



Florida Tech and members of Little Growers work on a native prairie garden at Stone Magnet Middle School at 1101 E. University Blvd. in Melbourne. PHOTOS BY TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY

FLORIDA TECH HELPS MELBOURNE COOL OFF

Researchers look for ways lower-income areas can cut energy costs

Jim Waymer
Florida Today
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

In partially paved-over paradises like Melbourne, heat has a way of piling up. On sunny Florida days, pavement can become several degrees hotter than the grass beside it. Indoors, especially in older homes, that means higher air-conditioning costs.

Science is seeking some “cool” answers.

Florida Tech researchers, in the third and final year of a \$900,000 federal grant, are gathering the data and sharing their know-how to help a lower-income area in Melbourne save on energy bills, while teaching youth the science of how excess heat happens. The neighborhood just east of the Florida Tech campus on University Boulevard is what the government calls an “underserved community,” in more ways than one.

Florida Tech has teamed with Little Growers, a Melbourne-based, youth-centered urban agriculture project and 4-H club that promotes community food security and sustainability, on the project.

Volunteers from Florida Tech and Little Growers have been planting hundreds of native Florida plants at Stone Middle to reduce heat and flooding and lure bees, butterflies and other pollinators. The garden is incorporated into science and art projects for the students and Little Growers gardeners.

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Florida Tech's Steven Lazarus and colleagues are using a grant to find cheap fixes to expensive problems that global warming is making worse.



Florida Tech research assistant professor Emily Ralston works in the prairie garden.

“So what we have in this neighborhood is an overabundance of concrete. That makes the temperatures hotter, and it also creates a problem when there’s stormwater because it’s more likely to flood.”

Emily Ralston
Florida Tech faculty member

Millions to get boost in Social Security

2027 raise won’t cover
current rate of inflation

Clayton Park
USA TODAY NETWORK – Florida

The 5.4 million Floridians drawing Social Security benefits will see their monthly checks increase 3.6% starting January 2027 after the federal government on Oct. 14 announced the fifth-largest cost-of-living-adjustment increase in the past 35 years.

That’s the good news. The not-so-good? Inflation continues to outpace even this latest adjustment, up 3.7% in September compared to a year ago, according to the latest Consumer Price Index report released Oct. 14.

And inflation doesn’t appear to be letting up anytime soon.

On Oct. 14, gasoline prices in Florida, which have been up and down lately, jumped yet again, this time to a statewide average of \$4.20 per gallon, up from \$4.06 over the weekend and \$4.13 a month ago, according to AAA Auto Club. Soaring energy prices, largely brought about by the Iran war, have been a major factor in driving up inflation, according to economists.

“It helps,” said economist Sofia Johana, a professor at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, of the latest COLA increase, “but it’s a small drop in the bucket as prices continue to rise. They (the Social Security Administration) are trying to keep pace with inflation, but my worry is that it’s a sign that they’re not expecting inflation to drop anytime soon.”

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Indications say Starship launch from Florida is drawing closer

Brooke Edwards
Florida Today
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

After SpaceX’s Starship hit a milestone by reaching orbit and deploying Starlink satellites during its recent Flight 14 out of Starbase, Texas, it raised the question: When will the world’s most powerful rocket launch from Florida?

SpaceX has stated multiple times that its goal is for a Kennedy Space Center launch by the end of the year. Although we do not have an official launch date, multiple clues and signs of progress hint the first Starship could arrive soon.

Here’s what we know:

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