

THE

# *Magnolia*

NEWS

NEWS OF INTEREST TO THE RESIDENTS OF MAGNOLIA POINT

VOLUME 7 • ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 2026



## Hello February!

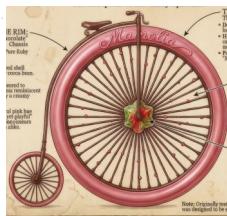
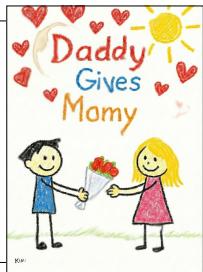
A favorite theme month is this! A single day that's a holiday...**not!** But is special nonetheless, like Halloween or Mother's Day. Just the mention of 'February' conjures up a reverence for love, romance and affection. And flowers, of course. Which feature mightily on our cover, throughout these pages and in this month's '**MIXmagic**', which has been magically positioned so very early in this issue: on **page 3**, next! We hope you like the recipe, and the issue!



**Breaking!** The Magnolia News is now contributing to the Magnolia Point Women's Club with 100% of monthly ad revenue. Pam Young explains in 'MPWC Update', **page 9.**



We couldn't resist; three new original cartoons and one 'Kimi Krayon' grace our pages this month, can you spot them all?



It's raining rubies in Spring Park! Maggie P's latest adventure aboard an authentic penny farthing bicycle, and the happy result, **pages 12-13.**



Highlights from this month's League play, and Baxter finds love, on **pages 23-25.**

It's a call to arms in Christian's 'Playing Through' this month, as he 'Takes It Away - Part II', **pages 17-18.**



A place where golf tips and couples' therapy collide, a safe zone where 'Mulligans' are prescribed, **pages 27-28.**



Three good friends find time and patience in Spring Park on a day we think in terms of of 'two', and it's 'HIP', on **page 19.**

## THE MAGNOLIA NEWS

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[MAGNOLIAresidents.com](http://MAGNOLIAresidents.com)

Bill lets us in on the secrets of a legendary Valentine's dessert, the 'Red Velvet Cake', on **pages 21-22.**



*The Magnolia News does not accept political, social commentary, or opinion pieces for publication.*





# MIXmagic SWEETHEART SLIPPER

A luxurious, romantic drink that balances rich dark chocolate with bright cherry notes. The chocolate provides a velvety, slightly bitter foundation while the cherry adds fruity sweetness and a hint of tartness. Cream adds body and smoothness, with vanilla rounding out the flavors. The result is reminiscent of chocolate-covered cherries with a sophisticated, not-too-sweet finish.

## Ingredients:

- 2 oz cherry juice (preferably tart cherry)
- 1 oz chocolate syrup (high-quality, or homemade)
- 1 oz heavy cream or coconut cream
- 1/2 oz vanilla syrup
- 2-3 dashes of chocolate bitters (optional)
- Club soda or sparkling water to top (about 2 oz)
- Ice
- Garnish: fresh cherry and chocolate shavings

**TIP:** For both versions, you can make them extra special by freezing cherries into ice cubes or creating a chocolate-cherry syrup from scratch using cocoa powder, sugar, and fresh cherry puree.

## Recipe:

1. In a cocktail shaker, combine cherry juice, chocolate syrup, cream, and vanilla syrup with ice
2. Shake vigorously for 15-20 seconds until well-chilled and frothy
3. Strain into a coupe or rocks glass over fresh ice
4. Top gently with club soda
5. Garnish with a fresh cherry on a pick and dust with chocolate shavings

### Alcoholic Version

- 1.5 oz vodka or dark rum
- 1 oz cherry liqueur (such as Cherry Heering or Luxardo)
- 0.5 oz crème de cacao (dark)





# MPCA NEWS



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NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION

FEBRUARY 2026

## COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications Committee offers this update to residents on the ongoing changes with the HOA's website. If you have logged in recently, you will have noticed the home page has been amended with quick links for easy access to important documents and more. The menu bar was rearranged to help residents find items they are looking for, the welcome message was updated, and Important Links were expanded for easy access. Regarding the upcoming annual meeting, all residents received a letter from May Management, an email, a notice on Newsgram and now there is a link to the meeting documents under Important Links on the Home Page.

At its January 12 meeting, the Board discontinued the forum. Only an HOA-specific website has a forum option and research into new website platforms found few that offered this feature. Discontinuing the forum

ahead of migration to a new website gives residents a chance to get used to a new way to get in touch with a specific Board member or committee chair.

Instructions were emailed to all residents about how to report a problem, request information, or report a concern through the Contact Us link. Residents are urged to use this feature which is also available under Important Links. Please select Contact Us, select the one committee that is in charge of the content of your request, and send.

The contract with the new website provider, MagicAngel, has been signed and work is underway. One recommendation brought forward by the Strategic Planning Committee during their research was to have a search option within the new website. In addition to the new website having a search option, it will be more user friendly and a Contact Us form as is currently available. The member database will be secured outside the website platform.

- JOANNE LEBEOUF & SANDY WALDRUP

## ACCESS CONTROL

The guard house at the main gate is currently undergoing much needed work for mold remediation, rotted wood-siding replacement, HVAC ductwork replacement, leaking window replacement, and other improvements to the building and grounds to help prevent future issues. An independent mold inspection was performed, luckily the mold types identified were not considered dangerous beyond being an allergen. Funding for the work was approved at the December board meeting. Resident John Cardinell has volunteered his time to arrange and oversee all aspects of the work being performed by the various subcontractors, providing us (the homeowners) a significant cost savings. The work is still in progress but most of it should be wrapped up by the end of January. Please join me in thanking John for his efforts on this very important project.

Looking forward into February, the Board is planning to make a decision on whether or not to implement RFID for controlling access into the community. If implemented, RFID will replace using remotes for opening the gates. Instead, resident's vehicles will be equipped with a fixed RFID sticker (credential). The RFID reader (to be installed) at each gate will automatically open the gate upon reading and verifying the credential. If approved, the new RFID reader equipment will be installed and a phase-in period will begin. Residents will be notified by May Management of when/where to go for sticker issuance and installation.

