

Space Coast Area Mensa



NEWSLETTER

Volume 00101000, Issue 0010

February 011111100110

From Your LocSec

January provided us all the opportunity to participate in the Central Florida Mensa Regional Gathering. I saw Thomas Thomas of course and even met Ann Carter finally. Did anyone else attend?

There were no volunteers to be on the nomination committee so I will ask Thomas Thomas what we do when nobody wants to volunteer to do the things we need to do. I'm sure there is a bylaw somewhere that will provide the critical guidance necessary. If not, I suppose we push on until American Mensa deletes our chapter. Let's try to get a few good events under our belts before that happens.

Speaking of events, I will be hosting an event on birding at the Viera Wetlands. Experienced and inexperienced birders are welcome along with family members.

The route is closed to vehicular traffic now and may never reopen. We are allowed to walk through it and the route I've selected is right at 1.5 miles. It will be more of a stroll really so nothing too taxing. Binoculars are very helpful but not a total necessity as many birds in this area will be pretty close to us. Cameras are welcome and if you are new to photography, you can always ask me for help. I discourage bringing scopes because you will wish you had left it at home before the halfway point because they are too heavy to lug around for any distance. I could tell you a story about that.

I may plan a geocaching event at Wickham Park for March. Most of the caches there now are new and I've yet to log them.

We really need some folks to contribute something to

the newsletter and plan an event or two. It will not take long to exhaust the list of topics I am knowledgeable on and which I think my readers would be interested in. I would think by September's issue, I will have run out of things to talk about.

When that happens, my inputs will become pretty random and potentially incoherent. Let's protect us all from that by contributing an interesting story or an article of interest.

As of the writing of this sentence, 98 members still want hard copies of our newsletter. That will cost us about \$300 out of our funds this month. The more members that switch to electronic, the more money we save.

Jim Fitzgerald

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New Members

Henry Eckstein

J Hayes

Thomas Lempicke

Stephanie Morris

Welcome to SCAM!

RVC10—Thomas G. Thomas

Now that January is behind us, it's time to start looking at some upcoming events that I hope your Local Groups are working on.

First, CultureQuest® registrations open on February 1 and run through March 31. This year CultureQuest® will be held on Sunday, April 24. It is considered a trivia contest by many, but the questions are usually more grounded in cultural literacy, based on the 1987 book by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. The idea is that our culture has certain common knowledge that everyone knows, even if they aren't familiar with the original source material – for instance, almost everyone knows what is meant when someone is referred to as “Sherlock”, whether or not they've read any of the Arthur Conan Doyle stories.

Each CultureQuest® team may have up to five members and two alternates, but are not required to have that many (there have been years when a single individual participated as a “team” and scored in the money). All team members must be members, and must have renewed their membership before March 31 or their team will be disqualified. A local group



Scholarship Update

The 2021 scholarships applications are rolling in for the local and national awards. There are member and non-member awards. The call for applicants was sent to all colleges and universities in our region, and to the dual-enrollment office at the schoolboard. An applicant must be enrolled in a degree granting accredited college or university the academic year following their application. The applications are open September 15 until January 15 every year and require an essay of not more than 550 words explaining their career, academic and/or vocational goals, and how they plan to achieve those goals. For more information, read the scholarship FAQ at the web-



site: <https://www.mensafoundation.org/what-we-do/scholarships/us-scholarships/>.

I want to give a big thank you to our local Judges for this year: Ann Carter, Jim Fitzgerald, and Hank Rhodes. They are judging essays from students residing in Brevard and Indian River County to recommend one for a \$600 local scholarship. We normally receive about 30 essays in late January and have approximately 2 weeks to rate them using a clear scoring metric. It is nice to read about our stellar local students and a pretty painless process overall if anyone is interested in volunteering to judge them next year! There are also regional and national judging panels you can join.

Julie S. Costopoulos, Ph.D.

