Nease VERTICAL

FALL ISSUE

2026-2027



- WADN
- Deflocking St. Johns
- Nease New Principal: Dr. Dresback
- New Track and Field

WADN Brings New Changes to the Daily News Show

By: Ella Willard

WADN, the school's daily news show, keeps students and faculty informed about what is happening around campus. This year, WADN is making several changes to give students more opportunities to create stories and make the show feel more professional.

Digital Media Teacher Ms. Jacobi said students can expect changes throughout the program, including a new name. "You can expect to see a lot of changes coming from the studio and a more professional newscast all around," Jacobi said. When asked what led to the name change, Jacobi explained that her experience helped influence the direction of the program, stating "we changed it to be more professional." I came with a television news background, and we're giving examples to these kids to have different roles. Wired just wasn't as professional." The new name is modeled after professional broadcasting naming regulations, with "W" meaning that the station is located east of the Mississippi River. The program will also be competing in various competitions this year, including attending the Florida Scholastic Press Association and National Student Journalism Conferences in the spring, giving students a chance to show off their work and learn from other student journalists.

WADN is also introducing new segments, including podcasts and more sports coverage. Along with the new ideas, students are getting new equipment to help improve production. One Digital Media student, Griffin Bechem stated, "this year, our packages are going to be more professional, and the lighting in the room is going to improve our filming." Students will also have their own computers, which will make editing their stories easier and faster, with Linnea Flostrand stating, "The new changes in WADN are that everyone gets their own individual computer so that they can edit their own individual projects faster." New backgrounds and equipment are also being added to give students more options while filming. "We got new backgrounds and different equipment so that we can film in different spots, and we're doing more packages this year by doing one a week," Digital Media student Lana Smuckler said.

With all these changes, WADN is giving students more chances to be creative, learn about news, and take on different, more professional roles while continuing to be an important part of Nease.



Communications Academy: WADN News Show Set



Photos taken by Vertical staff member: Ella Willard

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Clearing the Air: Why St. Johns County Must Deflock

By: Chensley Dosio

Opinion

On August 31st, the Florida Department of Transportation revoked every single permit it had issued for automated license plate readers (ALPRs) installed within the State Highway system, giving all involved agencies 30 days to remove them. FDOT cited exponential growth in public discontent, along with documented misuse and surveillance concerns, as justification. For those who had spent months rallying for St. Johns County to reconsider its contracts and APLR usage, the order seemed like a hard-fought victory, but it was not. Since then, there has been nothing but debate over whether or not the cameras will be taken down in our county. But all of this begs the question... what is actually at stake?

An automated license plate reader is not simply a speed or light camera, or some other traditional means of police jurisdiction. It photographs and records every plate that passes a specific point, logs the time/location, and stores that record in a searchable database, along with a vehicle's distinguishing features. This even extends to Bluetooth logs and tracking passersby in some cases. Through simply a phone or another electric signal, an ALPR can track exactly who has been within a certain area. No suspicion is required, and no warrant is sought, yet most vehicles and individuals logged belong to people who have committed no crime. The danger is not simply a photograph; it is the aggregate. Our dense network and system of readers within this county reconstructs where a person's vehicle has traveled. These are breakdowns of where a person has been; be it near a place of worship, a medical appointment, a political event, a lawyer's office... anywhere, really. ALPRs grant a means of constant surveillance to ALPR companies (a third, non-government party) that our local offices purchase information from. This data isn't even the county or state's alone! In fact, they are not even the first ones to collect it. These large "security" corporations are.

Understanding that misuse happens rampantly is now well established. A Washington Post investigation this August identified at least fifty officers nationwide charged with or accused of running unauthorized personal investigations such as surveilling ex partners, associates, etc., with no case number and no legitimate investigative purpose attached. These instances of no probable cause leading to the unnecessary and unlawful gathering of information are becoming increasingly common in reports. Flock's own leadership has acknowledged that misuse occurs and pointed to audit tools as the remedy. However, an audit tool that flags abuse after the fact does not prevent the search, and it does nothing to reverse whatever record might be made in the interim. The threats of this network are becoming increasingly clear as a warrantless surveillance network is not rendered safe by its capacity to "eventually" notice when it has been abused.

On September 1st, Commissioner Ann Taylor stated with the county commission that the sheriff's office would comply with the state directive, adding that it appeared the cameras would be "coming down in our county as well." The statement circulated widely and was received, understandably, as a resolution. However, representatives and public statements later characterized the same message more narrowly, and at a budget hearing on September 15th, Sheriff Hardwick confirmed that the county/road network was not part of the offer for removal.