- CHUCK COX

*Continued*





# MPCA NEWS



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## STRATEGIC PLANNING

After a brief hiatus over the holidays, the Strategic Planning Committee is back in session. Our current projects are both focused on longevity and continuity within the community.

The first project is to develop a Contingency Plan "book" that will be delivered to the Board for them to use in the event that there is a loss of access to the amenities in the community. It will cover a wide range of options available to the HOA. The Executive Summary has been drafted, and the Table of Contents has been developed. We are now in the process of filling in the various sections in the book.

Our second project involves creating a long-range strategic plan for our community. This strategic plan, based on community wide surveys and inputs, would:

- Serve as a touchstone guiding document for all board members and committee members
- Articulate and capture for posterity the long-range goals of the community
- Identify the priorities for the MPCA
- Provide long-range guidance on community financial objectives

- Require an annual review of the strategic plan
- Provide a mechanism for future Boards to revise the plan to accommodate changes in community priorities as identified in community surveys, changing technologies, and other triggering events

Part of the strategic plan process will include asking the Board to formally adopt the plan. A Board approved strategic plan will provide an agreed upon consistent road map for Board actions as the Board composition changes over time.

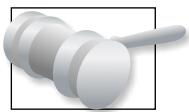
SPC believes having an adopted long range strategic plan will better serve the community than the current ad hoc approach to planning. Recent events and turnover in Board members have highlighted the need for continuity. SPC would like to clearly identify the long-range objectives of the community while also making new board member onboarding much easier.

SPC's Charter calls for 2-5 year planning. SPC is leaning into the longer range time frame. There will be more information forthcoming, but I wanted to let residents know SPC's thinking.

- ANN SIMS

## STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE





## LANDSCAPE & IRRIGATION

We've had a calm month in January. We have had warm weather followed by a couple of cold snaps with below freezing temperatures at night. This is stressful to plants, especially newly planted, subtropical and tropical ones. Our red maples started to blossom and then the freeze killed the blooms. The following is a summary of the tasks performed or overseen by the committee in January.

### Landscaping:

- Removed the first 4 ligustrum on the hedgerow and replaced two of them with coppertop sweet viburnum. There is no irrigation in this area, so they are being watered in by committee members by hand.
- Obtained a proposal to remove two Magnolia trees that would have to be removed for the road widening project at the Magnolia Point Boulevard entrance. The proposal was approved by the Board at the January 2026 Board meeting.
- Requested and received a proposal to mulch the area in front of the gatehouse under the Magnolia trees. Presented to the Board as requested. The Board chose to put the project on a temporary hold until the widening project is completed.
- Held our January, 2026 Planning and Priorities meeting to discuss projects for FY2026 and prioritize them.



### Irrigation:

The new bluetooth irrigation system continues to operate well. Our issues are now with older previous irrigation installations that are no longer active, operating off the potable water line to the gatehouse, not our irrigation line. We have had several leaks develop that have caused shutoff of the water supply to the gatehouse.

### (Still) Next Up:

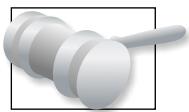
- Remove the declining variegated pittosporum and various orphan plants, and replace with new pittosporum, azaleas, and ornamental grasses in the community owned property in front of Exit Realty.
- Trim and limb up trees that are encroaching on the roads throughout the community. This will mean cutting back limbs in the right of way easements at the front or side of some residents properties.
- Pruning the trees in the medians, and both entrance and exit sides of Magnolia Point Boulevard.
- Continue our fall/winter planting along the shadow box fence on the entrance side of Magnolia Point Boulevard: add camellias, azaleas and some native plants and ornamental grasses.
- Mulching the Medinah gate beds and possibly adding two holly trees.
- Map the locations of the large electric utility boxes and make recommendations to the Board about wrapping more.
- Map the crepe myrtle locations on community property in preparation for pruning and fertilizing.
- Locate sites to install park benches and find an installer.

### February Planting Tips:

Our warm December has been followed by a January with wide temperature swings and low temps below freezing at night. Frost and/or freezes are likely this month and next. Recent periods of warm weather preceding the freeze reduces your plants ability to acclimate to the cold. It's not just the cold, below freezing temperatures (radiational freezing) but also the cold winds (advective freezing) that cause many of our

*Continued*





# MPCA NEWS



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subtropical garden plants to shrivel up and die or turn into a slimy pile of mush. The dried dead branches can be left to provide an extra layer of protection for the roots. The mush piles should be removed immediately because it is an ideal medium for mold growth, which can infect and kill the root system of the plant.

Recommended measures to increase your plants chances of survival include watering your plants to hydrate the soil and roots before and after a freeze especially after cold windy conditions to help prevent plant dessication, applying a layer of mulch around the base of the plant to help insulate the surface roots and covering your plants. Fortunately, root system freezing is not common in Florida and is usually limited to potted plants.

Cold damaged palms: WAIT to remove damaged fronds (especially if there are still green/yellow areas on the frond) until 2 to 3 spears appear at the crown of the plant where the bud is located. Sometimes it can take several months. Be on the lookout for crown rot. Copper based fungicide can be sprayed on the base area of the spear. Be sure to follow the directions.



*Christmas lights removal crew*

and lettuce. It's also a good time for planting potatoes.

We would like to invite our fellow Magnolia Point community residents to join the committee and help us move forward on our various renovation and beautification projects. Please contact Cindy Francisco at [pltluvr44@aol.com](mailto:pltluvr44@aol.com) or any L&I Committee member listed on the MPCA website under committees. NOTE: FREE community programs for Clay County gardeners from the Clay UF-IFAS Extension. For information contact the extension office at 904-284-6355.

