

The Front Porch

*Where the Tea is Sweet
and the Talks Are Long*

Diamond in the Rough

**River Oak Technical College is
a diamond in the rough**

PERMIT NO. 4
CALLAHAN, FL
PAID
U.S. POSTAGE
PSRST STD

Greene Publishing, Inc.
P.O. Drawer 772
Madison, FL 32341



MAR/APR
2022

PROPERTY OF



1-855-563-9400

“Where our *family* is taking care of your *family*”

Churches

Sign up and get one 96-gallon FREE weekly pick up

First Responders, Law Enforcement, Dispatchers, Military and Nurses

Sign up and get 3 months FREE

Pop's Sanitation, LLC is a family-owned,
local business that provides residential
trash pick-up for your home.

Providing residential trash pick-up
for all of Suwannee, Madison, Taylor
and Jefferson Counties

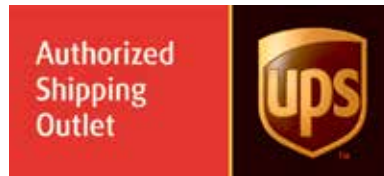
(855) 563-9400
www.popssanitation.com



We Pack and Mail



Shipping . Printing . Mailboxes & more...



- Mailbox Rental ✓
- Faxing ✓
- Business Cards ✓
- Shipping Supplies ✓
- Notary ✓
- Postcards ✓
- Engraving ✓
- Yard Signs ✓
- Finger Prints ✓

- Copies ✓
- Flyers ✓
- Shirts ✓
- Boxes ✓
- Signs ✓
- Website ✓
- Print ✓
- Flags ✓
- Stickers ✓

850-253-2684

177 SW Range Ave Madison, FL 32340

The Front Porch

Where the tea is sweet and the talks are long

Established 2019
Vol. 3 Issue 4 • March/April 2022

The Front Porch
is published every other month at
1695 South SR 53
Madison, Fla. 32340

Published by



Publisher

Emerald Greene Parsons

General Manager

Cheltzie Holbrook

Staff Writers

Rick Patrick

Mickey Starling

Lee Trawick

Christian Peterson

Heather Ainsley

Laura Young

Advertising Specialists

Ina Thompson

Robin Jones

Advertisement Design

Mark Estefan

Lucy Golub

Advertising & Subscriptions

(850) 973-4141

On the Web

www.greenepublishing.com

www.ecbpublishing.com

www.riverbendnews.org

Member of

Florida Press Association

and

Florida Magazine Association



Subscribe Today



Published six times a year *(every other month)*

*** \$25 ***
Per year

Mail checks or money orders to:
Greene Publishing, Inc.

P.O. Drawer 772

Madison, Fla. 32341

For all credit card payments, call:

(850) 973-4141

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email Address: _____

Please note: If you are a subscriber to the *Madison County Carrier, Madison Enterprise-Recorder, Monticello News, Jefferson County Journal, or Riverbend News, and you live in Madison, Jefferson, Suwannee, Hamilton or Lafayette County, you will automatically receive the magazine when published.*

CONTENTS

The Front Porch | March/April 2022



SITTIN' ON THE PORCH ----

9 Tommy Peterson

COVER STORY ----

10 River Oak Technical College

A Diamond in the Rough

FEATURES ----

16 Evie Pitts

A Living Legend

22 Lillian Eugene Smith

Misunderstood

24 Live Oak Hounds

48 Seasons of Foxhunting

32 Bradley Cooley

The Man Behind the Metal

36 Carl Joseph

Still an Inspiration

38 Girls Gone Kayaking

Fishing by Kayak

40 Juan Botino

A Cautionary Tale

44 Zac Petty

Chiefland's Rising Star

Jason Shoaf

District 7

State Representative



**Proud
to be
serving
the citizens of
District 7**

Thank you for allowing me to serve you for the past three years. If I can ever be of any assistance to you, please feel free to reach out to my office.

Office Numbers

Tallahassee - (850) 717-5007

Perry - (850) 295-5680

Blountstown - (850) 508-3207



**AMERICAN TOWING
OF NORTH FLORIDA, INC.**
DBA DUNCAN TIRE & AUTO
24 Hour Towing • Heavy Duty/Recovery
Road Service • Flat Bed • Load Shifts
2 -60 Ton Rotators



386.515.5274



**Jefferson County
Parks & Recreation
Department**

"Where Everybody Plays"

Park Manager, Mike Holm
1380 Mamie Scott Dr.
Monticello, Florida
850-342-0240 Park Office
850-519-6640 Cell
mholm@jeffersoncountyfl.gov





RAGANS FAMILY CAMPGROUND

Cabins - RV Sites - Waterpark
"Family camping at its best"

FAMILY FUN ALL YEAR LONG!