Space Coast Area Mensa Scholarship Chair

RVC10—Thomas G. Thomas

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may have more than one team if they wish. The top 20 teams are recognized on the Awards page on the national website, as well as sharing in monetary awards for their Local Group. More details can be found at <https://www.us.mensa.org/attend/culturequest>

Also coming up: April 18-24 is National Volunteer Week, which is when most *Mensa Cares* community service projects are run. Since these take some lead time to organize, February is a good time to start.

The Community Service Committee recognizes service contributed towards the local community or society. Recognition requests may be submitted by any member who organizes a community service event by providing the name and date of the event, the number of member and family participants, the percent of group participation, the total of contributions (either in time or value), and a brief essay on the positive effect or result for the community. LocSecs will be asked to confirm or ratify the submission by a local group member, but need not be the one to submit it.

If you have a community service project that you would like to run, you can register it at <https://www.us.mensa.org/volunteer/community-service/>

A number of nominations either begin or are due in February. Nominations for National Ombudsperson open on February 1 and close on March 31. Per our Bylaws, the National Ombudsperson is elected by the Local Group Ombudspersons every six years. Although a Local Group is permitted to have more than one Local Ombudsperson, each group gets a single vote – but only if they have an Ombudsperson. So, if your local group does not have an ombudsperson, this is a good time to volunteer!

Finally, Gifted Youth Coordinator of the Year nominations are due by February 20, and nominations for Mensa Foundation Awards (Copper Black, Distinguished Teacher, and Intellectual Benefits to Society) are due by March 1. Information on all of these can be found at <https://www.us.mensa.org/recognize/group-awards/gy-coordinator-of-the-year> and <https://www.mensafoundation.org/what-we-do/awards-and-recognition/>



Escape Rooms

By Jim Fitzgerald



I am confident you have heard about escape rooms and there is a good chance you have actually been in one. The escape room of today is a literal room where you must solve clues and puzzles in order to escape. The original 'escape the room' games were browser-based developed using Flash. These migrated quickly to mobile devices and often required you to find a tool in one room to use in a second room, which then opened or exposed something you needed to continue progressing to the exit.

Immensely popular, the online games soon became businesses which created physical space for participants to discover and solve clues, riddles, and puzzles. The first escape room was created for GenCon Indy in Indianapolis, IN back in 2003. In 2019, there were an estimated 50,000 escape rooms worldwide. Royal Caribbean cruise ships have escape rooms and there have been two movies produced which are escape room based along with one tv show series.

Local costs are ~\$30 per person with deals available on group.

Design: Many escape rooms are elaborately designed and are meant to be an immersive experience. I've been in rooms that contained half of a helicopter and another that had an entire ambulance. You may find yourself in a room where you need to solve a murder from the 1920's and the entire room will be filled with memorabilia from that era. Or you could be in a modern room which requires the use of lasers or electronic equipment to solve puzzles.

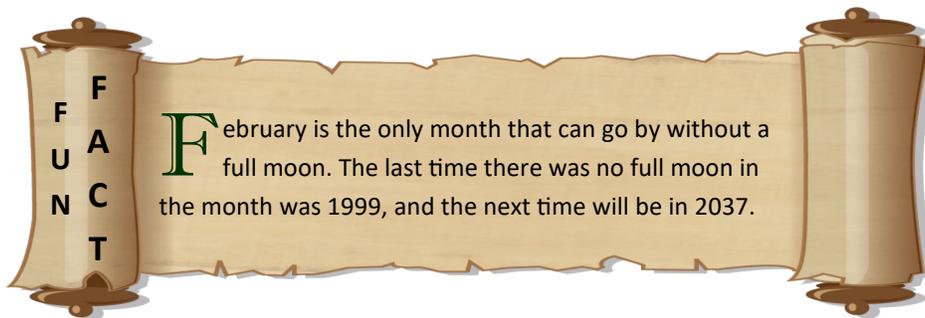
Teamwork: Escape rooms are typically set up to encourage team-based tactics. One person on the team may be great at math, another might be an excellent puzzle solver. Together, the attributes everyone brings to the team help in achieving the goal of escaping the room.