- CINDY FRANCISCO



February



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## Thank You

I just wanted to express a sincere thank you to Dave Petraglia for the offer to Magnolia Point Women's Club (MPWC) to be the recipient of the monthly donations received from local advertisers in "The Magnolia News", our award-winning monthly community newsmagazine. Also, I would like to thank the wonderful businesses that advertise currently in the monthly newsletter: **Dream Vacations, EXIT Magnolia Point Realty, Dream Vacations – Celebrity, Home Video Studio, Lawn Service Near Me, LLC and Summit Physical Therapy.** [magnoliapointnews.com](http://magnoliapointnews.com)

The proceeds received will help MPWC continue its mission to support efforts to improve the lives of the underserved residents of Clay County, to offer education incentives and opportunities to children within the county, and to provide a support system and positive experiences for its members.

MPWC has various programs and volunteers that make its mission possible. The Club has volunteer liaisons in all Green Cove Springs schools who check in with staff on a regular basis to find out what the school's current needs may be. This can range from helping the elementary school libraries with donations of books that meet the state mandated reading program

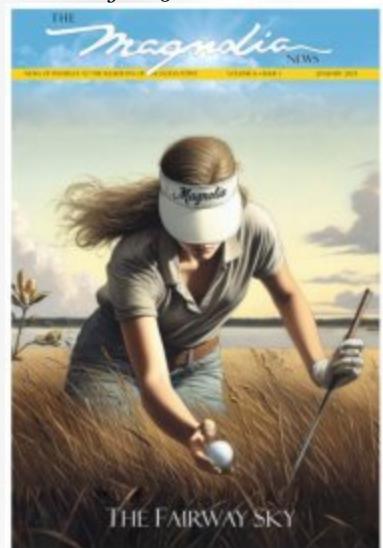
requirements, volunteers participating weekly in reading programs with students, providing incentive rewards for outstanding achievement or toiletry items or snacks when needed, and helping sponsor sports programs at the junior and high school level.

Since the inception of the Club (soon to be **25 years!**), MPWC supports the Club's educational mission by annually soliciting applications, reviewing and awarding scholarships to deserving Clay High senior girls. The Club conducts other fundraisers throughout the year, but much of the funds are provided by its annual event, selling luminaria kits for "Light up Magnolia Point". It's a wonderful community event, working with Magnolia Point Golf and Country Club, to have a golf cart parade through the neighborhood to see the luminarias and residents' holiday light displays. The success of this event is made possible by the support of the residents, which the Club is very grateful for. With the funds raised in 2025, the Club awarded three scholarships to Clay High senior girls totaling \$12,000. Thank you to the residents of Magnolia Point!

Through its year-long fundraising events, the Club continues to support the local charities in the community. In 2025, donations were made to The Quigley House, Food Pantry of GCS, Friends of the GCS Library, Guardian Ad Litem, Augusta Savage Mentoring Center, J.P. Hall Children's Charities, Seacemark Ranch and Sacred Heart Catholic Church Outreach Ministry.

The Club's hope and desire is to make 2026 a very successful charity fundraising year, which will give MPWC the ability to help more in the community.

January 2025 - the 'Amelia' issue



Click on Me!



## Update - Salvation Army Bell Ringers

The totals are in! Thanks to the smiles and greetings from the many Women's Club volunteers, \$1,294.00 was raised on their shifts at Winn Dixie. The volunteers worked from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. for three days in early December 2025, amassing 48 volunteer hours "ringing the bell" as part of the Salvation's Army Red Kettle annual fundraising drive. These volunteers braved unseasonably cold weather, beating last year's total of \$1,218.20! Thanks again to all the members who "rang" and to Outreach Chair **Jackie Maneval** for organizing the event.

Continued



# MPWC

## Nominations for New Leadership Positions

Vice President **Adele Murphy** has put out a call for new officers for the upcoming year 2026-27 year. Adele will become the president next year, and is looking for a vice-president who will become president in 2027-26, and recording and corresponding secretaries. Members can nominate others, or themselves, to fill these positions. The slate of officers will be presented at the March meeting and members will vote to approve the slate at the April meeting. Serving in a leadership position is a rewarding opportunity and if you are Women's Club member, please consider volunteering.

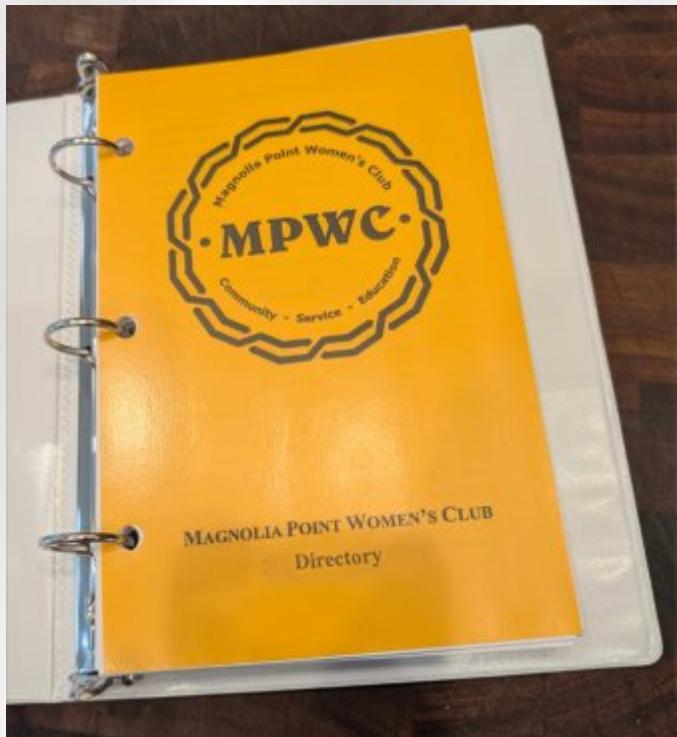


## Directory Ads Fundraiser Begins

The directory ads fundraiser work has begun. **Cheryl Michaels** will be

chairing this  
drive, with

assistance from **Lorna Broughton**, who has been the chair for the past several years. Local businesses have the opportunity to purchase an advertisement in the Women's Club member directory that is published every year. Letters to the current directory advertisers will be mailed in the next few weeks, and Cheryl will also be seeking new advertisers. Ads in the member directory are a great way for members to find information and recommendations about all types of businesses in the area.



