthed the festival, heavily inspired by Native American culture, is still acknowledged through a schedule of events designed to share, educate, and pay homage to the culture of our community's Indigenous peoples.

While certain traditions persist, the Chasco Fiesta has adapted to the shifting interests of the public in more recent years.

Anissa Reveron, Executive Director of the 2024 Chasco Fiesta, regards the festival's progression as a reflection of the city itself. “As New Port Richey evolves, so does the festival. Blending the traditional with the contemporary is what I think will keep Chasco alive for another century.”

Preserving this time-honored tradition is more than a reflection of New Port Richey's century-old history: it is a testament to the city's enduring spirit and its dedication to continuous progress without ever forgetting the past upon which it is built.



## NEW PORT RICHEY Centennial Committee GEARS UP FOR A Historic Celebration

► The City of New Port Richey's 100th-anniversary celebrations are in capable hands as members of the Centennial Steering Committee gear up to help our community celebrate this memorable milestone.

The Steering Committee is comprised of Chair David Schrader, Vice-Chair Judy DeBella Thomas, and members Angel Cook, Mayor Chopper Davis, Heather Fiorentino, Bob Langford, and Bonnie Martin. This group oversees members of seven appointed sub-committees, each dedicated to an area of focus that aids in the planning, coordination, and promotion of activities that commemorate the city's centennial year.

Current plans include collaborations with current descendants of our city's founders, many of whom still reside here, along with key historical entities like the West Pasco Historical Society, the Richey Suncoast Theatre, and more. Through partnership, the festivities promise to deliver insights into our city's history and showcase the many advancements since its founding.

Having been a member of city boards and committees for more than 30 years, Schrader expresses full confidence in the collective abilities of the group.

“There are great people assembled on this committee,” he asserts, “and I know we can expect great things from them.”

We look forward to the collaboration of the committee, the city, and the community, as plans take shape for a celebration that reveres our past, celebrates our present, and envisions an even better future!

To stay informed about plans for the Centennial Celebration, follow the New Port Richey Centennial's official social media channels and subscribe for email updates at [citynpr.org](http://citynpr.org)!

@100NPR Facebook.com/100NPR  
YouTube.com/@100NPR

# CITY MANAGER'S LETTER

Dear Neighbors,

In this issue of *The Bridge*, I am delighted to reflect on the rich history of our city and highlight our efforts toward establishing the foundation for a promising future.

On the cover, you may learn more about the longstanding tradition of Chasco Fiesta, a festival predating our city's official charter. This annual celebration embodies the spirit of our community, showcasing the resilience and identity that have shaped New Port Richey over the decades.

The cover also provides further insight into the efforts of our Centennial Steering Committee, who are planning to mark our city's 100th anniversary with spectacular fanfare. I anticipate that these celebrations will reflect our journey to this significant milestone while offering a glimpse of what we can look forward to in our next century.

Looking ahead to our future, I am also excited to share the ways in which we are embracing a new standard of excellence in public space and community building.

The renovations to Meadows Dog Park stand as a testament to this dedication, breathing new life into the space and establishing an elevated precedent for other recreational areas.

Similarly, updates on the Railroad Square project reflect our forward-thinking approach to community development. These upgrades aim to strengthen our downtown area as a hub of activity and connection.

We see further examples of this heightened standard for community building among our city staff. One example is Chandler Sheldon, recognized in an article on page five. His dedication serves as a testament to the caliber of employees we are privileged to have, each contributing to our collective commitment to fostering a vibrant and inclusive community.

As we honor our past and embrace the innovation propelling us toward a vibrant future, I hope you all share my sentiments of joy, connection, and pride in our remarkable community.

Warm regards,

Debbie L. Manns, ICMA-CM  
City Manager



# Fire Station No. 2 UPDATE

Construction is underway for Fire Station 2 at 5220 Grand Blvd., a project which marks a crucial step in the city's commitment to community safety.

The new 7,876 sq ft. facility is strategically located at the northeast corner of Grand Blvd. and Marine Pkwy., offering quick access to main feeder roads in all directions and the busy U.S. Hwy. 19 corridor. This will allow for an expansion of the coverage area while meeting critical response times of four minutes or less.

Beyond these improvements, the new station offers modern amenities with design features that prioritize health and safety standards set forth by the National Fire Protection Association, including designated hot, warm and cold zones.