(850) 973-8269

www.ragansfamilycampground.com
info@ragansfamilycampground.com



WATER ZONE OPENS IN SPRING!

**DISC GOLF,
WATER SLIDE,
LAZY RIVER,
THEMED WKND'S,
& MORE!**

Cabins, RV & Tent Sites, Day Passes & Group Facilities!
Book sites early



1051 SW Old St. Augustine Rd
Madison, FL 32340
I-10 Exit 258

Amenities & details subject to change.

GREAT FOOD JUST OFF I-10 AT EXIT 258 & 262!

RED ONION
Grill

SOUTH CR 255

850-971-4240

SMACKIN LIPS
DINER

SOUTH SR 53

850-973-3115

The Front Porch

Meet Our Staff



Emerald Greene Parsons
Publisher



Cheltzie Holbrook
General Manager



Rick Patrick
Staff Writer



Mickey Starling
Staff Writer



Laura Young
Staff Writer



Heather Ainsley
Staff Writer



Lee Trawick
Staff Writer



Christian Peterson
Staff Writer



Dawn Perez
Contributor



Mark Estefan
Graphic Designer



Lucy Golub
Graphic Designer



Ina Thompson
Sales Representative



Robin Jones
Sales Representative

See us for
Lay-A-Way!

Daddy's Gun Shop

Lay-A-
Way
Available!

Glock
Blue Label

• New & used guns

Gun Repair

Dealer for Smith & Wesson Law Enforcement

TONS OF GUNS IN STOCK!

HENRY RIFLE
DEALER



Halls

FIREARM TRAINING, LLC

"Promoting Safety Through Education"

www.hallsfirearmtraining.com

Phone: 386-364-6400 • 11015 71st Drive, Live Oak, FL 32060

Les Hall NRA Certified Instructors Joy Hall

Cell Phone: 386-590-0213

Cell Phone: 386-208-3646

les@hallsfirearmtraining.com

joy@hallsfirearmtraining.com

(386) 294-1532

758 SE CR 340 • Mayo, Fla 32066

J + J STRONG



J+J STRONG provides farm fuel delivery and construction site delivery in Madison & surrounding counties. We provide freight services in a 200-mile radius.

Newly opened self-service CardLock Gas Station is located at 3955 SW SR 14, Madison, Fla. and is OPEN: 24/7

Phone: (850) 973-1431

Fax: (850) 290-7443

www.jj-strong-fuel.com

Sittin' on the Porch with...

Tommy Peterson

Christian Peterson

Staff Writer

Tommy Peterson is not a Florida native; however, since his move to Florida, he and his family have truly found a home. Peterson was born in Boulder, Colo., in 1979 to two loving parents, Barbara and Dennis Peterson. He grew up with three younger siblings, one sister and two little brothers, though his parents would later adopt four more girls. Peterson spent his life attending church and being a integral part of his congregation.

After graduating high school, Peterson went to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Ill. It was there that he met his wife, Helen Peterson. Not long after they met, the two were married in 2002. Quickly after their marriage, the Petersons grew from two to three and didn't stop there. Eventually, Peterson was the proud father of five children, each one roughly two years older than the one that followed.

Throughout their lives, the Petersons moved from place to place, living in areas such as California, Georgia, Virginia, Colorado and many different places. Peterson's children were asked if their father was in the military based on their moves, yet the response was never "yes". Peterson is a pastor and has lived by faith for almost as long as he can remember, trusting in God to guide his next steps and to further his path.

Years after graduating from Moody Bible Institute, Peterson felt comfortable enough to go back to school to pursue a master's degree and eventually the role of lead pastor at a church. Peterson went to Westminster Theological Seminary, in Escondido, Calif. There he received his master's degree and began to search for a church to call home. Eventually, Peterson was offered a job at Community Presbyterian Church in Live Oak, and a home was found.

As the world gets more complicated and confusing, Peterson remains grateful for God's providence in removing his family from California and moving them to Florida. Here, his faith remains central for every action as he partakes in a faith-based ministry in the county jails, as well as continues to pastor at Community Presbyterian Church. He can be found working hard at the church every day of the week, though his biggest smile can be seen on Sunday afternoons when he sits down to eat with his family. ■





RIVEROAK
TECHNICAL
COLLEGE
IS A

**diamond in
the rough**

By Lee Trawick

RiverOak Technical College (RTC) in Live Oak, Fla., is more than classroom teachers and students. RiverOak prides itself on its student's success, not their student numbers. It offers a plethora of avenues for students to achieve their goals from scholarships to grants. For some students, RTC is a way to gain a step on the competition upon graduating high school; for some, it is a way to further their education or certification. For others, it is truly a second chance at a career they are passionate about, all the while not sacrificing their entire life or life savings.

