



PRESS RELEASE

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Pasco Tax Collector Mike Fasano Announces Winner of 2022 High School Essay Contest

Pasco County Tax Collector Mike Fasano announces that his office received entries from high school students throughout Pasco County during the recently ended annual essay contest. The entrants, students in Grades 9-12, were asked to answer the question: "Since the 1980's Pasco County has seen a steady growth in population that now has us nearing 600,000 residents. To accommodate this growth, we have seen many additions made to our county's general infrastructure (expanded roads, public transportation, additional shopping venues, etc.). What is one addition that has been made that was most beneficial to Pasco County, OR what is one addition that you believe should be made to further accommodate our county's growth?"

A panel of judges, not knowing the age, gender, grade, or school of each entrant, chose the essay written by Alyssa Gardiner, a student at River Ridge High School in New Port Richey, as the winning submission. Alyssa's essay best communicated her response to the topic question all while meeting the contest criteria of overall essay structure, appearance, and readability. A copy of Alyssa's essay is attached.

"One of the greatest opportunities for a teacher is to connect her students with the needs of the community," comments Beth Hess, Lead Teacher at River Ridge High School's New Teacher Academy (RRHS). "In the RRHS New Teacher Academy, we do this by placing students in schools to support reading and by participating in civic-driven endeavors. Alyssa skillfully wrote about the expansion needs and environmental challenges associated with the Ridge Road Extension. She is a wonderful student; I am not surprised that she won."

"The New Teacher Academy has given me, as well as many other students, an abundance of opportunities," comments contest winner Alyssa Gardiner. "Participating in this contest was a special opportunity that I have never had before. I was able to connect with this essay because I love writing, while also connecting with the community."

"I am very proud of all the students throughout Pasco County who participated in our annual essay contest," states Tax Collector Mike Fasano. "With so many well-written essays to choose from, the judges had a fun but difficult task to perform. Narrowing the choices down to one overall winner was a tough call the panel had to make.

However, Alyssa Gardiner's essay stood out as the clear choice among many excellent entries. I would also like to thank Lead Teacher Beth Hess, Principal Toni Zetzsche, and Peggy Hildebrand, Administrative Assistant - District Communications for their efforts to encourage the participation of their students in our annual contest."

Tax Collector Mike Fasano awarded Alyssa Gardiner a \$500 VISA gift card at a ceremony held at River Ridge High School on May 18, 2022 (photo attached). All entrants in the contest received a personal letter from Tax Collector Mike Fasano thanking them for their participation in the contest.

The Pasco County Tax Collector's Office plans on holding an essay contest again in 2023. Students who did not win this year may have the opportunity to enter again during the next school year if they are still enrolled in a Pasco County high school. Additionally, the student essay contest is just one of many community-related events the Pasco County Tax Collector's Office participates in throughout the year. For more details about next year's contest or other upcoming promotions and activities coordinated by the tax collector's office, please do not hesitate to contact Assistant Tax Collector Greg Giordano, at 727-847-8179 or visit www.pascotaxes.com

[Photo Attached - Tax Collector Mike Fasano and contest winner Alyssa Gardiner]

[Copy of Alyssa Gardiner's essay is attached]

Just Place

One addition that has been made that was most beneficial to Pasco County is the expansion of Ridge Road. A portion of Ridge Road has opened after two decades. The new portion is 4.2 miles long and is an uninterrupted section of roadway from Moon Lake to the Suncoast Parkway.

The extension of Ridge Road will also be providing furthermore road way capacity and an improved route way from coastal hazards area. It also has ameliorated hurricane evacuation clearances. Pasco county has 178,00 residents living in evacuation zones within 2 miles of Ridge Road. Therefore, with Ridge Road being expanded it has made Pasco County safer. It is now set to give families a vital evacuation route.

Although, it has become a controversial topic due to part of the road going through an environmentally sensitive area. So, there are many pros and cons being debated on this extension. Pasco county has had an increased traffic load, while being a student who takes a bus to get to school, I have realized how overcrowded the roads have become. My bus usually never makes it on time due to how many people are driving at 6 in the morning. The way the buses go into the school are on Ridge Road so there have been able to have people going straight through it instead of taking a longer route to get where they need to go. The road has already made a new impact in New Port Richey and will continue all the way through SunCoast Parkway.

The project is far from finished; one half of the road still is not open when going past moon lake road. There are two phases undergoing the construction and they are still working on

phase 1. The county commissioner requested \$14 million for phase 2 so it might be a while before they accumulate that much to proceed with the construction.

Overall, I think that the extension of Ridge Road has improved Pasco County. It still has a long journey ahead, but the outcome will be worth it for local residences evacuation routes and helping traffic flow at a steadier rate.