**"Cancer is the leading cause of death among firefighters," notes Fire Chief Chris Fitch. "They frequently encounter carcinogens. As a result, it was crucial that the new facility has designated zones for gear removal and cleanup to prevent contamination of their living spaces."**

The new station will facilitate additional public services, offering blood pressure screenings, acting as a safe haven, and utilizing its new training room as a space for community education and school programming.



"We're excited to have a greater presence in our neighborhood with this new flagship location," remarks Chief Fitch, who sees the facility as the city's best in 50 years.

The city extends gratitude to this project's crucial contributors: the Kulhawik family for donating the land for the new station in 1987, and the Florida Fire Marshal's Office for awarding grant funding of \$10,245 for a bunker gear extractor and \$48,700 for an exhaust source capture system.

We look forward to the grand opening of Fire Station No. 2 this fall and the improvements it brings to our firefighters and our community!



A rendering of the new fire station's appearance once completed in fall 2024.

## Spring Neighborhood CLEANUP DAY



The City of New Port Richey will host its **Spring Neighborhood Cleanup Day on Saturday, May 18, from 8:00 AM until 5:00 PM.**

During this time, residents within city limits may dispose of unwanted items at the following two locations: 5580 Frances Ave. and 6131 South River Rd.

Disposal of nonworking TVs and computer equipment will be accepted at the River Rd. location, which will also provide paper shredding (limited to four boxes per household).

Prior to unloading, Public Works personnel will inspect all vehicles and confirm proof of residency. They will also ask about the materials being discarded to ensure that hazardous substances such as paint, oil, cleaning solutions, and similar items are appropriately sorted for disposal.

**For more information, please contact the New Port Richey Public Works Department at 727.841.4536.**

# MAYOR'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Spring is a perfect time to enjoy our city's outdoor spaces and community events. I look forward to visiting our public facilities, including the revitalized Meadows Dog Park, and participating in the exciting events planned for the season ahead with all of you.

March brought us another outstanding Chasco Fiesta, continuing its enduring legacy in our city. As we look ahead to our 100-year anniversary, it's a great privilege to enjoy this and many of our other century-old traditions and landmarks that continue to stand strong today.

In the continuous pursuit of enhanced community well-being, I'd like to share some important updates and reminders regarding ongoing procedures, recent changes, and new opportunities.

First, I want to remind all citizens to remain mindful of the ongoing water shortage. Despite recent rainfall, Pasco County maintains Modified Phase I Water Restrictions which limit watering to once per week. Additional details are available on SWFWMD's website.

I also want to emphasize our collective responsibility in protecting our waterways. Illicit discharges in stormwater drains impact the Cotee River directly, and we depend on your cooperation to safeguard this vital part of our ecosystem. Learn more about this on page five of this newsletter.

Lastly, I'd like to bring attention to the available business spaces along the US Highway 19 corridor north of Main Street. With our city's growing reputation as a "place to be," now is a great time for local entrepreneurs to consider becoming part of New Port Richey's business landscape.

For those passionate about our city's continued success, I encourage you to explore volunteer opportunities that aid our improvement. New Port Richey has six boards and committees whose volunteers present recommendations to the City Council. These are:

- Cultural Affairs Committee
- Environmental Committee
- Historic Preservation Board
- Land Development Review Board
- Library Advisory Board
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

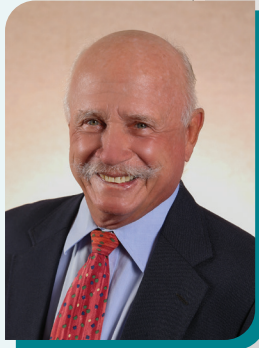
If you have the skills or passion to serve any of these groups, I encourage you to investigate further at [www.cityofnewportrichey.org/boards-committees](http://www.cityofnewportrichey.org/boards-committees).

You may also consider joining New Port Richey Main Street, Inc., an organization whose four committees—Economic Vitality, Design, Promotions, and Organization—work towards enhancing the vitality of our downtown. To learn more about their efforts, visit [www.nprmainstreet.com](http://www.nprmainstreet.com).

However you may choose to contribute, your efforts are invaluable to our community's progress. As I often say, 90% of the work is done by 10% of the people—I encourage you to become a part of the 10% who will pave the way for even greater accomplishments and prosperity in New Port Richey's future.