RTC is a diamond in the rough in Live Oak, with 635 industrial certifications and licenses available to all ages regardless of background. The school is constantly changing its offerings to their students, ranging from sixth-grade to post-high school, who are trying to better themselves with education. RTC works hand in hand with local schools in the area: Suwannee High School, Branford High School, Columbia High School and Lafayette High School. Every year, a graduating senior receives a \$1,000 scholarship simply by filling out an application. In addition, 92 percent of their students are on a grant or scholarship that allows them to further

their education and certifications or change career paths.

When talking with RTC principal Mary Keen, she glows with joy over her students' success.

"Our students are our family and hopefully, we are theirs. Our teachers, instructors and administrators pull for our students every day. Everyone knows everyone here, and we get an idea of what each student wants from RTC. That allows us to steer them better and prepare them for the career they are wanting," Keen said.

But the job doesn't stop there; RTC then reaches out to professionals in the industry to find job placement in the workforce. Their job isn't just to recruit students to RTC but to find them a career after completing their programs. RTC does this by offering more than most colleges; every student graduates with more than the minimum graduation requirements for the workforce. Welding Technology is a highly competitive field, one where more certifications and job experience will give you more opportunities and a leg up on the competition. RTC offers that leg up with Welding Technology Advanced, Industrial Certification (Welding Level 1,2,3). The automotive industry is another field that is forever changing. Because certifications

in this field are highly recommended, RTC offers Automotive Service Technology 2, with various specific credentials that will give the RTC students the advantage in the workforce others do not have.

Students at RTC develop the skills they need to make a difference in the workforce and provide for their families, but RTC offers more than that. Each student is confident in their abilities and is proud of the person they have become through RTC, giving them a sense of pride in life. Students come from all walks of life, from middle school to a lifelong road of misfortune. Leaving RTC with confidence and pride in their abilities does more than allow graduates to provide for their families; it gives them a sense of structure in their lives. Brandon Debyah is a former RTC student who is grateful to RTC and his welding instructor, Kevin Mercer.

"Two years before I moved to Live Oak in 2018, I found myself in some pretty rough places in life," Debyah said. "I wasn't making good decisions and was hanging with the wrong people. I felt I needed a change. In August of 2018, I attended RTC to learn how to weld. [My instructor] encouraged me and helped me far beyond teaching me how to weld; I didn't have a father figure in my life, but I can now say I do in Mr. Mercer."



Throughout his time at RTC, things got rough for Debyah once again. Still, his instructor did not give up and continued to stand by him and found him a job as a welder at Cedar Manufacturing, where Debyah worked for three months before being promoted to supervisor. Shortly after that, he was asked to become the company's general manager. This is one of many stories that make up RTC.

Principal Keen puts a lot of focus on her staff to make sure their students are prepared, not only with certifications and licenses but also mentally and emotionally. Each student leaves knowing they have a family at RTC that is proud of them and will always strive to help their current and former students. Principal Keen takes pride in reviews from companies that say they are excited about hiring their students. She doesn't use it as a recruiting tool but as a building block in promoting future graduates. She thrives on building relationships with the workforce that allow her students to find job placements as soon as they are available. Recently, Ace Electric came to visit RTC to find recruits who were job-ready. Ace found exactly what they were looking for at RTC and hired 10 students for their company. Each student is now earning top competitive



pay and looks forward to a life-long career with the skills they acquired while at RTC.

RTC offers many different career paths such as:

- Applied Cybersecurity (coming in the Fall of 2022)
- Automotive Collision Technology Technician
- Automotive Service Technology 1
- Automotive Service Technology 2
- Brick & Block Masonry
- Cosmetology
- Electricity
- Facial Specialty

- Heat/ventilation and Refrigeration Technician (coming in the fall of 2022)
- Medical Administrative Specialist
- Nails Specialty
- Nursing Assistant
- Patient Care Technician
- Pharmacy Technician
- Phlebotomy
- Practical Nursing
- Professional Culinary Arts & Hospitality
- Surgical Technology
- Welding Technology
- Welding Technology – Advanced.

RTC offers a wide range of avenues for achieving their goals, such as dual-enrollment for high school students, night classes and day classes. At RTC, most certifications are set up to complete within one year or less. But RTC doesn't stop there; many people in today's workforce have healthy and productive careers but are often blocked in advancement because of a lack of a college degree. RTC provides a way for students to overcome such obstacles by providing college prep classes that will help prepare them for a university. They also offer help for students who look to score higher on college entrance exams. Some believe they are restricted within their job because of the language barrier; at RTC, they provide classes to overcome such barriers. They also offer foreign language classes to help better prepare their students for the workforce. For students looking to complete their high school education, they offer a course called Adult Basic Education that will allow students to obtain their GED.