Experience: The vast majority of rooms are set up as a 60 minute challenge. Some rooms which are much more complicated may allow 90 minutes. Team size also varies from a maximum of 6 up to 12 people. The maximum is usually determined by the size of the room and whether puzzles can be worked in parallel or are linear. Locks represent a large portion of the challenge to escaping. There are a large variety of locks including number, letter, directional, cryptex, digital, and magnetic. There are even RFID locks that require an object be placed or waved close to another object which will then open a hidden chamber.

Modern escape rooms are often comprised of more than one room. You may start off in a small room with puzzles that, when solved, allow you to enter a second room where more puzzles and clues await.

Many rooms contain physical puzzles to solve, which may be deciphering notes on chemical samples to placing objects into correct locations to magnetically open a hidden safe. Some rooms have auditory clues such as dialing a specific phone number to hear a message.

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Escape Rooms

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Rooms that are considered challenge rooms are significantly harder to escape. There are 3 major reasons for this. 1) the puzzles are much harder and will likely require cooperation between teammates that are in different rooms; 2) the room will be much darker than normal making everything harder to find, and 3) the addition of sound effects, often quite loud, to make it harder to communicate with each other. I don't recommend attempting challenge rooms until you have built a good team and normal rooms are beginning to feel like they are easy.



Corporate Teambuilding: Escape rooms are popular for corporate teambuilding exercises because the rooms require cooperation and participation from everyone. In an escape room, everyone is able to contribute something. I was in a room once where I examined some luggage for clues. Finding nothing, I moved on but I noticed someone else checking the luggage right after I was finished with it. He also found nothing. A few minutes later, someone else was looking at the luggage and they found a hidden note which was what we needed to open a lock and continue the game.

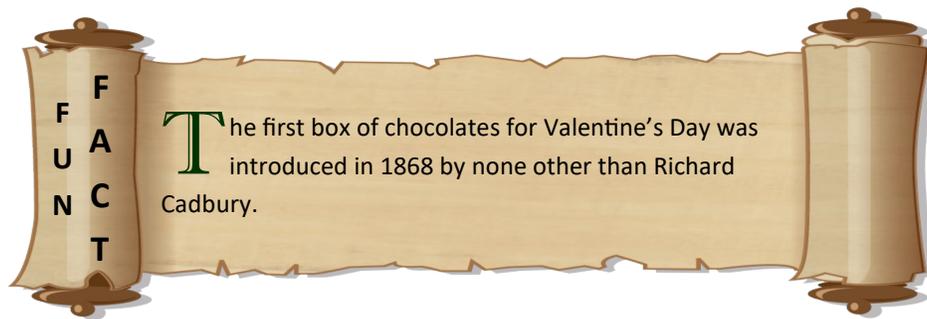
Pro Tips

Start Easy: If you've never been in an escape room before, check with the business to see what the escape rate is for each of their rooms. Most businesses will track their escape rate (successful escapes within the allotted time) and some publish that on their web site. Go for one with a high percentage of escapes if you are a novice. This is so you can enjoy the experience with a higher likelihood of success while you learn how escape rooms operate.

Clues: All escape room businesses offer up to 3 clues and all you have to do is ask. Usually this means the entire team must want a clue. If you are stuck and not able to find a way to proceed, ask for a clue. The game master is always watching and will know what you have or haven't found and what your next step should be.

Skill Sets: You can choose to just book a room with your friends and, if you haven't reached the maximum number of players, the establishment may add other people to your group. These strangers may be experienced and very helpful or they could offer little to the team effort. Some places give you the entire room even if your team falls short of their maximum number of players while others will let you book the entire room for yourselves at an increased cost. Try to find friends with a skill set that complements your own. My specialties are performing in-head math, pattern recognition, words, and shortcutting. I've built a team of 5 people with overlapping skill sets. Out of over 50 rooms, we have only a couple of failed escapes, many successes and a few records for escaping faster than any other group. Besides basic math skills and other common knowledge subjects you are expected to bring with you, everything you need will be available in the room. If you find a clue that is music based, there will be enough information

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Escape Rooms

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“THE MOST EFFECTIVE COMPONENT FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION IS LISTENING.”

for you to figure it out without having anyone on your team who can read music. Don't know morse code? They will have a decoder for you.

