



First lady Jill Biden to visit Patrick Space Force Base

Rick Neale
Florida Today
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

First lady Jill Biden will visit Patrick Space Force Base on Monday afternoon to meet with military spouses and families, White House officials announced.

Biden and Veteran Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough's trip to the Space Coast will cap a two-day swing through the Sunshine State.

The first lady will promote the White House's Joining Forces initiative during her Patrick Space Force Base visit. Joining Forces focuses on families of service members and veterans, caregivers and survivors in three areas: employment and entrepreneurship; military child education; and health and well-being, according to the program's



First lady Jill Biden speaks at the National Celebration of Reading. PROVIDED BY TONY POWELL

website. Biden and McDonough are sched-

uled to arrive in Florida on Sunday night at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

Monday morning, the duo will speak at a cancer survivorship summit hosted by U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz in Davie.

White House officials have not released logistical details of Biden's Monday visit to the Space Coast.

Biden's visit comes on the heels of Friday's SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket launch from Kennedy Space Center, sending NASA's Psyche spacecraft hurtling on a 2.2 billion-mile mission to the asteroid belt.

About nine hours later, SpaceX launched a Falcon 9 rocket from nearby Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, sending another batch of Starlink satellites into low-Earth orbit.

Health 1st gives \$400K to 15 groups in Brevard

Grants target gaps in health care needs

Dave Berman
Florida Today
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Health First has awarded more than \$400,000 in grants to 15 Brevard County community organizations to support a range of health and wellness programs.

The wellness grants will focus on addressing disparities identified in Health First's latest local Community Health Needs Assessment. Health First said it identified such things as improving access to health care; providing more physical activity and nutrition options for children; and addressing other social determinants of health.

"It takes a true team effort in elevating our communities and, by working together, we can make a real difference towards improving our health and wellness," said Paula Just, chief experience officer with Health First, which is Brevard County's largest health care company.

The organizations approved for a 2024 wellness grant were:

- 211 Brevard
- Boys & Girls Club (Brevard clubs)
- Club Esteem
- Complementary Cancer Care
- Junior League of the Space Coast
- Family Promise of Brevard
- Neighbor Up Brevard / The Dock
- New Life Mission
- Promise in Brevard
- South Brevard Sharing Center
- Space Coast Sled Hockey
- Streetside Showers
- Ways for Life Brevard
- Who We Play For
- Women's Center of Brevard

A Community Health Improvement Committee that includes Health First leaders in various departments evaluated and approved applications for wellness grants.

Among the grant recipients was New Life Mission in Melbourne, which operates a residential program for mothers and their children who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

At New Life, the grant will help fund a mental health counselor, which Chief Executive Officer Amy Lyon said will be "a game-changer."

Toni Seaton, the in-house counselor at New Life, said her role as mental health counselor is to help mothers address barriers to reaching their goals.

"When they come in, they bring with them their past," Seaton said. "It's their life. So everything comes with them when they walk through these

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LaShaundra McGhee, from left, Neighbor Up Brevard operations director; Paula Just, chief experience officer with Health First; and Lynn Brockwell-Carey, executive director of Neighbor Up Brevard, at The Dock, located on Masterson Street in Melbourne. The Dock was one of the grant recipients.

TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY

Demolition of aging hotel makes room for new resort



The demolition of the International Palms in Cocoa Beach has begun. Replacing it will be a \$300M Westin luxury resort at the site. Driftwood Capital bought International Palms for \$23 million in October 2016. MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY

Officials hope Cocoa Beach Westin becomes a destination

Tyler Vazquez
Florida Today
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Workers this week began razing the International Palms hotel in Cocoa Beach to make room a \$300 million, four-star-plus Westin-branded oceanfront resort with 502 rooms.

The aging and deteriorated International Palms had been plagued by problems for years despite once being a major hotel and conference center for the area.

After years going through the planning and permitting process, the new resort will see a major upgrade to the property, seen by many as a way to increase the tax base for the city by drawing in more tourism dollars on much higher-rate rooms.

Driftwood Capital bought International Palms for \$23 million in October

2016. Cocoa Beach commissioners have been waiting to see the 16-acre complex at 1300 N. Atlantic Ave. demolished to make way for a brand new luxury resort.