RTC is a college with a wide variety of opportunities for anyone looking to advance in the workforce. If you are looking to grow in your current career, change careers or become your boss in the field of your choice, RTC may be that launching pad you are looking for. Chances are, if you are looking at the labor forces around Madison, Suwannee, Lafayette, Hamilton and Columbia Counties, you are looking at the fingerprints of RTC. Principal Keen is proud of her school, but she is more proud of her faculty and students and the impact they make on a daily basis.

Principal Keen is grateful for all the support throughout the local community. In addition, she and RTC would like to think of all of the donors who provide many scholarships for their students allowing them to pursue their life dreams.

- Altrusa Naomi Hart
- Culinary Arts
- RTC Academic Development
- North Florida College
- Suwannee Chamber of





- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Commerce | Benard Williams Memorial |
| Vincent M. Jones | Scholarship |
| Achievement Award | Bright Futures |
| PN Scholarships | Lonnie Bob Hurst |
| - Shands Ladies Auxiliary | Scholarship |
| -Honor of Mrs. Elizabeth | Sabal Trail's Postsecondary |
| McMillan | Education Scholarship |
| -Memory of Margaret | RIVER OAK Merit |
| Boatright | Scholarship |
| -Memory of Wayne Corbin | RIVER OAK Academic |
| Altrusa of Live Oak Carol | Development Scholarship |
| Herring | Walter Doughty Memorial |
| Pat Collins Memorial | Scholarship |
| Nursing Scholarship | Rotary CTE Scholarship |





- 60-bed Skilled Nursing Facility
- Private and Semi-Private rooms
- Home-like atmosphere
- Wi-Fi for wireless access
- Cable TV
- Salon Services
- Designated outdoor smoking area
- Courtyard with gazebo & gardening area
- Fishing pond with dock
- Menu selection for meals
- Daily individual & group activities indoor, outdoor & off-campus
- Courtesy transportation to & from medically necessary appointments
- Elegant Dining
- Chaplin & worship services

2481 West US Hwy. 90
Madison, Fla. 32340
(850) 973-4880

www.madisonhealthandrehab.com



The Joint Commission
Gold Seal Of Approval™

Madison Health and Rehabilitation Center is a 60-bed skilled nursing facility with private and semi-private rooms. We are centrally located in the heart of Madison County and have provided quality care since 1985. Our dedicated teams of highly trained professionals focus solely on the needs of our residents. Each resident at our facility receives a well-defined individualized plan of care that caters to their needs. Short term or long term, our well trained therapists are here to assist the residents in achieving their goals. Our facility also offers outpatient therapy. The residents may enjoy visiting the beauty salon, spending the day fishing at our pond, relaxing at the gazebo in the beautiful, enclosed courtyard and much more. With quality care in a friendly and safe environment, our residents are able to enjoy themselves, while receiving the care they need.

Quality Focused Care, One Resident at a Time!

- Close to family & Friends
- Physician visits as needed
- Nursing: RN, LPN, CNA's
- Staffed above requirements with warm, friendly staff
- Plan of care meeting within 72 hours with resident and family (includes discharge planning)
- Registered Therapist for evaluation & treatments
- Restorative Nursing Program
- Wound Prevention Precautions
- Podiatry & mental health services provided on-site
- Resident council
- Medicaid application assistance Personal provider of choice

Serving Madison, South Georgia, Perry, Live Oak, Monticello and Tallahassee.

Specializing in:

- Residential real estate
- Commercial properties
- Lending and financing
- Real estate investment
- Rental property management
- Farms, ranches, lots, land
- Hunting tracts

Megan Nicole Washington (850) 464-2437
Benjamin Marinelli (850) 510-0178
Jennifer Oester (850) 212-3181
Catherine Hope (678) 630-9931
Blake Coleman Burnett (850) 509-4964
Nicholas Buzbee (850) 508-4986
Rachel Sparling (850) 264-9241
Jerrod Trainer (850) 869-9872

WE WANT TO BE YOUR REAL ESTATE AGENCY

Welcome to All Realty Services, your source for Big Bend North Florida real estate. We specialize in Madison, Florida and Monticello, Florida properties. If you own real estate that you're thinking of selling, I would be happy to provide you with a FREE Home Evaluation.

In today's competitive real estate market, timing is everything. Many good homes are sold before they are ever advertised. Beat other homebuyers to the hottest new homes for sale in North Florida with my New Listings Notification.