Communication: The team must communicate. A good strategy is to spread out as soon as the countdown clock starts and begin calling out locks, objects and any unusual things you may discover. Knowing that there is a 4 letter lock in the room is helpful when you run across a puzzle that looks like it will spell a 4 letter word. A good team will call everything out and then, even if you haven't gone to every wall in the room, you have an idea of what is there. Someone may call out that they found a clue written down but the print is too small to read. That would pair up well with the magnifying glass someone else announced they had found. Taken separately, the objects may

not seem significant or you might write them off as red herrings. Always call out what you have found because someone else may need it. It is all about getting and keeping everyone informed. The most successful teams constantly communicate with each other.

Exploration: Most rooms will be clear on what can or cannot be touched. Usually anything in the ceiling area is off limits and not part of the game. You never need to move heavy furniture or poke around electrical outlets. Pay attention to the game master who will advise you on what is and isn't in play. Anything not specifically mentioned as being out of play must be in play.

Trust Your Instincts: Because escape rooms can be quite elaborate in design; pictures on a wall, items on a table, and virtually every object in the room is potentially part of a clue or puzzle. If you see three pictures on the wall of three women with one in a red dress, one in green and the other in blue, you might not think too much about it because it fits the theme of the room but, it may strike you as odd and those are the objects you need to really examine. If something looks a little out of place or a little too conspicuous, it is probably part of the game. Most escape rooms have red herrings in them which costs you time to work on. A good rule of thumb is that if the puzzle looks like it was easy to create and very time consuming to put together, it is likely a red herring. The other side of that coin is something that obviously was difficult to build and appears hard to solve. Businesses don't normally go to the trouble of creating a complex and hard to build time sink for no reason. If you aren't sure, move on to something that you are sure is part of the escape game. If the puzzle you weren't sure about obviously comes into play later in the game, great. If not, you saved a lot of time by skipping it.

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Escape Rooms

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Organize: When you solve a clue, open a lock, or complete some other consumable action, place all the used items in a corner of the room. This has the advantage of removing those items from play and preventing another player on the team from looking at them and starting to try and figure them out. It's kind of a waste pile for completed things. This also helps the staff reset the room since everything is all in the same place when you are done.

Listen: Everyone has an input and should be listened to. People think differently and a teammate's idea might be the one you need to continue the game. The most effective component for good communication is listening.

Explain Later: Don't get caught up in explaining (or asking someone else to explain) how they solved a puzzle or opened a lock. You don't have time for that and you will lose team momentum. Ask how things were done after you escape if you are interested. I've completed many rooms where my teammates solved some lock combination or a puzzle and I still have no idea what their solutions were. The fact that something was figured out is much more important than learning how it was done. Remember you are on the clock.

Final Thoughts: I've completed around 60 rooms and all of them have been in Brevard and Orange counties. There are still some out there that I have not yet attempted as COVID set us back quite a bit. On the positive side of that, many businesses have designed new rooms during the pandemic which means there should be more local rooms available for me to try. When my team goes to Orlando, we usually do at least two rooms and sometimes three to try and minimize our trips to the center of the state. There is even a mobile escape here in Brevard that will come to your party.

If you plan to travel overseas, there are probably escape rooms where you are going and they may accommodate English speaking participants. Japan has elaborate escape rooms which may be on more than one floor and they even have escape games as a portion of an entrance exam to a middle school.

Escape rooms *are* Mensan-worthy. Puzzles, logic, problem solving, strategy... these are things we do. Don't pass on escape rooms just because you think they will be too easy. The vast majority are pretty hard and if you escape without using any clues, then you have done well. Be aware that while establishments try to stay within the theme of the room, they will occasionally have some anachronistic item present that breaks the theme a bit: a digital safe in a Sherlock Holmes themed room for example. I just overlook these off-theme tangents and focus on the clues and puzzles in the room.

Contact me if interested in my thoughts on the various escape room businesses in our area.

“TRY TO FIND FRIENDS WITH A SKILL SET THAT COMPLEMENTS YOUR OWN.”



