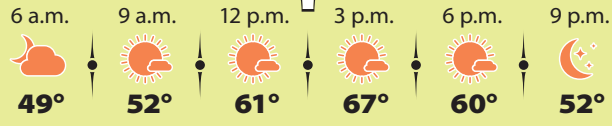




BEFORE THEY WERE VILLAGERS | D5
Jim Simpson worked as a doctor and took part in missions work across the world.



GARRETT SHIFLET ON SCHOOLS | D1
The Villages Dollars for Scholars is seeking golfers for a scholarship golf tournament.



TOP WORLD AND NATION NEWS

KING CHARLES III BEGINS TREATMENT FOR CANCER, A3

Around the World: Senate GOP distances itself from border bill. **A5**

Across the Nation: Second atmospheric river hits California. **A11**

In Health: Nearly two dozen measles cases reported across U.S. **C2**

SPORTS NEWS

NINERS STRUCK GOLD IN UNSUNG BROCK PURDY

Despite their pricey 2021 draft bust in Trey Lance, San Francisco's last pick in 2022, Brock Purdy, has brought the team to a Super Bowl. **B1**

LOCAL NEWS

TVCS PROGRAM GETS STUDENTS INTO READING

The student body of The Villages Charter School is participating in the One School, One Book program to help foster an interest in reading. **D1**

LOCAL NEWS

COURSE OFFERS CHANCE TO LEARN EASY DISHES

The Enrichment Academy is offering a course that will teach participants easy, flavorful and healthy meals that they can make at home. **D3**

OUR TOWN | AMERICA'S MOST ACTIVE HOMETOWN

Recreation and Parks Earns Highest Honor



Above: Residents participate in an Aqua Drums Vibes class at Everglades Recreation. Rachel Stuart, Daily Sun



Middle: Elizza Huggins, center, dribbles a soccer ball during the Camp Villages Outdoor Games Soccer at Saddlebrook Softball Complex. George Horsford, Daily Sun



Right: Morton Stanfield, of the Village of Gilchrist, competes in the men's shot put at The Villages Senior Games. Daily Sun file photo

The department joins a prestigious group of only 205 agencies.

By KEITH PEARLMAN
Daily Sun Managing Editor

The Villages Recreation and Parks Department is once again recognized as a gold standard in the nation.

The National Recreation and Parks Association recently honored the department with its prestigious CAPRA Award — a distinction held by only 205 recreation and parks agencies nationwide.

It is the third time the department has been presented with the association's highest honor.

It's the award that means the most to John Rohan, director of The Villages Recreation and Parks.

Please See **AWARD, A8**

Villages Honor Flight Hosting Its First Car Show Fundraiser

The organization also is hosting a Ladies for Liberty concert to collect donations for the nonprofit.

By VERONICA WERNICKE | Daily Sun Senior Writer

Villages Honor Flight is adding a new fundraiser to its annual list in its quest to continue taking local veterans on free trips to Washington, D.C.

The organization is hosting its first car show March 9, with all proceeds going toward honor flight missions.

Also in March, Ladies for Liberty will return to The Villages to perform a fundraising concert for the nonprofit.

“(It’s about) giving veterans back what they sacrificed for the country,” said Sam Landis, who is helping organize the car show. “They took

time out of their lives to serve and protect us.”

The inaugural car show will be from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. March 9 at the Baker House, 6106 County Road 44A, Wildwood. Doors open at 8:15 a.m. and prizes will be awarded at 12:30 p.m.

The idea came easily to Landis. He and his wife, Nadine, often take their 2002 Camaro to car shows and know how much fun they are, he said.

“People have these wonderful cars in The Villages,” said Landis, of the Village of Poinciana. “We

Please See **FUNDRAISER, A9**

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Taylor Strickland

Gipsy Kings, the Grammy Award-winning band known for songs like “Bamboléo” and “Un Amor,” is coming Monday to The Villages to perform songs from its ninth studio album, “Savor Flamenco.”

The concert opens with Pavlo Simtikidis, a Greek-Canadian guitarist, and a pre-show concert by Christina Vukel, who represents Albania in this epic night of music and culture.

“The whole evening is like a European and Latin extravaganza,” said Joe Bamford, show organizer and owner of Get Off The Bus Concerts.

The headliner for the night, Gipsy Kings, is a popular French

Please See **CULTURE, A10**

EXPLORE & EXPERIENCE

OUT & ABOUT IN THE VILLAGES

Try This Today: See a Story Come to Life Through A Hula Performance

Experience Hawaiian culture with the Hula Ohana dance troupe, the largest authentic Hawaiian hula performance group in The Villages. The group performs throughout the community, including at The Villages' squares, where Dawna Thomas, at right, of the Village of Fernandina, is shown. Practices are held three days a week — Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The first hour of practice helps newer members learn how the troupe performs. For more information, contact Carrie Wood at woodyandcarrie@gmail.com or 703-851-5848. — Greg Hughes, Daily Sun



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

IN ENTERTAINMENT

BritPack Band Ready to Invade Savannah Center

Find out more, **E1**

Plus: Find the lineup of entertainment at the town squares, theaters and beyond, **E3**

AT RECREATION CENTERS

Happening near you: From aqua aerobics to Zumba and everything in between, there's fun for everyone, **E4-5**

LOVIN' THE LIFESTYLE

Plan your perfect day in The Villages, **E1**

Recipes	E1
Comics	E6
Puzzles	E7-8
Horoscope	E9
Poetry	E11
Advice	E12

from the front page

CULTURE

Continued from A1

band credited with bringing Catalan rumba, flamenco and salsa music to a worldwide audience. For more than 30 years, the Kings have dominated world music charts and sold more than 14 million albums worldwide.

