



NFC South leader tumbles, Rams rise up

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5 Newport area holiday events

Get in the spirit this weekend

Will Richmond
Newport Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK

Not to cause any alarms, but you know have exactly two weeks until Christmas day – and possibly even less depending on when you’re reading this.

If you’re not quite into the spirit of the season yet, don’t worry, this weekend can help.

From concerts to craft fairs, open houses to readings of a holiday classic, there is something for just about everyone. Take a break from checking your list twice and check out what’s happening across Newport County this weekend.

Newport Signs Winter Concert

Newport Sings will present its annual Winter Concert on Sunday at 4 p.m. at Calvary United Methodist Church in Middletown.

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The Museum Of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center. PROVIDED BY ALLAN MILLORA

TOP: Readings of “A Visit from St. Nicholas” will take place at the Colony House.
BRUCE LIPSKY/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION

PARTIES, INFLUENCE AND PLANS

Inside Trump’s Mar-a-Lago private club

Some worry about ‘unfettered’ access to president-elect

Antonio Fins
Palm Beach Post
USA TODAY NETWORK

PALM BEACH, Fla. – The gilded Tea Room at Mar-a-Lago, with its glistening chandelier and gold accent drapes, proved a fruitful venue for investor James Fishback to launch an investment fund aimed at taking down diversity, equity and inclusion policies at top American companies.

That’s not simply because President-elect Donald Trump’s private club, where a one-time membership fee now tops \$1 million, abounds with deep-pocketed potential investors. Rather, the club is where the like-minded within the MAGA movement have hunkered down to plan the next Trump administration since his stunning election win.

“We’re free thinkers here,” Fishback, 29, said as he presided over more than two hours of speeches and panel discussions.

Those conversations spitballed the use of data analytics to teach middle schoolers critical thinking skills, a monetary system where bitcoin is more valuable than gold, using artificial intelligence to handle health insurance claims, and even marveled at a purported 25% spike in Bible sales.

There’s a lot of disruption-themed brainstorming going on at the president-elect’s South Florida club these days. Mar-a-Lago – the Mediterranean-style estate that an American cereal heiress first envisioned as a presidential retreat a half-century ago – is today the giddy center of the American political universe.

As Fishback wrapped up his investment event earlier this month, a human trafficking prevention luncheon was kicking off. The night before, Trump and his incoming administration’s highest-profile hires – including Elon Musk, Vivek Ramaswamy and Robert Kennedy Jr. – held court in the club’s ornate dining hall.

“In addition to all the other things that Mar-a-Lago is, it is a very important institution as a hub for this very

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URI setup could be model

Levels of ‘forever chemicals’ in water are barely detectable

Alex Kuffner
Providence Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

SOUTH KINGSTOWN – It went unnoticed at the time, but just a few weeks ago, the University of Rhode Island did something that no other major supplier of drinking water in the state has done after discovering contamination from

so-called “forever chemicals.”

On Nov. 1, the school flipped the switch on a system that filters out per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, from the water it supplies to the nearly 20,000 people on its Kingston campus.

Early tests have shown that the new filtration system has been able to lower concentrations of the chemicals to barely detectable levels, meaning the university’s drinking water is now not only in compliance with a state

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Construction manager Nick Winn stands in front of the PFAS filtration system with University of Rhode Island officials Ken Burke, Abby Benson and Kurt Calvo.
ALEX KUFFNER/PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

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Events

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The concert will feature nearly 100 singers from the Newport County Youth Chorus Prep Chorus, the Aquidneck Singers and Quorus along with special guests from the Community Sing program. There are no advanced tickets; a suggested donation of \$20/person or \$40/family will be accepted at the door (credit card, cash, check accepted) and is tax-deductible. All proceeds support new and expanding Newport Sings programs.

Newport County Youth Chorus Prep Chorus (Grades 1-6) will perform songs about light. Aquidneck Singers, a multi-generational women's chorus, is excited to perform a variety of music ranging from folk songs to Gospel. Quorus, Newport's first and only LGBTQIA+ chorus, will sing familiar songs the audience will be sure to love! The concert will conclude with an audience singalong, which will certainly help you get into the holiday spirit!

Jamestown Community Chorus 75th anniversary concerts

The Jamestown Community Chorus will celebrate its 75th anniversary with two December concerts.

The concerts will be Saturday at 4 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. Both take place at the Jamestown Recreation Center, 41 Conanicus Ave. General admission tickets are \$15 and can be reserved ahead of time or purchased at the door.

The concert will feature music from the last 75 years. You will hear music from the December holidays as well as popular and classical styles that represent the 75-year voyage of the chorus. In addition, there will be photographs, ephemera, rosters, video and audio from the early years until the present. More than 600 people have sung with the chorus over the years and the present chorus is proud to carry that legacy forward. Music Director B.J. Whitehouse, now in his 35th season, will lead the chorus.