All Realty Services

Big Bend - Florida

WWW.MYALLREALTY.COM

*Lynette Sirmon, Realtor
Broker/Owner*

112 SW Range Ave. (850) 973-9990 Office
Madison, Fla. 32340 (850) 973-9992 Facsimile

Follow us on Facebook





Kaleb Koon
Owner
 7+ Years Industrial Experience

9051 101st Court
 Live Oak, Fla. 32060
 (386) 292-4892

Aluminum, Stainless, Carbon Steel
 CNC Metal Signs
 10% off with ad




WAUKEENAH
Fertilizer & Farm
SUPPLY INC.

Fertilizer in Bag and Bulk • Veterinary Supplies
 Custom Blending Liquid Nitrogen
 Feed • Seed • Chemicals • Fencing Materials



9643 Waukeelah Hwy
 Monticello, Fla. 32344

(850) 997-4460 • (850) 997-4480









Open 6 Days a week
 Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Saturday 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

Diva Daisies
Boutique 

304 Howard St. W
 Live Oak, Fla. 32008
 (386) 208-8159



The insurance you need...



for the surprise you don't!

Owned & Operated by: **Leslie Swann Anderson**

Swann
Insurance

105½ N. Jefferson St., Perry, FL. 32347
(850) 584-5800
swanninsurance@fairpoint.net



Evie Pitts

is a living legend

Evie Pitts stands with her 2022 State Championship medals in the traditional and snatch events.

By Lee Trawick



#14 Evie Pitts and the Lady Buccaneers celebrate their 2022 Class 1A District 5 Championship.

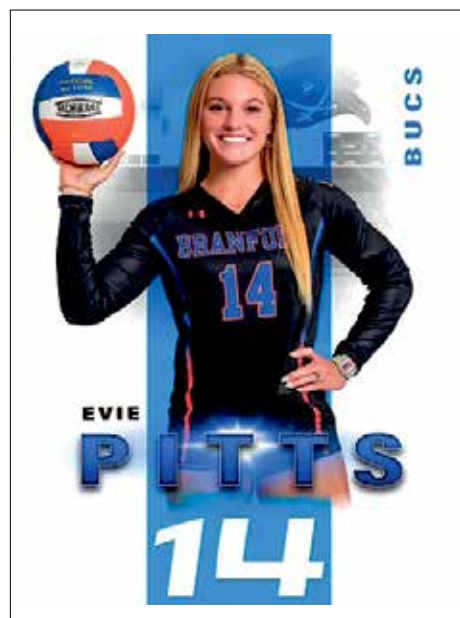
"A lot of legends, a lot of people, have come before me. But this is my time."

— Usain Bolt

Robbie and Nancy Pitts gave birth to a baby girl on June 9, 2004. Little did they know what their daughter would accomplish throughout her life. Her name is Evie Pitts. Now a senior at Branford High School in Suwannee County, she has donned the orange and blue of the Branford Buccaneer nation since she was in the sixth grade. In a few months, she will turn in her orange

and blue for red and black at Valdosta State University. But before she does, she still has an agenda before she leaves.

Throughout her high school career, she has represented Buccaneer nation in volleyball, softball, weightlifting and track. She has built a reputation as a positive role model through her sports platform with an infectious smile. While a great athlete, she has proven to be a better teammate, fantastic friend, unblemished positive influence and an even greater person. Pitts does not, however, rest on her athletic accolades. She dominates in the classroom as well and will graduate with honors in May.



"Some people want it to happen; some wish it would happen; others make it happen."

— Michael Jordan

Pitts thrives on winning, but her definition is not what most measure as winning. To Pitts, winning means doing better today than she did the day before. Never resting on yesterday's accomplishments, she expects more out of herself the next day no matter what she has accomplished. Perhaps one day, she will take time to look back over her career and relish in all of her milestones, but for now, she is focused on capturing the moment at hand and never letting an opportunity pass her by.

During the summer months, when the football team is enjoying summer workouts, they often find Pitts in the gym long before they get there and long after they leave. Never wasting a day, she isn't a perfectionist

in the sense that she is consumed by perfection, but she is a perfectionist in the sense that she has routine and doesn't deviate from it. She has long gotten past proving people wrong, as she knows she can't control or dwell on what others may say. Early on, she enjoyed shocking herself when something even she thought was unattainable became another task she had conquered. Until now, it is a mindset with her; there is nothing she can't do if she puts her mind to it. She exercises her mind even more than her body; therefore, success has become a habit because it is the only way she thinks. If she wants it, then she goes out and makes it happen. While others may look at a goal and see obstacles, she sees opportunities to prove why she's deserving of it.



Evie Pitts shows off her 2022 State Championship trophies and medals.



Evie Pitts signs her letter of intent to play softball at Valdosta State University.

“There may be people who have more talent than you, but there’s no excuse for anyone to work harder than you.”