## Upcoming Activities

The Activities Committee has planned an outing on Tuesday, February 10, to visit the "Andrew Wyeth at Kuerner Farm: The Eye of the Earth" exhibit at the Cummer Museum. The Activities Committee will also host bingo, always a favorite activity, at the February 11 member meeting.

## New Members

New members are always welcome, and beginning January 1, they can join at a discounted rate of \$20 until the end of April 2026. Any woman who is a Magnolia

Point resident or property owner, or a member of the Country Club, can become a member. If you know of someone who would like to become a Women's Club member, please have them contact **Diane Lochner**, Membership Director, at [diane.scorpio@gmail.com](mailto:diane.scorpio@gmail.com).





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# THE RUBY CYCLE



sugary tang of ruby chocolate. Maggie P, the "Queen of Culinary Disruption", adjusted her goggles. She sat perched five feet in the air atop a gleaming penny farthing bicycle, her tweed knickerbockers a sharp contrast to the high-tech AI fractal-thread "Maggie P" embroidered on her vest. "Josh! Are the Sprockets secure?" Maggie shouted down to her Director of Marketing, Josh Nosh as she wobbled past.

Josh Nosh, a man whose ambition was frequently undermined by his own nervousness, was frantically bungee-cording crates of "Ruby Sprockets" to a trailing rickshaw. "Theoretically, Maggie! But I'm worried about the aerodynamics of a chocolate-dipped biscuit in this Florida heat!"

Maggie ignored him. She was channeling the same "iconoclast" energy that had turned her family's humble Green Cove origins into a global empire. "Eight years ago, we gave them 'Mamolia' hearts. This year, The Ruby Revolution!"

Standing at the ribbon-cutting line was Mayor McGillicuddy. The Mayor, a man who seemed to be held together by starch and local tradition, peered through his spectacles at Maggie's towering bicycle.

"Now see here, Margaret," the Mayor doddered, leaning heavily on his cane. "In my day, these high-wheels were for young men with sturdy collarbones. Are you quite sure this is... municipal-grade safety?"

"Mayor, it's a revival!" Maggie proclaimed. "Green Cove is the new Brussels of the South! Check the tartness!"

The humid air of Green Cove Springs was thick with the scent of sulfur from the springs and the

With a celebratory shove, Maggie pedaled. The penny farthing groaned. Josh Nosh chased, shouting "brand synergy!" while clutching a rogue box of biscuits. The Sprockets, tart, berry-infused masterpieces of ruby cocoa, rattled in their crates.

Disaster struck near the historic spring. A squirrel, perhaps lured by the scent of ruby chocolate, darted across the path. Maggie swerved. The massive front wheel hit a patch of grass, and the "Queen of Culinary Disruption" lived up to her title. She sailed through the air, landing with a soft thwack into a newly planted bank of pink azaleas. The crates of Ruby Sprockets followed, shattering against the pavement.

"My career!" Josh Nosh wailed, falling to his knees beside a pile of pink crumbs. "It's a massacre! The biscuits are pulverized! We're ruined!"

The Mayor shuffled over, poking a piece of chocolate with his cane. "Looks like gravel, Margaret. Pink gravel."

Maggie popped up from the azaleas, a leaf in her hair and a manic glint in her eye. She picked up a handful of the shards. "It isn't gravel, Mayor. And Josh, stop crying. It's 'Ruby Road Rubble.' It's an artisanal ice cream topper. It's a metaphor for the beautiful mess of love!"

Josh Nosh blinked, his marketing brain pivoting. "Resilient Romance? Crushed but Sweet? Maggie, you're a genius."

By sunset, the town was buzzing, and Maggie P was being discharged from Baptist Fleming Island into Josh's capable care. The "Ruby Road Rubble", he reported as he guided her wheelchair to the car, would be sold in souvenir tins, and even Mayor McGillicuddy, nibbling on a procession of shards during the focus group Nosh had hastily assembled at City Hall that afternoon, admitted that the "fourth chocolate" was surprisingly sophisticated. Once again, Maggie P had turned a tumble into an international culinary and marketing triumph.

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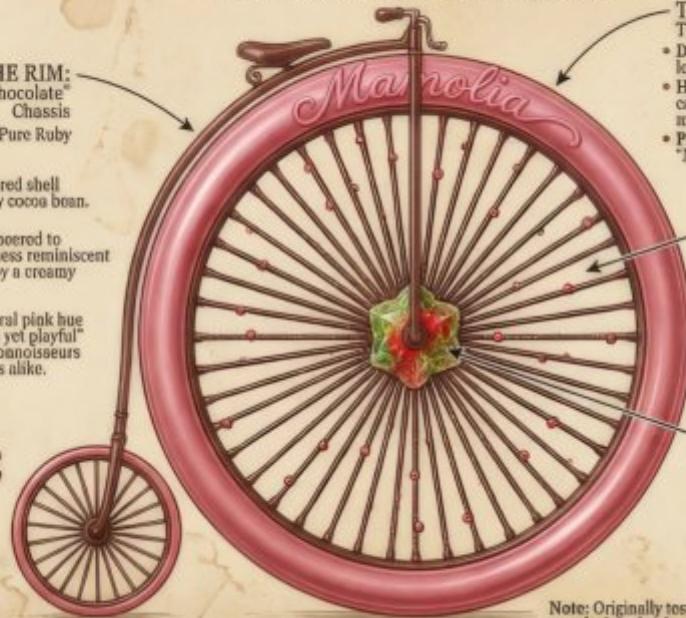
# A MARVEL OF CONFECTIONERY ENGINEERING

## The Blueprint of the "Ruby Sprocket"

### THE RIM:

The "Fourth Chocolate" Chassis

- Composition: 100% Pure Ruby Chocolate.
- Specs: A velvet-textured shell molded from the ruby cocoa bean.
- Flavor Profile: Engineered to provide a subtle tartness reminiscent of berries, balanced by a creamy sweetness.
- Aesthetics: The natural pink hue provides a "luxurious yet playful" finish, appealing to connoisseurs and casual consumers alike.