Chorus alumni are invited to attend the concert and will be asked to join the chorus for the "Hallelujah Chorus" and

"Peace Be With You."

More information is available at www.jamestownchorus.com, Facebook and Instagram or by emailing cantabile50@gmail.com or by calling (630) 215-3810

Rogers High School Craft Fair

The third annual Rogers High School Craft Fair takes place Saturday at Rogers High School, 15 Wickham Road, from 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Enjoy a festive celebration of creativity and craftsmanship at this seasonal event sponsored by the RHS Class of 2026 which will showcase a vibrant selection of handcrafted goods, perfect for finding unique gifts or treating yourself this holiday season.

Explore a delightful variety of local artisans offering one-of-a-kind items, including handmade soaps, body butters, candles, leather goods, ornaments, wreaths, jewelry, photography and more.

In addition to all the amazing crafts and gifts, delicious food will be available for purchase to keep you fueled while

you shop.

Museum of Newport Irish History Open House

Visit the **Museum of Newport Irish History**, 648 Thames St., on Saturday from noon to 4 p.m. for Christmas Open House.

View the exhibits while enjoying Celtic holiday music, eggnog and cookies. Celtic-inspired ornaments and lapel pins will be available for sale.

Caroling by the AOH Men Singers will follow from 4-4:30 p.m.

'A Visit from St. Nicolas' readings

Christmas in Newport presents four readings of the poem "A Visit from St. Nicolas" and pictures with Santa on Saturday from noon-2 p.m. at the Colony House, Washington Square, Newport.

Readings will take place at noon, 12:30 p.m., 1 p.m. with a reading in Spanish at 1:30 p.m. Christmas in Newport at the Colony House is a free event open to the public. Don't forget to bring your camera for pictures with Santa Claus!

Club

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Trumpian coalition that I think is going to be what conservatism looks like for the next generation or more," said Kevin Roberts, president of the conservative Heritage Foundation.

Trump's first administration transformed Mar-a-Lago

That transition to conservative hub has been almost a decade in the making.

When she passed away in 1973, philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post deeded her lake-to-ocean socialite mecca in Palm Beach to the U.S. government so it might live on as a tropical Camp David for American presidents. Instead, the decaying compound was sold to Manhattan real estate tycoon Trump in 1985.

Trump refashioned the property into a happening club. Author Les Standiford said there was not much nightlife on the island at the time.

"Mar-a-Lago was a far more raucous and happening place than the Everglades Club or Palm Beach Country Club," said Standiford, who wrote "Palm Beach, Mar-a-Lago and Rise of America's Xanadu."

"In large part because Trump made it a point of encouraging entertainers and celebrities to join the ranks. That was part of his marketing strategy. That's what makes other people want to be there."

Among those who appeared at Mar-a-Lago were actor Sylvester Stallone — who compared Trump with George Washington — as well as performer Rod Stewart and various Miss Universe winners and contestants.

Another club staple were the Palm Beach winter season philanthropic galas, which contributed mightily to the club's reported \$25.1 million in revenue in 2017. Organizations that held elegant charity balls included the International Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

For 20 years, that was Trump's Mar-a-Lago brand — the top of the Palm Beach social season.

Trump's first presidential election win in 2016 ushered a change. Power players muscled in, buying memberships for proximity to the president, White House staff and Cabinet heads.

"After the presidency came, people who wanted access to power of course were drawn to Mar-a-Lago, which add-



President-elect Donald Trump walks by Elon Musk during the America First Policy Institute gala at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., on Nov. 14.

CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS

ed another layer to its appeal," Standiford said.

When Trump's first term ended with his 2020 defeat and he began to plot a comeback, the political overtone overshadowed polite society, Standiford noted.

"That's just a natural focal point given where Donald Trump's energies went following the (2020) election," Standiford said. "It probably will remain that way for as long as he is in office. It's going to be a political staging area far more than it ever was before."

Trumpettes' galas are 'bigger than life because he is bigger than life'

A crucible for the Trump family and Mar-a-Lago was the white supremacist march and violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. The fallout led more than two dozen charitable organizations to boycott Mar-a-Lago, though several ultimately returned.

Club revenues saw a 14% drop through 2019. But by then politics was flooding the zone.

Toni Holt Kramer, who became a Mar-a-Lago member around 2009, was among the first to fill the void in the booking calendar, and the coffers, at Trump's club.

"It was kind of a most unpleasant

time," recalled Holt Kramer, who had a long career as a Hollywood TV show host. "You would have thought people would have stayed with Mar-a-Lago, and stayed with President Trump, but a number of organizations left at that time."

In January 2018, Holt Kramer's Trumpettes fan club held what she and others can rightfully claim was the first large-scale, politically-infused gala at Mar-a-Lago.

A second Trumpettes event followed in 2019 with Academy Award-winning actor Jon Voight. In 2020, Trump and first lady Melania Trump attended the group's football-themed party along with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and the state's first lady, Casey DeSantis.