Newsletter Submissions

To submit articles, events, SIGs, announcements, please email locsec@mensa.org

All submissions must be received by the Editor before the 10th of the month preceding publication. Whenever possible, we prefer submissions via email.

Editor contact information is listed above

Upcoming Events

5 Feb: 8:00 AM. Birding: Identification and techniques for watching. In-person at Viera Wetlands <https://viera.com/attractions/viera-wetlands> (see route map on page 9). This will involve quite a bit of walking/strolling as the area is currently closed to vehicular traffic. Meet at the entrance to the wetlands in the small parking lot. Host: Jim Fitzgerald

5 Feb: 5:00 PM. ExComm meeting on Discord

Picture of the Month



Buggin' Out

Photo by: Jim Fitzgerald

For the high resolution image, visit the Picture of the Month channel on our Discord server



Recipe

Contributed by Eileen L.

CORNER

Fried Rice

This is a one-pot meal that is quick and easy to prepare. It is especially useful for leftover meats.

Serves: 4-6

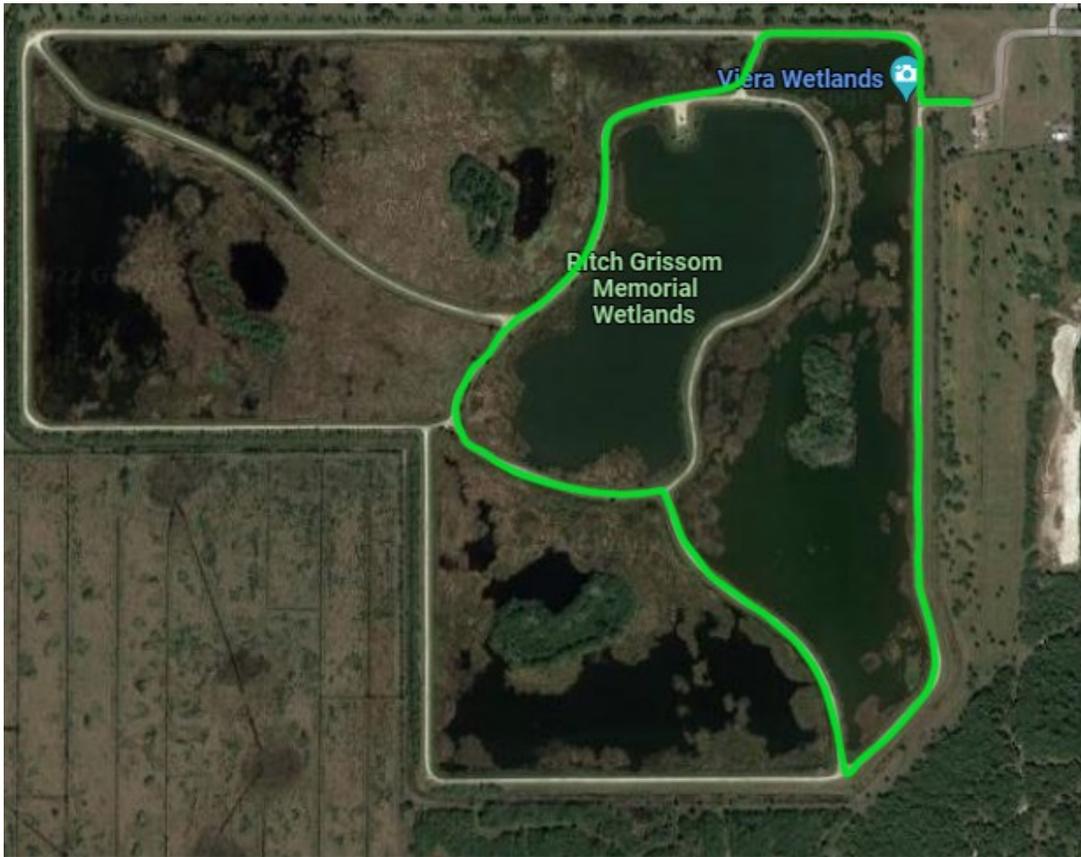
Preparation:

- ❶ Cook 2 cups rice, set aside, but keep it warm.
- ❷ Dice the following vegetables. (*These are the basic veggies that we like but you can add any vegetable to this*)
 - ¼ head cabbage
 - 1 small green bell pepper
 - 1 small onion
- ❸ Place the vegetables together in a bowl.
- ❹ Dice 1½ C cooked meat (using leftover meat is great!): ham, Spam (see directions below if you are using Spam), steak, hot dogs, any meat you would like, & you can combine them too.
- ❺ Place the meat(s) in a separate bowl from the veggies.