### THE TREAD:

The Signature Script

- Design: The outer edge features a raised, looping script reading "Magnolia".
- History: A tribute to the 2017 Valentine's campaign where an unreliable autocorrect morphed "Magnolia" into a viral sensation.
- Purpose: To remind cyclists that "Mama's Heart is Always Sweet"

### THE SPOKES:

The "Disruption" Matrix

- Composition: Dark Chocolate piping infused with Pink Peppercorns.
- Function: Provides structural support and a spicy counterpoint to the berry notes.
- Origin: Inspired by Maggie P's "Ruby Rhapsody" series, which married ruby chocolate with unconventional pairings to revolutionize the brand.

### THE HUB:

The Ignition Point

- Composition: A crystallized core of Candied Jalapeño.
- The "Kick": A hidden heat source representing the "Queen of Culinary Disruption" herself.

Note: Originally tested in Brussels, this flavor profile was designed to be sophisticated yet unexpected.



- STORY, GRAPHICS: EDITOR





dp



*"The dismount looks less like a maneuver and more like an insurance claim."*





EDITOR

Daddy  
Gives  
Mamy



KiMi



# Playing Through



CHRISTIAN SMITH

## TAKE IT AWAY. PART II: ARMS

In the last article, I addressed how wrist action can be a barrier to a fundamentally sound backswing and some things you can do to ensure you are using them correctly. In this installment, I want to address the arms, some common flaws, and some good thoughts and drills to make sure your arms are not getting in the way of a good golf swing for you.

The first thing I want to address is how the arms need to work in sync with the shoulders and core body rotation in the backswing. One of the biggest flaws I see is people starting the swing by moving their arms independently of the shoulders and core (core meaning stomach essentially). They either lift the club up with their arms, or they swing the arms to the inside so that the leading arm is touching or connected to the chest. If a player just lifts the arms in a vertical fashion, independent of their shoulders, this is going to take the club on a very steep and outside path. It also negates the power that can be created when the arms, shoulders and core move together. Most of the time, this player will strike down steeply on the ball and come across the swing path (outside to in), which typically results in a weak pull slice. If they happen to shut the clubface with the hands, it results in a dead pull. Conversely, the person who swings their arms independently and wraps them across their chest, the path will be far too inside on the backswing which will cause them to reroute to the outside in the downswing. A lot of times this action also causes the player to get 'stuck' (stuck meaning no space to swing through) as they come down so the body will come up and out of the swing early. Depending on the timing, this usually results in a fat or thin shot. This also causes loss of power because the shoulders have not maximized their rotation and results in a shorter swing radius.



So, what's the remedy you ask? A drill I have mentioned before is extremely beneficial in both of these scenarios. Take a club and put the butt (top of the grip) into your belly button area and grip down with your hands to the metal or graphite of the shaft. Now, for the first foot of the backswing (about to the outside of your trailing leg), keep the butt of the club touching your stomach. Make sure you are turning your arms, shoulders and core together! The angle of the butt of the club in your tummy should not be turning. For the ones that drag the arms inside across their chest, they could keep the butt of the club touching, but that butt-end would turn so that only the outside of that little circle (top of the club) would be touching. We want that entire little circle that makes up the butt of the club attached to your belly button as you turn for that first foot. After the first foot, the body will essentially have turned about as much as it can and the club starts to lift as the trailing elbow tucks under. This ensures that you keep everything in sync and maximizes your turn radius. Note: it would be impossible to keep the butt of the club connected throughout the entire backswing and if you tried, you would not be in a good position. That first foot or so is key. Another check point is when you get to the top of the swing, the leading arm

Continued



should not be touching your chest; there should be about a 35-45 degree angle in the crevasse between your arm and chest at the shoulder.

The elbow tucking under as I mentioned above is the next thing I want to talk about. Another culprit of dragging the club inside the swing plane is the trailing elbow moving too far inside in the backswing (a lot of times this is called the 'chicken wing' or the 'flying elbow'). On our shirts/blouses, there is usually a seam that runs from the center of the armpit area down to the waist. In the backswing, you don't want that trailing elbow getting inside or behind that seam as you turn. A good drill to feel this is to take your leading arm and tuck it under your trailing armpit with the trailing hand extending just past the trailing shoulder. Now as you turn, your arm/hand being under that armpit will prevent that trailing elbow from coming inside. As you turn back in this drill, let the trailing elbow bend and come up and at the top of the swing you should be in a position almost like that of a waiter holding a tray. When the trailing elbow goes inside quickly by itself, you would notice that your trailing hand and forearm are pointing more towards the ground which is not a natural or functional position to be in. Unless the club is re-routed in the downswing which is .2 to .35 seconds (good luck!), about the only thing that can happen is to smother the ball with some sort of low hook shot.



*Elbow gets behind, facing towards the ground - bad!*



*Drill to get the feel of preventing the elbow from moving behind you*

So in this lesson, the key points for correct arm movement in the swing are to 1) swing in unison with your shoulders and core as you start the backswing and 2) keep that trailing elbow inside that center seam on the side of your shirt/blouse. This will put you in a position at the top that will allow you to swing naturally when you change direction without a lot of manipulation. It will also put you on a nice swing plane which will improve your contact and accuracy.

Give these a try and give me a shout when you see me!

-CS



DEDICATED TO MASON REAVES SMITH





As the warm breeze moved lazily through the moss-draped oaks, the three stood by the river, each carrying a quiet awareness they didn't quite name. Valentine's week had a way of spotlighting absences, and somehow all three of them, old friends who usually orbited fuller lives, found themselves unattached, on the same unlikely afternoon. The reunion was easy in the way only long friendships are, but threaded with an awkward tenderness, the unspoken question of how they'd all landed here together.

Mark busied himself with his phone, committed to capturing the perfect Valentines selfie. It had to be at Spring Park, their February tradition, a ritual dressed up as romance, or at least proof of survival. His determination to finally get a photo without his chins multiplying felt oddly symbolic, like a small stand against the quiet erosion of confidence that *singledom* had brought him. The irony, of course, was that he was hopelessly 'unphotogenic'. Every picture exaggerated his most unromantic angles. But today was

different, he knew, lifting the phone just high enough to flirt with destiny. Today, maybe, he'd feel seen.