Gipsy Kings is predominantly a family enterprise. Originally called Los Reyes, the band was founded in 1978 by Nicolas and André Reyes and their cousins, Jacques, Maurice and Tonino Baliardo.

Although they were born in France, they are mostly of Spanish Roma descent, which is the source of inspiration for their vibrant music and performance style. The band remains a huge driving force in Spanish flamenco music to this day.

"I think (The Sharon is) going to have a hard time keeping people sitting down when they have the Gipsy Kings play," Bamford said. "It's hip-swaying kind of music."

The Gipsy Kings live up to their name, traversing the globe to share their music with the world. Bamford said the other musicians in the night's lineup have similar stories.

When Pavlo Simtikidis started out, he sold albums out of the trunk of his car. Now, the Toronto-based artist is opening for one of France's most successful musical groups of all time.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime situation," Simtikidis said. "I do concerts all over the world, but I happen to be living in Tampa and I was ecstatic when Joe Bamford called me and asked me if I wanted to perform with the Gipsy Kings."

Simtikidis, often referred to as simply "Pavlo," is an award-winning, Greek-Canadian guitarist whose music has



The Gipsy Kings, a Grammy award-winning French band, will headline a Latin and Mediterranean music showcase at 7 p.m. on Monday at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. They will perform music from their ninth studio album, "Savor Flamenco."

been described as having a Mediterranean sound mixing the folkloric styles of Greek, Spanish and Latin music with pop sensibilities. However, Simtikidis simply refers to it as "feel good music."

"In general, my music is basically combining flamenco and Latin with my Greek heritage," he said.

Born to Greek immigrant parents, Simtikidis incorporates traditional Greek melodies and instruments like the bouzouki — a long-necked lute central to a lot of modern Greek music — into his music.

Early in his career, Simtikidis received a lot of pushback from recording companies for being "too ethnic." Ironically, they wanted him to drop the bouzouki and be more like the Gipsy Kings.

"When I was growing up, the Gipsy Kings were very popular," Simtikidis said. "But because of my Greek heritage, I took my own way."

Simtikidis has been going his own way for nearly 30 years now and has cultivated

his own original sound. In addition to the bouzouki, he is also known for including instruments like the Chinese erhu, the Armenian duduk, the Arabic ney and the Turkish baglama to his songs. This musical amalgam has led Simtikidis to perform in front of the likes of King Charles III and has afforded him the opportunity to work with artists such as José Feliciano, Jon Secada, Olivia Newton-John and The Tenors.

"We're all stuck on giving music these defining terms like rock or jazz or pop or Latin, but what really matters is the way it makes you feel," Simtikidis said.

As for opening for the Gipsy Kings, Simtikidis predicts it will be a spectacular evening.

"I just want people to feel good," he said. "There are so many crazy things going on in the world that if they leave feeling like they had a good time, then it's good enough for me."

Go to pavlo.com for more information. Joining Simtikidis on stage

is Vukel.

"I'm so excited to go back to The Sharon," the 18-year-old singer said.

Vukel is a rising star in the local music scene. After releasing her debut album, "They Say," in 2022 at age 16, the Mount Dora native

continues to make a name for herself with more than a million Spotify streams, thousands of Facebook followers and a passionate local fan base.

Vukel has performed at The Sharon twice before, opening for Air Supply in 2022 and Sara Evans in 2023, but as the daughter of Albanian immigrants, she said the stakes for the international showcase are different.

"This one I have to take more seriously because I'm representing Albania over here," she said.

Vukel also will give a pre-show performance in The Sharon's main lobby, where she will sing several songs from her upcoming unreleased album. Unlike her previous work, the indie artist said the new album will feature a lot more Latin and Albanian-inspired music.

"The big thing about Albanian music is that it's very dance-y," Vukel said. "If you hear Albanian music you just can't help but dance."

Vukel is ecstatic about

getting to perform on stage with Simtikidis and looks forward to giving the audience a sneak peek into her next big project. But most of all, she wants to show fans how much she appreciates them.

"Personally, I'm just so grateful for all the support I've gotten from people," Vukel said. "They're why I made it this far, why I'm still here and why I now get to play with the Gipsy Kings."

To listen to Vukel's music or find out about other upcoming performances, go to christinavukel.com.

The Gipsy Kings, Simtikidis and Vukel hit The Sharon's main stage at 7 p.m. Feb. 12. Proceeds from the concert go to supporting the Orange Blossom Gardens Lions Club in Lady Lake.

Tickets for the show start at \$99. For more, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

Senior writer Taylor Strickland can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5334, or taylor.strickland@thevillagesmedia.com.

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