The sheriff's office's responses have, however, continued to justify its position. Sheriff Hardwick points to citations of instances of aid, in which these Flock Cameras have allowed the department to apprehend targets. Hardwick later told Jax Today in an interview that "If you're not committing, you know, violent crimes, and you're not wanted by federal, state or local government for a crime, then there's nothing to hide." While such a generalization of intention may be met with some criticism from the traditional citizen, he claims the county employs these devices strictly for necessary reasons. He later addressed the hotly debated topic of budget allocation in an email to the county commission, and according to Jacksonville Today, stated that "the county budgeted a total of $908,000 for the cameras in the 2026 fiscal year but spent only $481,000. The remaining cost was covered by grants".

This is no longer a dispute about one company or one county. It is a question of whether an unconstitutional record of residents' movements is compatible with a constitutional relationship between citizens and the state that monitors them. The sheriff's office has made real reforms under pressure. I would argue every concession from them is in and of itself an admission that the prior arrangement was not defensible by constitutional means. But policy adjustments made unilaterally can be unmade unilaterally. As a member of Deflock's team myself, I've seen the progress we've already made. On behalf of Deflock St. Johns, founder and a primary advocate for the cause Riley Willis states in an interview that "as an organization representative of a very diverse group of people, we have one goal in mind: a better future for our community; one free of intrusive, AI-powered mass surveillance." Commissioners have agreed to spend two weeks reviewing legal options, including the county's authority over right of way permits, with that window closing near the end of September.

The Deflock effort will continue building on the thousands of residents who have already joined it, organizing turnout for the commission's future sessions, and pursuing formal public records requests on the county's original authorization of these installations.

Deflock is promoting a rally on October 17th at the St. Augustine Pier. This event is expecting a large turnout of support as our community continues to make it clear through action that compromised rights will not be given up lightly. The state has already decided that the tracking of ordinary residents is unacceptable on its highways, and there is no principled basis for it becoming acceptable in our home instead.



Opinion pieces reflect the views of the individual writer and not necessarily those of the Vertical staff, Nease High School, its administrators, or the St. Johns County school district. The Vertical welcomes readers to respond by emailing nhsvertical@gmail.com or @nhsvertical on Instagram.

New Principal, New Chapter: How Dr. Dresback is Fitting in at Nease

By: Portland Murray



Photo taken by Vertical staff member: Chensley Dosio

With over 30 years in education and various job experiences, Nease's student body welcomes Dr. Dresback back as the new principal for the 26-27 school year.

Dr. Dresback built his career around education in St. Johns County, holding many different positions in the district. He started his career in 1996, taking on the position of Principal at Switzerland Point Middle School and working there for two years. After that, he moved to Allen D Nease High School and stayed for seven years. During that time, Dr. Dresback was awarded with the St. Johns County Principal of the Year Award for the 2015-2016 school year. After his time at Nease, he moved to the district, where he served as Associate Superintendent for Student Support Services and Regional Superintendent for Secondary and Alternative Schools.

The Vertical Staff interviewed Dr. Dresback about his past experiences and what he wants the future of Nease to look like.

Q: How have your first couple of weeks been at Nease?

DR. DRESBACK: "I think it's been exciting to get to meet everybody and to be able to see what's happening on campus, and then start asking questions on what's working well, what's not working well, and what we can do to improve and to get better!"

Q: How have things changed from the last time you were at Nease?

DR. DRESBACK: "Well, I left in 2017 as the principal at Nease High School. When I was here before, there wasn't a Panther Hall, there was a big green grassy knoll where parent pickup and drop off is. There was also a lot of changes with our new turf field and track, which is exciting for our sports to take advantage of that!"

Q: What are some new things that you are looking to implement in the new school year?

DR. DRESBACK: "So, a lot of it for this year will be to watch and look in areas that we need to improve. So not a lot of change – I don't believe in change for change's sake. What I believe in is: Let's get data and see where we are able to get better. The biggest thing right now is I'm just looking for ways to increase student engagement, so we are trying out our first indoor pep rally, and we are super excited about planning that!"

Dr. Dresback's focus remains on what's best for the Nease community and supporting its students and staff.