Aarna hovered close, wrestling with a different kind of vulnerability. She'd been dragged into a Valentines-themed Instagram wager with her relentlessly smug sister: more likes by the end of February, or face the humiliation of cooking dinner. But beneath the joke was something softer and sadder, the need to feel wanted, noticed, proof that being alone didn't mean being left behind. She hoped a spontaneous photobomb might make her seem charmingly carefree, the kind of person love might stumble into by accident. Her fear was ending up frozen forever as an awkward footnote in Mark's attempt at self-reassurance.

Lisa watched them both with a familiar fondness, feeling oddly protective. She wasn't invested in the selfie itself. For her, this outing marked something more fragile. It was her first public appearance since a catastrophically romantic blind date two months earlier, a night that had unraveled into embarrassment and the realization that she'd mistaken hope for chemistry. Today was her quiet Valentine, a vow to herself that she was still brave enough to show up, still capable of joy, even if romance felt distant. Still, a small voice whispered that she might be tempting fate again.

As Mark's finger hovered over the screen, ready to freeze the moment, a playful east wind tugged at his hat, sending it skittering toward the river's edge. Instinctively, he turned, snapping the photo as Aarna lunged for his sleeve and Lisa tipped forward into the grass. In the scramble, laughter broke through first, real, unguarded laughter, followed by hands reaching out, steady one another without thinking.

The result was accidental perfection: Mark caught mid-gasp, Aarna suspended between surprise and delight, and Lisa smiling calmly, as if she'd known all along that this was how it would land. The photo went viral. Mark's chins were present and accounted for, but so was something else: ease, affection, the visible comfort of people who knew each other well. Aarna's followers multiplied overnight, securing her victory and, more importantly, lifting a weight she hadn't realized she was carrying. And Lisa finally had a story that didn't end in disappointment, but in laughter and loyalty.

In the end, their shared awkwardness softened into something sustaining. Three friends, unattached but not alone, buoyed by history and kindness, proof that love didn't always announce itself with roses and reservations. Laughing, they wandered to the nearest wing joint, where the lemonade was cold, the sandwiches forgettable, and the companionship quietly profound. On a day, seemingly a *month* built for couples, they reminded each other that this counted too.

- STORY, PHOTO: EDITOR



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AN  
UPGRADE



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- BILL BLACKWELL

## RED VELVET CAKE

### **INGREDIENTS**

Vegetable oil for the pans

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
1 tsp baking soda  
1 tsp salt  
1 tsp cocoa powder  
1 1/2 cups vegetable oil (we used avocado oil)  
1 cup buttermilk at room temperature  
2 large eggs at room temp.  
2 tablespoons red food coloring  
1 tsp white distilled vinegar  
1 tsp vanilla extract

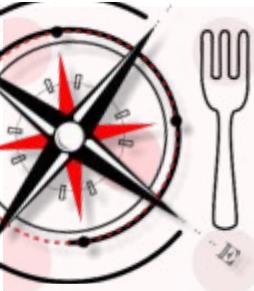
### CREAM CHEESE FROSTING:

1 pound cream cheese, softened  
4 cups sifted confectioners' sugar  
2 sticks unsalted butter, softened  
1 tsp vanilla extract



*Continued*





# THE Traveling Fork

## DIRECTIONS

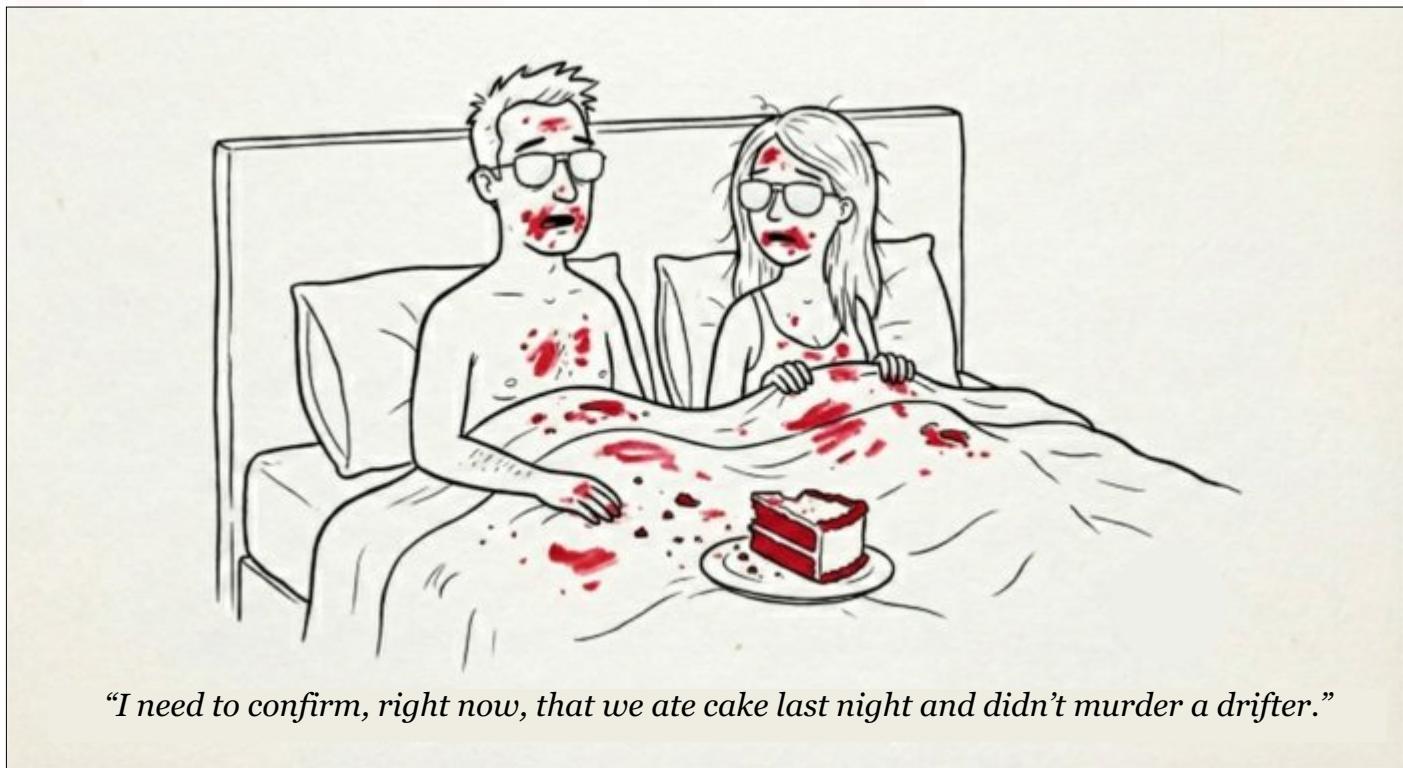
Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly oil and flour 2 or 3 round cake pans; in a large bowl, sift together the flour, sugar, baking soda, salt, and cocoa powder and mix well. In a separate large bowl, whisk together the oil, buttermilk, eggs, food coloring, vinegar and vanilla.