— Derek Jeter

For Pitts, her biggest fear is not being prepared. No matter if she walks to the plate in softball, walks onto a volleyball court, steps onto a platform, or gets into position on a track; whatever unfolds before her, she has prepared for that moment. She has hit 1,000 balls before that one; she has made that dig on the volleyball court hundreds of times; she has been behind before on the track and has to show why



Evie Pitts connects with the ball for the Lady Buccaneers.



Hannah Terry, Evie Pitts, Jesse Sikes and Haleigh Rae Harris take a picture for senior memories before they graduate Branford High School in 2022.

she is the two-time defending State Champion in weightlifting going into her final lift. No matter the circumstance, she has prepared for that moment. Therefore, Pitts expected it of herself when others are overcome with joy by that hit, lift, run or dig. The only way she loses is if she walks off the court, track, platform, or field questioning, "did I do enough?" Pitts refuses ever to let that become a question.

“Today, I will do what others won’t, so tomorrow I can accomplish what others can’t.”

— Jerry Rice

Pitts is the winningest Buccaneer in school history. She has played on the biggest stages, performed on the grandest of platforms and has done it all while remaining humble and hungry for more. Pitts has won six District Championships for Branford High School; she has won five Regional Championships along the way. Pitts has reached the pinnacle three times, as she is a three-time State Champion in weightlifting. She was a two-time State Champion in the Traditional event as a junior in 2020, and then defended her title as a senior in 2021, in the 139-pound weight class. Also, she won the 2021 State Championship in the snatch event as a senior.

Pitts was a member of the Buccaneers' first-ever Final Four team in volleyball as a sophomore. Although her team captured the crown of Regional Champions that year, it wasn't until her senior season that the Buccaneers captured their first District Championship. Pitts has been equally successful on the softball diamond as she was on the court. With one season to go, Pitts helped her team to capture both a District Title and Regional Championships on their way to the school's first-ever Final Four appearance in softball. On the weightlifting platform, Pitts is undoubtedly one of the Buccaneers' all-time greats in weightlifting, as she stands atop the podium forever as a four-time District Champion, three-time Regional Champion during her reign as a three-time State Champion in her junior and senior season in the Traditional event and in the Snatch event her senior season. The 2021 season was the inaugural season for the Snatch event, or who knows how many State Championships Pitts would claim. As if she hadn't accomplished enough as a Buccaneer, Pitts will go down in history as a member of the 4x100 meter team that holds the school record. She is currently in her final season of both track and softball, so while her accolades may continue to mount for her, she has already cemented herself as one of, if not the greatest Buccaneer of All-Time. ■



WATER MELON FESTIVAL

A Slice of the Good Life

Sponsored By

**JUNE
4**

Watermelon Queen Pageants | 10 am & 5 pm

**JUNE
10**

Kick-Off Dinner | 5 pm
Bed Race | 6:30 pm

**JUNE
11**

Pickle Ball Tournament | 11 am
Watermelon Crawl | 6 pm

**JUNE
16**

Women's Club Luncheon & Fashion Show | 12 pm

**JUNE
17**

Vendor Village | 4 - 9 pm
Family Entertainment | 6 pm
Kids Show | 7 pm

Street Dance | 7 - 9 pm
Beer Garden | 7 - 9 pm

**JUNE
18**

Kiwanis 5K Run & Walk | 8:15 am
Vendor Village | 9 am - 4 pm
Watermelon Parade | 10 am
Antique Car Show | 11 am
Platform Events | 11 am
Family Entertainment | 11:30 am

Kids Show | 11:30 am
Beer Garden | 12 - 4 pm
Watermelon Games | 1:30 pm
Family Entertainment | 2 pm
Kids Show | 2 pm

MONTICELLOWATERMELONFESTIVAL.COM



Live edge cypress furniture, including free-standing swings, porch swings, chairs, picnic tables, benches and more.



**Cypress grown,
sawn and
assembled in
Lafayette County,
Fla. at Central
Florida Lands and
Timber Nursery,
LLC by Marvin
Buchanan.**



**AUTHENTIC
CYPRESS
CREATIONS**

**3087 North CR 53
Mayo, Fla. 32066**

Phone: (386) 294-1211

Fax: (386) 294-3416

Email: cflat@windstream.net

In the business of cypress for six generations



Your Friends
for Life.



SOUTHERN FARM BUREAU
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Big Bend Farm Bureau

(386) 310-2121

Jefferson County

(850) 997-2213

Abby Godwin

Agent

Madison County

(850) 973-4071

Mike Williams

Agent

Jimmy King

Agent

Lafayette County

(386) 294-1399

Devin Hingson

Agent

Taylor County

(850) 584-2371

Ryan Perry

Agent

Lance Braswell

Agency Manager

**Helping you is
what we do best!**

**24/7 Claims Service
Call 1-866-275-7322**



Auto • Home • Life

*Florida Farm Bureau General Insurance Co.