Sincerely,  
Chopper Davis  
Mayor

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# Railroad Square

## Construction Set to Begin This Summer



Another milestone in **Downtown New Port Richey's** renaissance is on the horizon as construction for the enhancements to **Railroad Square** is slated to begin this summer.



In 2019, Railroad Square was identified as an untapped resource with the potential to spark increased support for the business community and to create an inviting public space, so a plan was conceived to transform the roadway from an underwhelming thoroughfare into a beautiful pedestrian plaza that still serves vehicular access needs.

With an estimated total investment of \$4.5 million, the overhaul of Railroad Square will unfold in two phases. Phase I improvements will concentrate on the portion of Nebraska Ave. between Adams St. and Grand Blvd. Phase II improvements will address the section between Grand Blvd. and Bank St.

Enhancements include shade sails, lighting improvements, landscaping, market-style kiosks, seating arrangements, and an outdoor activity zone with cornhole and swings. Additionally, Cavalaire Square will be outfitted

with a shaded seating area, creating a more inviting space for live entertainment in the heart of our historic downtown.

These efforts, which reinforce the city's commitment to nurturing community vitality through enhanced public spaces, will draw foot traffic to local businesses and redefine the area as a vibrant cultural hub. Upon its completion, Railroad Square will provide an ideal venue for gatherings, special events, and exhibitions that celebrate culture and strengthen our community spirit.

**Before construction begins, the city will hold several meetings to communicate project information and to strategize means of minimizing disruption to local businesses. All business owners and citizens are encouraged to attend.**



**PROJECT LOCATION**  
Nebraska Ave. from the west side of Grand Blvd. to the east side of Adams St. including the public parking lots to the east and west of 5751 Missouri Ave. and including 5744 Missouri Ave. (Cavalaire Square)

For updates on this and other project details, visit [www.cityofnewportrichey.org/railroadsquare](http://www.cityofnewportrichey.org/railroadsquare).



# K-9 REX Joins the New Port Richey POLICE DEPARTMENT

▶ The New Port Richey Police Department is excited to introduce the newest addition to its K-9 unit.

Rex, a Belgian Malinois and German Shepherd mix, is currently in Patrol School training. He is set to graduate in May as the fourth member of the department's K-9 division.

**“Our officers work in four shifts,” says Lieutenant Chris Mellecker, who oversees the K-9 unit. “Adding a fourth dog is significant for us because we’ll now be able to have a dog on duty for every shift.”**

New Port Richey’s K-9s handle diverse tasks: from traffic stops and missing persons investigations to community education demonstrations. They must be adaptable and responsive in various situations.

Rex’s handler will be Officer Joseph Bologna, a veteran officer and state-certified trainer with 13 years of experience in training police K-9s. Notably, Officer Bologna also recently received the New Port Richey Police Department’s award for Officer of the Year.

Lieutenant Mellecker praises the dedication of Officer Bologna and all the Police Department’s K-9 handlers.

“They have to be committed to the dogs both on and off duty,” he adds. “It really demonstrates their passion for, and dedication to, the work they do.”

The Police Department is eager to welcome Rex to the K-9 unit, viewing it as an important component of its community safety measures.

**“When a place feels safe and comfortable, people want to be there,” says Lieutenant Mellecker. “By strengthening our K-9 unit, we are better equipped to ensure our city is a place where people want to be.”**

# Meadows Dog Park Set to Reopen

**Meadows Dog Park, which has been undergoing substantial renovations since July 2023, is set to reopen this spring with a brand-new look and feel.**

▶ The \$1.4 million dollar project, funded by Penny for Pasco sales tax dollars, marks the park’s first significant renovation since it opened in 2007. The project introduces tremendous upgrades to the park’s amenities and infrastructure, including:

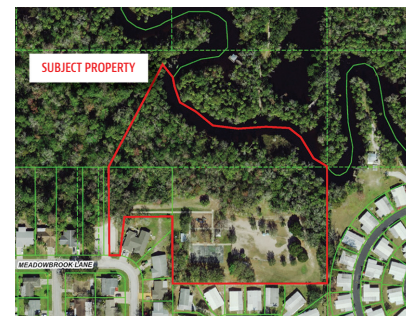
- Two dog play areas with agility equipment
  - A new children’s playground
  - Shade sails over the picnic area
- Three new pickleball courts and a half basketball court
  - Remodel of the on-site restrooms
- New site lighting and aesthetic improvements, including landscaping and hardscaping

Parks and Recreation Director Andre Julien highlights the impact of these changes, saying, “It isn’t a one-to-one comparison with the old park. The new improvements truly transform the space into a community asset that offers something for every member of the family.”