Driftwood Chief Executive Carlos Rodriguez Sr. has previously told Cocoa Beach city commissioners that replacing the International Palms with a hotel that generates \$300-\$350 room nights will enable the other hotels in the area will be able to raise rates as well, increasing revenue to the city.

Driftwood Capital is a Coral Gables private firm that owns Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront and Crowne Plaza Melbourne Oceanfront just north of Indialantic, along with a nationwide portfolio of hotels.

Officials hope the Cocoa Beach Westin become a resort destination where visitors spend "many days." Plans call for:

- The largest conference center in Brevard County.
- Tennis, bocce ball, shuffleboard, basketball and pickleball courts.
- A deep-water wave pool for surfers.
- Topgolf Swing Suites.
- A resort pool with cabanas and a kiddie pool.
- A day spa and salon.

For many years, International Palms was a local destination, boasting 11 buildings that were constructed during phases in 1963-64 and 1978-79, with internal renovations added in 2004. The hotel had 502 rooms, more than any competitor on the Space Coast.

Despite its massive footprint and amenities, the resort had fallen into disrepair.

From September 2016 to September

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doors. It's my job to help them overcome the barriers their past has put in the way so they can reach their overall goals, and become self-sufficient."

Resident Sandra Galan Vega said the counseling she received at New Life has helped her "cope and grow. She's helped me stay positive, me and my daughter, and let me know we're going to make it. Before, I thought I was a nobody, a failure. Now, I know I'm somebody."

Andrea Sasson, community engagement director at The Dock, said the organization provides a holistic program for youth and teens, giving them opportunities for mentorship, spiritual guidance and career guidance.

"It's a critical need for our youth here," Sasson said. "For after-school hours, without a structured program like The Dock, they might be led to things that aren't healthy for them. This is a safe haven to grow."

The program is located in the Booker T. Washington neighborhood of North Melbourne, and currently serves about 20 at its teen center and another 20 in grades kindergarten through fifth grade.

"Through this after-school and summer program, The Dock provides a secure and nurturing environment where young minds can flourish, focusing on their academic, spiritual, social, physical and intellectual growth," said Lynn Brockwell-Carey, executive director of the program.

Necola Bacchus, a parent whose son attends programs at The Dock, said: "They help the kids to show them what's out there - how they might live after high school, after college. My son, he goes here. He's about to graduate high school. And they're helping him get to college and become a firefighter. Yes, it helps open their eyes."

Another supporter of the program is Sabrina Parks, a grandmother who raised Connor Rogers, an Eau Gallie High School graduate who went to Colgate University to major in biochemistry.

"This place is special, especially in this neighborhood, for keeping the kids off the street," Parks said. "It teaches the kids the Godly word, and some of the



From left, Paula Just, chief experience officer at Health First, joins representatives of grant recipient New Life Mission, including Toni Seaton, in-house counselor; Sandra Galan Vega, resident; Amy Lyon, chief executive officer; and Maria Santiago, program director. TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY



At Club Esteem, Executive Director Ellena Little said the funding from Health First "certainly helps us expand our services and reach additional children in our community."

PROVIDED BY HEALTH FIRST

kids don't hear the Godly word until

they come here. It offers opportunity. They go around and look at colleges, when they're of age. They're encouraged to check out colleges."

LaShaundra McGhee, the program's operations director said, with the grant, it will "allow us to expand upon the services that we have and provide additional support for our families. So, for me, it was a tremendous blessing. We're very grateful for the opportunity to be able to expand what we can do for these families.

At Club Esteem, Executive Director Ellena Little said the funding from Health First "certainly helps us expand our services and reach additional children in our community."

Club Esteem aims to help children in what it calls "underresourced communities" through tutoring, mentoring and

enrichment programs. Little said a goal is "to help youth and families break free from the cycle of poverty by achieving academic and personal success."

"So whether that's going to college or the military, there is a plan that we create with them," Little said. "We're changing the trajectory of those lives here in our community. We do everything we need to do so that that child has hope, and that child is successful for the rest of their lives."

This is the second year for Health First's wellness grant program. Last year, a total of more than \$360,000 was awarded to 12 nonprofit organizations.

Dave Berman is business editor at FLORIDA TODAY. Contact Berman at dberman@floridatoday.com, on X at [@bydaveberman](https://twitter.com/bydaveberman) and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/dave.berman.54.





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