

**BEFORE THEY WERE VILLAGERS | C5**  
Kelly Dobson served in the U.S. Marine Corps for six years as an electrician for helicopters.

6 a.m.  
61°

9 a.m.  
61°


12 p.m.  
66°

3 p.m.  
67°

6 p.m.  
63°

9 p.m.  
61°

**LEAH SCHWARTING ON RIVERS | C1**  
Twenty-one projects received a total of \$100 million to restore the Indian River Lagoon.



TOP WORLD AND NATION NEWS

## RIGHT TO PROTEST IN U.K. PUT UNDER THREAT, A5

**Around the World:** Watchdog says Iran raised uranium production. **A2**

**Across the Nation:** Biden orders strikes on Iran-aligned group. **A3**

**In Business:** Where does the billions in unspent gift card money go? **C10**

ARTS & CULTURE

## SAVANNAH CENTER HOSTS MUSICAL TRIBUTE

The Central Florida Lyric Opera will be at the Savannah Center to perform a tribute show with the works of Andrew Lloyd Webber. **A18**

SPORTS NEWS

## MIAMI SHOWS THAT IT CAN TAKE ON THE GREATS

By defeating the Cowboys on Sunday, the Dolphins have started to shake the narratives surrounding their poor record versus winning teams. **B1**

LOCAL NEWS

## FIRST DAY HIKES GIVE CHANCE TO EXPLORE NATURE

Florida state parks are offering visitors a chance to take a ranger-guided hike to ring in the new year, encouraging outdoor experiences. **D1**

OUR TOWN | HOME-FIELD ADVANTAGE



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

Richard Pettus, Athletic Director and Head Football Coach, at The Range at H.G. Morse Stadium at The Villages High School. The new Middleton campus' facilities have had a strong impact on VHS athletes.

# VHS Athletes Thrive At New Facilities

By CONNOR O'BRYAN | Daily Sun Staff Writer

When The Villages High School moved to its new Middleton campus over the summer, it was an opportunity to give student-athletes a leg up in training and performance with brand new, state-of-the-art facilities.

It's safe to say these facilities made a lasting impact on Buffalo athletics.

"To see it start on a piece of paper and to watch it

grow each year – it's just been incredible what we've been able to witness," said Richard Pettus, VHS athletic director and head football coach. "Athletically, we offered 28 sports teams – from JV to varsity. We added girls flag football last year. We're adding girls beach volleyball this year. Maybe in the next

Please See **VHS, A8**

## Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Begins in January

### 2024 HEALTH CARE

The next three months allows Medicare Advantage patients to reevaluate their plans.

By LEAH SCHWARTING | Daily Sun Specialty Editor

The Medicare Annual Enrollment Period is over, but everything isn't locked in place for Medicare Advantage patients.

From Monday to March 31, Medicare Advantage patients can take a second look at their plan during the upcoming Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period (OEP). The three-month stretch allows patients to see if they're satisfied with their new plan. If they are not, they can switch to another Medicare Advantage plan or return to traditional Medicare and join a

Medicare drug plan.

After the open enrollment period ends, however, patients' coverage will be finalized until the next Medicare Annual Enrollment Period (AEP) in October or they qualify for a special enrollment period.

"So, as far as enrollments, AEP is the period," said Emilio Noble, Villages Health vice president of sales and marketing. "As far as solidifying the decision, open enrollment is the period."

Please See **MEDICARE, A11**

### ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Michael Fortuna

After a few years apart, the members of Forte decided the time is right to reunite. And the vocal trio wants to give its first performance back together in The Villages.

Featuring the lineup that made its way to the "America's Got Talent" finals in 2013, Fernando Varela, Josh Page and Sean Panikkar will combine their voices for a special performance at 7 p.m. Jan. 31 at Savannah Center.

Tickets are \$55 and up, and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thevillagesentertainment.com.

"We're all kind of maturing and wanting to still make music

Please See **FORTE, A10**

## EXPLORE & EXPERIENCE

OUT & ABOUT IN THE VILLAGES

### Try This Today: Enjoy Storytelling Through Dance With Hula

Get a taste of Hawaiian culture during a performance by the Hula Ohana dance troupe, the largest authentic Hawaiian hula performance group in The Villages. Practices are held three days a week — Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays — at SeaBreeze Recreation. The first hour is generally to help newer members adjust to the choreography and learn how the troupe performs. Anyone is welcome to join, like Dawna Thomas, of the Village of Fernandina. For more information, contact Carrie Wood at woodyandcarrie@gmail.com or 703-581-5848. — Greg Hughes, Daily Sun



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

IN ENTERTAINMENT

**Christina Vukel Performing at McGrady's Pub**  
Find out more, **D1**

**Plus:** Find the lineup of entertainment at the town squares, theaters and beyond, **A17**

AT RECREATION CENTERS

**Happening near you:** From aqua aerobics to Zumba and everything in between, there's fun for everyone, **D4-5**

## LOVIN' THE LIFESTYLE

Plan your perfect day in The Villages, **D1**

Recipes	D1
Poetry	D3
Comics	D6
Puzzles	D7-8
Horoscope	D9
Advice	D12



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MEDICARE

Continued from A1

During the three-month annual enrollment period, which ended on Dec. 7, seniors chose whether they wanted to enroll in traditional Medicare or one of many Medicare Advantage plans. Unlike traditional Medicare, which people can add to with supplemental insurance like prescription drug coverage, Medicare Advantage often includes drug coverage, vision and dental benefits.