Marked by significant upgrades and exciting new features, the park’s reopening underscores the city’s dedication to offering exceptional community spaces that foster connected, active living for everyone.



For more updates on the opening date and status of the Meadows Dog Park renovations, visit [www.cityofnewportrichey.org/meadowspark](http://www.cityofnewportrichey.org/meadowspark).



▲ Meadows Dog Park is located in the Meadows subdivision and is accessible via Larch Ln. and Meadowbrook Ln.

## YOUR CITY COUNCIL (As of April 10, 2024)



**Mayor, Chopper Davis**  
[Davisc@cityofnewportrichey.org](mailto:Davisc@cityofnewportrichey.org)



**Councilman, Matt Murphy**  
[Murphyrm@cityofnewportrichey.org](mailto:Murphyrm@cityofnewportrichey.org)



**Councilman, Peter Altman**  
[Altmanp@cityofnewportrichey.org](mailto:Altmanp@cityofnewportrichey.org)



**Councilwoman, Kelly Mothershead**  
[Mothersheadk@cityofnewportrichey.org](mailto:Mothersheadk@cityofnewportrichey.org)



**Councilman, Bertell Butler, IV**  
[Butlerb@cityofnewportrichey.org](mailto:Butlerb@cityofnewportrichey.org)



**May 25**  
**Annual NPR Kids' Fishing Tournament**  
 Cotee River – Free Admission

**May 25**  
**Concert in the Park Series:**  
 "Girl Can't Help It" Journey Tribute  
 Sims Park Amphitheater – Free Admission

**JUNE**

**Jun. 1**  
**New Port Richey Public Library's "Touch-a-Truck"**  
 City Hall Parking Lot – Free Admission

**Jun. 8**  
**Rap River Run 5K, 10K and Kids' Fun Run**  
 Sims Park – Ticket Purchase Required

**Jun. 25**  
**New Port Richey Public Library's Adult Spelling Bee**  
 The Hacienda Hotel – Free Admission,  
 Registration Required

**Jun. 29**  
**City of New Port Richey's 4th of July Celebration**  
 Sims Park – Free Admission

**ONGOING EVENTS:**

**Tasty Tuesdays Community Market**  
 Every Tuesday from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM  
 New Port Richey Public Library Courtyard

**Walk & Talk**  
 Every Monday at 10:00 AM  
 New Port Richey Public Library Courtyard

**West Pasco Historical Society Speaker Series**  
 Second Friday of every month  
 Sims Park – Peace Hall

*Beyond these events, the New Port Richey Recreation and Aquatic Center and Public Library offer a variety of opportunities for our residents to connect, learn, and have fun. Whether you want to meet people who share your interests or learn something new like a language or sport, there's something for everyone!*

For more information on classes and activities taking place at the New Port Richey Recreation and Aquatic Center, please call 727.841.4560.

For more information about the Public Library's classes, concerts, and other special events, please call 727.853.1279.



# Essential Employee Spotlight:

*Chandler Sheldon*

Chandler Sheldon is celebrated as a linchpin of the New Port Richey Recreation Center, beloved by both his peers and the community.

Parks and Recreation Director Andre Julien regards Sheldon as "the glue that holds us together," emphasizing his unique ability to connect with those around him. Assistant Director Kevin Trapp echoes this sentiment, adding that his impact grows stronger daily.

Since starting part-time in 2016 as a Recreation Leader, Sheldon has risen to Rec Supervisor III, overseeing the Rec Center's day-to-day operations.

**"Chandler's journey through the Rec System has profoundly shaped his character and commitment to giving back," notes Trapp.**

Throughout his eight-year tenure, this commitment has been evident in every responsibility he has taken on.

In addition to core responsibilities, Sheldon spearheads many Rec Center events while maintaining external commitments, including participation on the Gulf Middle School Advisory Board. He graduated from FRPA's Emerging Leaders Institute last year, further demonstrating his dedication to enhancing community experiences through continuing education.

Julien reflects, "I'll get it done" defines Chandler. His positive presence makes him a role model and an integral part of our community."