*Florida Farm Bureau Casualty Insurance Co.

*Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Co., Jackson, MS

FLAUPR00111



The misunderstood LILLIAN EUGENIA SMITH

By Lee Trawick

Lillian Eugenia Smith was the daughter of Calvin Warren Smith and Anne Hester. Calvin was a successful businessman and civic leader and Anne was a descendant of wealthy rice planters. Lillian was the seventh of nine children. As a small child, she was exposed to views of white supremacy, but it would be years before she built up the courage, through her education and experiences, to rebel against those types of views. Rebuking those views encapsulates her life's work. She never wanted her work to be known or judged on social injustice, but rather as a humanitarian advocating for all equal rights. Not white over black or black over white, but simply a humanitarian for all.

Smith was born in the small rural town of Jasper, Fla., on December 12, 1897, although her family would not stay there. Her father saw an opportunity for greater success in Clayton, Ga., and it was there that Smith would find a

love for music and literature. She would go on to graduate from high school in 1915. After graduation, Smith spent several years running her father's hotel before joining the Student Nursing Corp and teaching at a rural high school in Georgia. In 1919, she began studying piano at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Md. Smith's biggest life-changing adventure started, however, in 1922, when she traveled to work as the music director of an American Methodist school for Chinese girls in Huchow, China. Smith spent three years as the music director, where she observed the Chinese philosophy and the impact of Western imperialism. There she drew parallels to the social relations in the South.

In 1925, Smith returned home to care for her ailing parents and help run the Lauren Falls Camp for girls in Clayton, Ga. The camp was initially purchased as a summer home in 1912; then, as her father's business failed in 1915, it became their permanent home. Smith ran the camp there until

1949, where it was nationally acclaimed for its creative educational approach.

When the camp wasn't in session, Smith would write several manuscripts about her family and life experiences in China. Those manuscripts were never published, but in 1935, Smith teamed up with her friend, Paula Snelling, and together they launched a magazine devoted to Southern politics and culture. This magazine first appeared in 1936 as *Pseudopedia* (later renamed *The North Georgia Review*, then *The South Today*). During its last running in 1945, the magazine reached a circulation of more than 10,000. The magazine spotlighted the views and work of African Americans and women. It was also a platform for Smith, who openly criticized racism. Later, in 1927-1928, Smith studied psychology at Columbia Teachers College. Her primary interest was the study of the psychological harm of segregation on whites.

It wasn't until her widely criticized, best-selling novel,

Strange Fruit, was published in 1944 that she reached national attention for her views against racism and the culture of the South. *Strange Fruit* was a story about an unwelcomed love affair between a white man of a well-respected family and an educated African American woman working as a maid. Ironically, the setting for this story was her native hometown, Jasper, Fla. The book was so controversial that it was banned in Boston and Detroit, for it was considered obscene. It also was banned from being mailed throughout the United States until President Franklin D. Roosevelt intervened at the request of his wife Eleanor.

In contrast, Billie Holiday tried to claim that Smith had named her book after her 1939 song "Strange Fruit," about lynching and racism against African Americans. Smith maintained the title of the book referred to the "damaged, twisted people (both black and white) who are products or results of our racist culture."

Despite all the controversy, her debut novel sold more than three million copies and was translated into 16 languages.

The money and recognition she received from her first novel gave her a platform to establish a reputation as a critic of segregation. From there, Smith became an opponent of segregation. She gave lectures and often wrote for national magazines such as *Life* and newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Atlanta Constitution*; she even contributed a column for the black newspaper, *The Defender*, in Chicago.

Then, in 1949, she published her second novel, *Killer of the Dream*. The book was nonfiction combined with autobiography and psychology to analyze her upbringing and the pathology of a Southern culture based on white supremacy and segregation. It discussed her views of the diseased Southern way of life that transcended race relations and symbolized the human experience.

In 1954, Smith published her third book, *The Journey*, after a brief bout with breast

cancer that she beat with treatment. The book was based on her life experiences and travels, mixed with interviews, as she toured the South and investigated the idea of human dignity. The book shed light on the pain and suffering of many people's lives in the South. She also discussed her discovery of the religious outlook of evangelical Christianity that she had once rejected in her youth.

After the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (which outlawed segregation in schools), Smith published her fourth book, *Now Is the Time*, in 1955, which implored the South to accept the decision.

She published two more books: *One Hour*, in 1959, a novel focused on the hysteria of the McCarthy era; her final work in 1964, *Our Faces, Our Words*, was a pictorial essay of civil rights efforts.