Using a standing mixer, mix the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients until well mixed and a smooth batter is formed. Divide the cake batter evenly among the prepared cake pans. Place the pans in the oven apart from each other. Bake until the cake pulls away from the side of the pans, and a toothpick inserted in the center of the cakes comes out clean, about 30 minutes.

Remove the cakes from the oven and run a knife around the edges to loosen them from the sides of the pans. One at a time, invert the cakes onto a plate and then re-invert them onto a cooling rack, rounded sides up. Let cool completely.

In a standing mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, or with a hand-held electric mixer in a large bowl, mix the cream cheese, sugar, and butter on low speed until a homogenous mixture is obtained. Increase the speed to high, and mix until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes (occasionally, turn the mixer off and scrape down the sides of the bowl with a small rubber spatula). Reduce the speed of the mixer to low, add the vanilla, raise the speed to high and mix briskly.

Frost the cake. Place 1 layer, rounded side down. Use a palette knife or a table knife and spread some of the Cream Cheese Frosting over the top of the cake (approximately 1/4 inch). Carefully, set another layer on top, rounded side down, or up if only 2 layers and repeat. Top the remaining layer and cover the entire cake with the remaining frosting. Sprinkle the top with finely chopped pecans. Enjoy, with no concern about calories.



- PHOTOS, CARTOON: EDITOR





*Couple's*

## NINE HOLE LEAGUE

**January 25** - It was a beautiful day in the low 80's, a bit windy but a great weather day! We had four-foursomes and played our usual team scramble/best ball with alternating drives on the front nine.

1st Place - **Doug & Mauricia Buchanan & Bruce & Jeanne Gorman** with a **36**

2nd Place - **Don & Dianne Dearth & Bob & Diane Gove** with a **37**

### Highlights:

Fred & Kristy Varn and Den & Janine O'Connor's team- birdied #7

Wayne Costa, Bede Johnson & Ron & Susie Snow's team- birdied #2 and #6

Don & Dianne Dearth & Bob & Diane Gove's team birdied #8

Doug & Mauricia Buchanan and Bruce & Jeanne Gorman birdied #3 & #6

Some great playing today!

- DIANNE DEARTH



# LOVE IN THE ROUGH

When Mark and Linda left for their **Couples 9 Hole League** match, Baxter felt the sting of betrayal. And how quickly the new season had arrived! He'd watched them load up the golf cart with clubs and coolers, waving as if he were just another

spectator in their domestic fairway drama. After an incident last year when Baxter shredded a plush Magnolia golf bag they'd offered him on the way out to League play one day, they decided to try a different approach: a doggie door to the back yard, though it came with a radio color to assure his compliance with the property lines.

As the door shut, Baxter strutted to the front window and took his lookout spot atop the sofa. The fairway shimmered beyond the pines; he could faintly hear laughter and the distant ping of well-struck golf balls. Typical. Humans chasing balls they don't seem to want to catch.

Then, something caught his attention, a flicker of movement by the Boxwood near the edge of the yard. A flash of white and brown fur. A wagging tail.

Baxter froze. *There she was.* The beagle *beauty* from down next door, a certain 'Piper', trotting out from behind the hedge confidently across the lawn as though she owned the neighborhood. She paused, sniffed the air, and spotted him in the window. Her ears perked. Her gaze locked.

Baxter leapt down, scrambled out the flap in the back door, and rocketed around the house towards the front yard. As he neared the boundary of the invisible fence, where the driveway met the side yard, he executed the 'Charge and Roll' maneuver his Husky friend Oscar had shared with him: he dropped a shoulder into a tuck, rolling through the unseen barrier and onto the concrete, slightly dazed from the maneuver and shock from the collar. He bounced up, no worse for wear from the jolt, bearable as it was under the circumstances.

Outside, the air was thick with the scent of cut grass and something else: freedom. Piper was trotting away, coyly, tail flicking like a metronome.



"Wait up!" he barked (in 'Dogese', of course).

Piper paused, gave a sly over-the-shoulder glance, and took off at a teasing trot toward the magnolia.

Baxter's short legs pumped like pistons. He caught up and she stared at his collar, wide-eyed.

Baxter was a brave, clever and worthy companion. After all, he'd just beaten a *collar!* She was happy to see that all she'd heard about the Russells was true! Together, they darted through sprinkler arcs and across the dew-slick fairway, two streaks of rebellion under a watercolor afternoon sky.

At the pond by the 8th green, they paused to catch their breath. Baxter, ever the gentleman, offered Piper a half-chewed tennis ball he'd found earlier, a romantic gesture if there ever was one. She accepted it, dropping it delicately at his paws, her eyes gleaming.

It was, Baxter realized, the perfect first date. They explored the edges of the 7th hole, darting between sprinkler heads and the water hazard where frogs croaked in lazy harmony. They paused beneath the magnolias, where the air was sweet and dappled with fireflies. Baxter, normally all jittery nerves and bravado, found himself oddly calm beside her. Piper tilted her head, nuzzled his ear. The hours flew by. By the time Mark and Linda returned home, Baxter was back inside, curled up amid an assortment of chew-toys. He looked up as they entered, tail thumping lazily.