A Bold Refresh: Nease's Brand New Track and Field Receives Positive Feedback

By: Bella Hayes

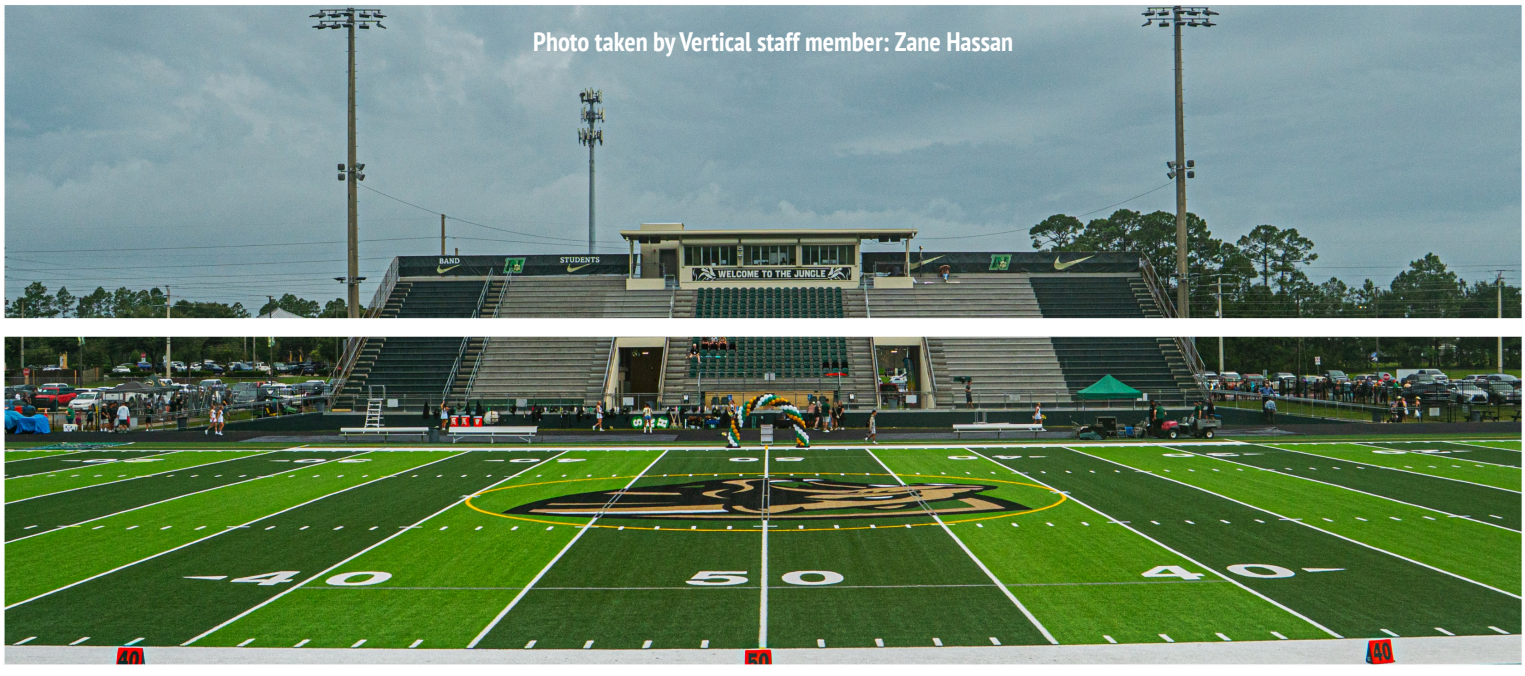
After months of waiting, Nease football finally has a new place to call home. Over the summer, the Nease football field underwent a major transformation, bringing a new turf and track to campus. The upgrades have completely changed the look and feel of the field, giving athletes a more updated and reliable space to practice and compete. Head football coach, Collin Drafts said, "One of the best things about it is that we get to practice in the stadium every day now. That gives us a true home field advantage now that we are practicing in the exact setting we play in on Friday nights."

The new turf is one of the biggest changes to the Panther Stadium. Unlike the previous playing surface, which was natural, the turf provides a more consistent field for players which can handle much more use throughout the season. For the football team, these changes create a field that can better withstand practices, games, and Florida's unpredictable weather. For staff members, the new field removes the need for heavy maintenance. And for Nease students, the changes to the stadium kickstart an all-star program that Panthers can take pride in. Senior football player, Chase Bogle, states, "The new turf makes the field look a lot nicer and gives us a better surface to play on. The whole environment feels newer, and it's exciting to have a new field that our team can be proud of."

The track surrounding the field was also replaced as part of the project. The new track gives Nease track and field athletes an updated surface to train and compete on while also completing the new look of the stadium.

While the improvements are exciting, they came with one major downside: Nease was unable to host a home football game until September. Because construction continued through the beginning of the season, and the school placed limitations on track use, the Panthers had to start the year playing their games away from home. Additionally, the Panther Regiment, Nease's marching band, had to give up the opportunity to host the annual district-wide Music Performance Assessment.

The lengthy wait made the return to the Panther Stadium even more exciting. Senior football player, Jayden Haynes, tells us, "It was hard having to wait because we were all excited to play on our new field, but the wait made our first home game even more special." After spending the beginning of the season on the road, finally getting to play under the lights on the new turf gave the team and student section something to look forward to. Coach Drafts said, "I truly believe Nease has always had the best overall atmosphere for football games in all Northeast Florida. Now that we have the beautiful turf field as an upgrade it makes it even better."



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