Cooking Directions:

- ❶ Add 1 Tbs vegetable oil in a skillet on medium-high heat.
- ❷ Add your Spam (if using). Cook until the Spam becomes crispy, about 5 minutes.
- ❸ Add your mixed vegetables. Season with salt and pepper.
- ❹ Stir together and cook until the vegetables are softened, but not mushy (don't overcook).
- ❺ If you are using leftover cooked meat(s), add the meat to the pan of cooked vegetables and combine until everything comes together and is heated through.
- ❻ Turn off the heat. Thoroughly mix in the warm, cooked rice.
- ❼ Serve immediately.

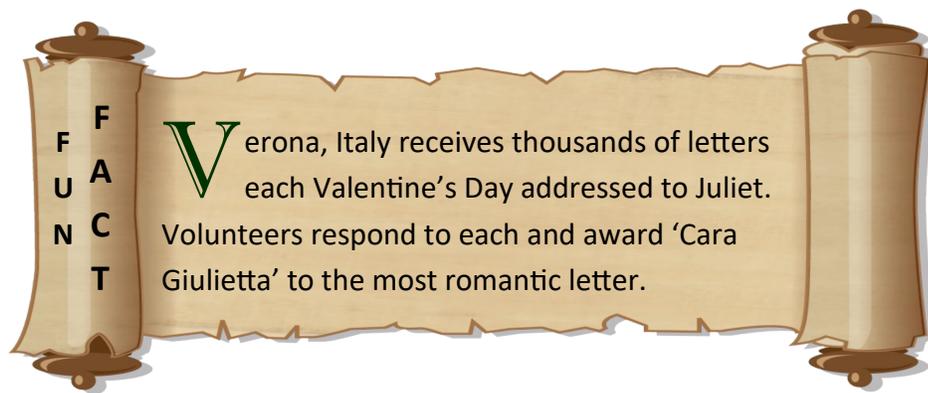




Approximately 1.5 mile walk. Roads are not paved but they do exist and we will generally stay on them. Friends and family members welcome. Meeting at 8:00 AM and starting by 8:15. Expecting it to take about 2 hours. RSVP to Jim Fitzgerald if you plan to attend and provide total number of people in your party. Event may be rescheduled if weather is bad that day or if there is a storm the night before. Storms tend to make for pretty muddy roads and none of us want that.

CultureQuest 2022

I would like Space Coast Area Mensa to form a team for CultureQuest this year and I will be your first teammate. As Thomas mentioned in his article, we can have up to 5 people and we can field multiple teams if there are more than five folks interested. You can just email me if you want to participate and I've created a CultureQuest channel on Discord as well.



SPACE COAST AREA MENSA

Officers and Appointees

Local Secretary	Jim Fitzgerald	locsec@scam.us.mensa.org
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Testing Proctor	Harold (Bud) Long	
Testing Proctor	Hank Rhodes	
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Regional Vice Chair (Area 10)	Thomas G. Thomas	RVC10@us.mensa.org

Vacant Positions (volunteers needed)

Assistant Scholarship Chair
SIG Chairman
RG Chairman

Gifted Youth Coordinator
Area Coordinator, Brevard County
Publicity

Mensa Links

SCAM Web Site

<http://www.spacecoast.us.mensa.org/index.html>

SCAM on Discord

<https://discord.gg/s82uBqPTj4>

American Mensa

<https://www.us.mensa.org/>

Mensa Connect

<https://www.us.mensa.org/connect/mensa-connect/>

Your Membership Profile

<https://www.us.mensa.org/my-mensa/my-membership-profile/>