"Oh, *Bax*," Linda sighed, "*There's our big boy!* Did you miss us?"

Mark laughed. "I'm sure he slept the whole time." If only they knew.

Baxter closed his eyes and sighed, not with loneliness, but with contentment. Out there in the fairway shadows, love had found him between the magnolias. Tomorrow, he decided, he'd be on the lookout; it was Mark and Linda's shopping day. Maybe Piper would be waiting.

After all, even a Jack Russell deserves his own nine holes of romance. And a secret admirer.

- STORY, PHOTO: EDITOR



# LADIES 9 LEAGUE

- DIANNE DEARTH

**January 8** - It was so foggy you could cut it with a knife! Alas, the round started and ended with a bit of sunshine. The team game of Stableford was played with three teams.

1st Place - Dianne Dearth, Bede Johnson and Donna Hirsch - 57

2nd Place - Cheryle Newman, Karen Lioce and Shirley Orvosh - 51



*"Dad says flowers are good, but a diversified portfolio is forever.!"*



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Were a couple to be advised on their relationship, the counselor might defer to golf terms to make the point. Here are some common **Golf Terms: Counseling Equivalents**.

**Birdie:** *Getting the birthday **and** the gift right*

**Bogey:** *You said "fine" but your tone said "We'll discuss this in 3-5 business days"*

**Bump and Run:** *Low, rolling shot at the truth; soft landing technique*

**Bunker/Sand Trap:** *Technically playable, spiritually exhausting*

**Conceding a Putt:** *Close enough; no need to die on this hill*

**Dog Leg:** *The discussion doesn't go straight; requires adjustment*

**Double Bogey:** *Nothing's working, conversation, swing, or dinner plans*

**Draw:** *Intentional gentle curve toward the truth*

**Eagle:** *You both admitted you were wrong **and** hugged it out before bed*

**Fade:** *Strategic avoidance that feels mature but isn't*

**Fat Shot:** *You hit dirt before the issue developed, and stayed there*

**Flop Shot:** *High drama, soft landing, necessity unclear*

**Fried Egg:** *Logic obscured; difficult position requiring careful extraction*

**Gimme:** *A short point we'll all pretend was resolved*

**Going for the Green:** *Risky shot that could pay off big or backfire*

**Green in Regulation:** *Making a point in the expected number of attempts*

*Continued*



**Handicap:** To level the playing field despite different expectation levels

**Hitting the Wrong Ball:** Two-stroke penalty for addressing the wrong issue

**Hole in One:** Rare, magical occurrence when the negotiations align

**Hook:** Apologizing so hard you're now the victim somehow

**Improving Your Lie:** The excuse gets better every time you tell it

**Lay Up:** Choosing reconciliation over being technically correct

**Mark Your Ball:** 'Pin that thought; I need to finish being right about this first'

**Mulligan:** Doesn't count, except emotionally

**Out of Bounds:** Beyond acceptable limits; stroke and distance penalty

**Par:** An expected score; you're both moderately annoyed but still functional

**Play Out of Turn:** When it's not your turn to speak

**Playing Through:** Giving in to a better point; knowing when to step aside

**Punch Shot:** Low, fast, no fluff

**Shank:** Point goes wildly off-target; complete miscommunication

**Slice:** To curve away from target; not facing the issue directly

**Slow Play:** Taking too long; holding up the discussion

**Snowman:** Score of 8; it started with the thermostat and now you're sleeping in separate zip codes

**The 19th Hole:** Drinks, friends, and selective recollection

**The Rough:** Difficult negotiation; harder to make progress

**The Yips:** Sudden inability to discuss simple issues

**Thin Shot:** Barely making contact; avoiding the real issue

**Topped Shot:** Hitting only the top of the problem; not getting to the real issue, again

**Water Hazard:** Getting in too deep; emotional overflow with penalty strokes, and possibly ice cream

- STORY, ART: EDITOR



# L, NUTRIA



**“SOMEONE YELL ‘BRAKE!’ AGAIN!  
IT WAS FUNNY THE FIRST TIME”**

dp

dp

## MAGNOLIA POINT BRIDGE

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there are four tables, the top four scores win money. Duplicate pays first three winners NS and EW with Mitchell movement.

**Duplicate and Social Bridge** play on alternate Thursdays in the clubhouse dining room from 1:30 to 5:30PM. The fees are \$2.00 for Social and \$3.00 for Duplicate to cover the cost of prize money and supplies.

### CONTACT

**Social:** Marty Essex [mamers3@bellsouth.net](mailto:mamers3@bellsouth.net)

**Duplicate:** Jon Bastress [JonBastress@gmail.com](mailto:JonBastress@gmail.com)

### Duplicate Bridge, Thu Jan 08

#### East/West Winners

1. Jon Bastress & Joe Thill

2. Evie & Joe Ezzell

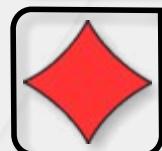
3. Monica & Steve Harmon

#### North/South Winners

1. Joan Sabanski & Carol Studer

2. Cindy Jennings & Joan Richardson

3. Sharon Sprott & Ed Szymanski



- SHARON MURPHY

### Social Bridge, Thu Jan 15

1. Marty Essex & Cindy Jennings

2. Kim Belcher & David Miller

3. Alice Lodge & Kaaren Tague

4. Connie & Michael Byers

5. Evie & Joe Ezzell

6. Susan Mitchell & Sharon Sprott

### Duplicate Bridge, Thu Jan 22

#### East/West Winners

1. Sharon Sprott & Ed Szymanski

2. Don Maneval & Nancy Petillo

3. Mary Kendall & Marsha Parker

#### North/South Winners

1. Jon Bastress & Joe Thill

2. Joan Sabanski & Carol Studer

3. Monica & Steve Harmon

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## The New Words

**“Boxka”**

**Vodka. In a box.**



**“Björkshire Terrier”**  
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