We thank Chandler Sheldon for his essential role and dedication to delivering exceptional experiences to our community!

**If you've had an outstanding interaction with any city employee, please share your feedback.**

*To share your feedback, please complete a comment card located at each city facility, or you may email comments to wharranb@cityofnewportrichey.org.*

**APRIL**

**Apr. 19**  
**Riverside Concert Series:**  
 Celtic Conundrum  
 Sims Park – Free Admission

**Apr. 20**  
**New Port Richey Environmental Committee's Earth Day Celebration**  
 NPR Public Library – Free Admission

**Apr. 27**  
**Concert in the Park Series:**  
 "Rock Revue" Blues Brothers & Tina Turner Tribute  
 Sims Park Amphitheater – Free Admission

**MAY**

**May 4**  
**New Port Richey Environmental Committee's Monarch Day Celebration**  
 NPR Public Library – Free Admission

**May 9**  
**New Port Richey Main Street's "Mixer on Main"**  
 Dang Good on Main – Free Admission

**May 16**  
**New Port Richey Main Street's Spring Wine Stroll Sock Hop**  
 Downtown New Port Richey  
 Ticket Purchase Required

## ONLY RAIN DOWN THE DRAIN: MANAGING STORMWATER RUNOFF

Given the flat terrain of our region and the substantial growth of our city over the past 50 years, we face particular challenges regarding stormwater management.

Stormwater drains alleviate flooding by redirecting rainfall from our streets to naturally occurring waterways, such as the Pithlachascotee River. However, when these drains are obstructed by yard debris, they can't do their job. Moreover, as they do not lead to a water treatment plant, pollutants such as pet waste, engine oil, and household cleaners that end up in our storm drains can harm aquatic ecosystems and make water unsafe for recreation.

For these reasons, city ordinances strictly prohibit the discharge of any substance other than rainwater into our storm drains. The city has also established the Stormwater Utility Division, a specialized unit dedicated to managing these systems to reduce flooding, improve drainage, and safeguard our waterways.



**Residents can contribute to these efforts by reporting illicit discharges or illegal dumping to Code Enforcement at 727.232.8922. To learn more about stormwater services, contact Public Works at 727.841.4536.**




# CITY OF NEW PORT RICHEY

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## A Sneak Peek at WATER LEAKS

Often, a water bill that is higher than normal can be explained by an undetected water leak, and one of the most common culprits is the toilet tank. Two of the most likely sources of water leaks from your toilet are:

- **A leak past the flapper, which causes the tank to refill without flushing. This can waste about 10 gallons per hour.**  
*TIP: Add food coloring to the tank and check the bowl after 15 minutes. If there's color in the bowl, replacing the flapper can resolve the issue.*
- **A flapper stuck in the up position, which causes continuous running. This can waste around 200 gallons per hour.**  
*TIP: If you need to jiggle the handle to stop the tank from filling, a quick flapper replacement can prevent a sudden spike in water bills.*

A good rule is to ensure the toilet stops running before you leave the house. Unseen leaks can waste up to 4,800 gallons daily, leading to unexpectedly high bills. Addressing these issues can help you both conserve water and save money!



## SUMMER LIBRARY CHALLENGE: CELEBRATE A CENTURY AT THE NEW PORT RICHEY PUBLIC LIBRARY!

This year's Summer Library Challenge will highlight the city's upcoming centennial, celebrating our past, present, and future. Members of our community can look forward to diverse events and programs, including concerts, historical presentations, children's performers, craft workshops, a film festival, and more.

Summer Library Challenge participants set personal reading goals and earn activity badges throughout the summer. As readers earn badges, they will increase their chances of winning amazing prizes!

**Registration begins in May, and the challenge kicks off on June 1 with the annual Touch-a-Truck event.**

Participants of all ages can sign up at [nprlibrary.beanstack.org](http://nprlibrary.beanstack.org) or via the Beanstack app.

### LET'S MAKE THIS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION ONE FOR THE HISTORY BOOKS!

## Calling ALL Citizens

The spring session of our 2024 Citizens Academy is currently in progress! Attendees will formally complete the nine-week program and participate in a graduation ceremony at the regular City Council meeting on Tuesday, May 7. Enrollment for our fall session will open in late June. Please refer to [www.cityofnewportrichey.org/citizensacademy](http://www.cityofnewportrichey.org/citizensacademy) for more information.