The trained volunteers of Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders (SHINE) get a lot of questions about Medicare Advantage plans, said John Krier, SHINE area coordinator for Lake and Sumter counties. SHINE is a free health insurance counseling program offered through the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

TV commercials for Medicare Advantage plans promise everything, said Krier, of the Village of Pinellas, but most people are smart enough to say it can't be that easy.

“All of the advertising is around the benefits, but what's really important is do the plans have the providers that they need in their network, first of all, and that are reasonably accessible,” Krier said. “It doesn't help a Lake County resident if he's in Altoona and the specialist happens to be in Clermont. You've got to know the accessibility.”

Bob Trinh, Villages Health chief executive officer, compares it to buying a car.

“Once you buy a car you can't turn it back in,” he said. “However, OEP allows you to access your health benefits and your new primary care physician and care team, and if you don't enjoy it, then here's your one chance to either go back to your previous primary

OEP allows you to access your health benefits and your new primary care physician and care team, and if you don't enjoy it, then there's your one chance to either go back to your previous primary care physician and plan or to choose a different one.”

BOB TRINH

Villages Health chief executive officer

care physician and plan or to choose a different one that maybe your neighbors have a great experience with.”

Krier recommends people schedule an appointment and check out their drug plan to see if it's right for them during this time. If not, people may discover they've opted out of a plan they want when it's too late.

For example, The Villages Health accepts Medicare Advantage plans from Florida Blue, Humana and UnitedHealthcare. Sometimes patients buy new plans from a different provider, and only realize they can't see their doctor at The Villages Health when they try and make an appointment.

Shoppers can get enticed by rich benefits in some of the

Medicare Advantage plans, Trinh said, not realizing the benefits they leave behind when they leave The Villages Health, which in addition to primary care services, also offers specialty care in a variety of areas.

The open enrollment period, however, allows them to go back if they so choose.

“So it's basically an opportunity, a remorse period, to try it out, make sure it works for them, and if they have a change of mind, go back and re-select,” Noble said.

To find out more about picking a plan that works for you, visit a Health Insurance Resource Center from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The centers, which accept walk-ins, are adjacent to The Villages Health. To find the center closest to you, visit HI-RC.com.

For more information about The Villages Health, visit thevillageshealth.com. People can also learn more by making an appointment with a new patient specialist by calling 844-884-9355.

Seniors can also seek help from SHINE, which meets in The Villages from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on first and third Wednesdays at Eisenhower Recreation, 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. first and third Fridays at Chula Vista, and 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. second and fourth Tuesdays at Lake Miona Recreation.

Outside of The Villages, SHINE meets in the local area from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. second and fourth Wednesdays at the Lady Lake Public Library and from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on the first and third Tuesdays at the Leesburg Public Library.

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After Recalls, Experts Say Eyedrops Will Require New FDA Powers

The FDA is asking Congress for new powers, including the ability to immediately recall products.

By MATTHEW PERRONE  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON D.C.

When you buy eyedrops at a U.S. store, you might assume you're getting a product made in a clean, well-maintained factory that's passed muster with health regulators.

But repeated recalls involving over-the-counter drops are drawing new attention to just how little U.S. officials know about the conditions at some manufacturing plants on the other side of the world — and the limited tools they have to intervene when there's a problem.

The Food and Drug Administration is asking Congress for new powers, including the ability to mandate drug recalls and require eyedrop makers to undergo inspections before shipping products to the U.S. But experts say those capabilities will do little without more staff and resources for foreign inspections, which were a challenge even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced regulators to skip thousands of visits.

“The FDA is not getting its job done in terms of drug quality assurance inspections abroad,” said David Ridley of Duke University and co-author of a recent paper tracking the downturn in inspections. “Very few foreign drugmakers have



Richard Vogel | The Associated Press

Repeated recalls of eyedrops are drawing new attention to the limited powers U.S. regulators have to oversee medical products made overseas.

been inspected in the past four years.”

In 2022, FDA foreign inspections were down 79% from 2019, according to agency records collected by Ridley's group. Inspections increased this year but are still far below pre-pandemic levels.

FDA spokesman Jeremy Kahn said: “The FDA works to inspect as many facilities possible, but ultimately industry is responsible for the quality of their products.”

An October recall of two dozen eyedrop brands came after FDA staff found cracked floors, barefoot workers and other unsanitary conditions at a Mumbai plant that supplied products to CVS, Walmart and other major retailers. It was the first time FDA staff had visited the site.

That inspection was prompted by an earlier recall of tainted eyedrops from a different Indian plant that's been linked to four deaths and more than a dozen cases of vision loss. That plant had also never been previously inspected.

“These are very rare instances, but what we've seen is that these products can cause real harm,” said Dr. Timothy

Janetos, an ophthalmologist at Northwestern University. “Something needs to change.”

Experts point to three possible changes:

Prescription medicines are highly regulated. Before a drug-maker can sell one in the U.S., it must undergo FDA review to establish its safety and effectiveness. As part of the process, the FDA typically inspects the factory where the drug will be made.

But eyedrops and other over-the-counter products don't undergo preliminary review or inspections. Instead, they are governed by a different system called a monograph, essentially a generic recipe for all medicines in a particular class. So long as drugmakers attest that they are using the standard recipe, they can launch a product within days of filing with the FDA.

“It's nothing more than electronic paperwork,” said Dr. Sandra Brown of the Dry Eye Foundation, a nonprofit advocating for increased regulation. “There's no requirement for the facility to be inspected prior to shipping for sale.”

The FDA says it has flexibility to adjust its review process “to ensure safety.”

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