Earlier this year, the Trumpettes' "Mega-MAGA" bash stood out in the Mar-a-Lago season's event roster that also included a gala headlined by Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli.

Trump attended the Feb. 12 Trumpettes' party with Melania, in her first public appearance after the passing of her mother in January, along with Republican U.S. Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee. Ramaswamy was also there.

So was Tom Homan, the former New York cop and immigration official tapped as Trump's border czar, and Club

for Growth leader David McIntosh. U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., attended a VIP cocktail hour in the club's White and Gold ballroom, while a Cuban salsa band serenaded a cocktail gathering by the pool.

Other political groups have hosted events at Mar-a-Lago, including the American Freedom Tour's "Winter Gala," Mike Flynn's America's Future Inc. and Catholics for Catholics, which brought actor Jim Caviezel. Among the most recent was last month's America First Policy Institute affair.

But Holt Kramer said the Trumpettes' galas stand apart for one reason. "I don't do a party. I do an extravaganza," she quipped. "That's the difference. We are bigger than life because he is bigger than life."

Amid the glitz, serious business continues. Trump recently hosted Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau after the president-elect threatened to hit Canada with tariffs.

Mar-a-Lago's 'unfettered' access to Trump worries watchdog group

The night before he held the breakfast event for his Azoria fund, Fishback was at Mar-a-Lago. He approached the incoming White House chief of staff, Susie Wiles, as well as Trump himself to explain what his "anti-woke" fund was all about.

"I said, 'What you are doing for the country is you're going to run it like a meritocracy. You're going to hire the best and brightest even if they come from circles outside the traditional conservative world. We hope to do the same with Azoria,'" Fishback said of his chat with the president-elect. "And he wished me luck."

Perhaps no more than a benign exchange of good will, but encounters such as this one have government watchdogs again unsettled about the nexus of money, power and policy at Trump's Palm Beach club.

"We saw this happen before at Mar-a-Lago," said Jordan Libowitz, vice president of communications at Citizens for Responsibility & Ethics in Washington. "It is a place where you get unfettered access to him."

One high-profile example during Trump's first term, he said, was the influence that three club members — Marvel Entertainment Chairman Ike Perlmutter, physician Bruce Moskowitz and attorney Marc Sherman — exerted at the highest-levels of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Filter

Continued from Page 4A

money that has been allocated to the state so far will only do so much.

"It's not nearly going to be enough to take care of the problem on a long-term basis," Fazioli said.

URI filtration system uses activated carbon

The new filtration system at URI is housed in a metal shed not far from the campus wells. It consists of two enormous tanks filled with granules of activated carbon — 30,000 gallons of the stuff.

Activated carbon is extremely porous with lots of surface area, making it effective at filtering out contaminants. It does this through a process called adsorption, which is different from absorption in which a substance soaks into a material. Instead, as the well water passes through the tanks, toxins ad-

here to the surface of the sand-like pieces of activated carbon.

It's similar in concept to what you'd use at home to filter water from your tap or to keep your fish tank clean.

"A very big fish tank," quipped Calvo. URI, which uses 700,000 gallons of water a day and operates a system similar in size to that of a small town, is the largest water supplier so far in Rhode Island that has had to take action on PFAS.

The use of activated carbon is the most studied method to remove the chemicals and when done properly can be 100% effective, according to the EPA.

While the tanks of activated carbon are able to do the job alone, the university isn't finished in addressing the problem.

To ensure the filters work as efficiently as possible and for as long as possible, URI is getting ready to start work early next year on phase two of the project: the installation of a pre-treatment system to remove iron and manganese from the water, natural elements that can cause mineral deposits in

"We welcome the attention. We feel like this is unique and we want to help."

Abby Benson

URI vice president for administration and finance

equipment.

While the first phase of the project cost about \$5 million, the second phase is expected to be about three times as much. It's scheduled to wrap up by February 2027. Only once the entire project is completed will the school be in compliance with its agreement with the state health department.

"The reason we did it in two phases was to remove PFAS from the water sooner," Burke said.

So far, the system is working well.

Calvo said that tests of the filtered water are finding PFAS at less than 4 ppt, meaning any presence of the chemicals is below the limits that can be detected by a laboratory.

URI always intended to be one of the first water systems to address the PFAS problem, he and other university administrators said. That was partly out of a desire to be a leader on the issue, but there were also practical considerations.

The system URI is using is manufactured by a California company called AqueoUS Vets. At the time the school placed its order there was a 10- to 12-month wait time for the equipment. Administrators knew that other water suppliers in the state and the country would be needing to invest in filtration systems and they didn't want URI to get caught up if there was a supply chain problem.

Officials with the Kent County Water Authority and Quonset Development have already come out to see what URI has done and university leaders expect to be giving more tours.

"We welcome the attention," said Abby Benson, vice president for administration and finance at the school. "We feel like this is unique and we want to help."