Throughout her life and career, Smith was one of the most outspoken white Southerners. Martin Luther King once said of her, "Smith is one of the most important and pivotal influences of our time for the civil rights



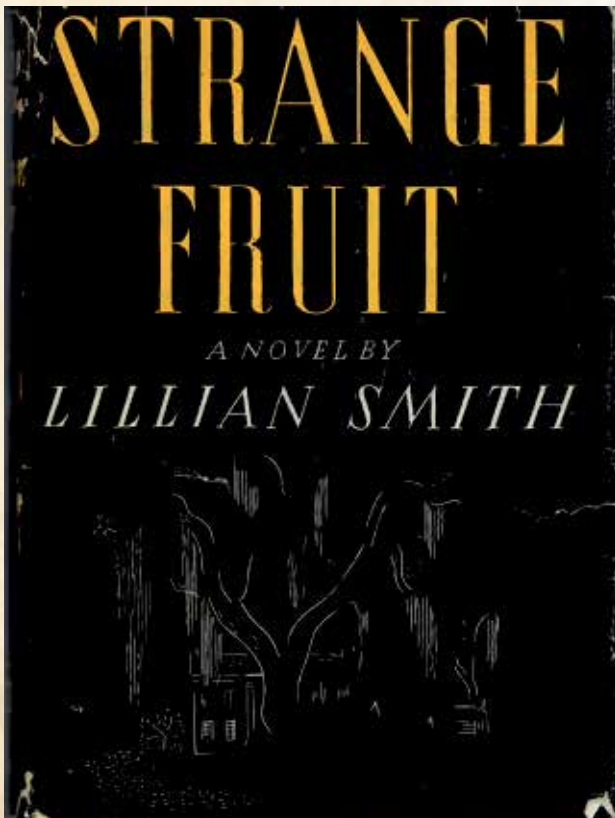
movement." Despite Smith always preferring to appeal to white self-interest groups and pushing for personal change, in the 1950's she became an early member of such African American organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). By the mid-1960s, however, she became critical of the increasingly militant tone of some African American groups.

While Smith never wavered in her beliefs, she was often misunderstood, and she became the subject of hate by segregationists. In 1955, segregationists burned down her home because of her views and destroyed her early manuscripts and correspondence. In a letter, she wrote to Dr. Martin Luther King, "It is hard to believe they did it because of race. But this lawlessness of the young is direct lawlessness of their elders, many of whom do not hesitate to say they will not obey the highest law of our land when that law does not suit them."

While Smith may have been interpreted as an advocate for African Americans, that was

not the case. Instead, Smith advocated for desegregation, equality for all and the effect of the injustice of racism for all humanity. The sickness of hatred and the brutal treatment of the human race thrived primarily in the South. The hatred only bred hatred; the disease of hate warps a mind in ways that affects generations that follow; therefore, human growth as a society would be stifled, at best. Smith advocated for equal education and opportunity for all, whites in poverty, the middle class and African Americans. Human growth only occurs when we as a human race can break the cycle of hate and judgment towards one another. Smith may have been misunderstood; however, today she could be seen not only as one of the most influential women during the civil rights movement, but as one of the most influential women of our time.

Smith lived her life as a well-respected, uncompromising and influential advocate of desegregation in the South until her death on September 28, 1966. She was 69 years old. ■



Live Oak



48 Exhilarating Seasons of Foxhunting

Story by Laura Young

The first rays of warming sun slant between the horse trailers that have pulled in around the home of Martin and Daphne Wood in northeast Jefferson County. A late February frost sparkles on the winter-paled grass. The horses stamp their hooves and swish their tails while riders in traditional fox hunting attire tighten the girths on their English saddles. Over at the kennel, the foxhounds sense an exciting morning ahead, yipping and crooning in anticipation of the hunt to come.

The riders mount up and gather with the disciplined pack between the kennels and the stables. At precisely 8 a.m., a high note floats from the hunting horn, and the foxhunt begins. Slowly, the members of the Wood's foxhunting club, known as the Live Oak Hounds, move out with practiced orchestration, down a lane between pastures and into a sun-bright field.

The riders in the lead, wearing navy frock coats with hunter-green collars, include Master of the Hunt Daphne Flowers Wood, co-founder of the pack, and Huntswoman Aleigh Taber, with 44

foxhounds flanked by three professional lady members of the hunt's staff. Next, come more Live Oak Hounds members, many in scarlet coats, including the Joint Masters of the Hunt, Mercer Fearington and John Reynolds. Seasoned riders stay toward the front, while newcomers follow along to learn. Members who are children, along with their parent or sponsor, bring up the rear, already becoming part of the next generation of foxhunting enthusiasts.

After, the 32 riders and the foxhound pack carefully cross the Boston-Monticello Highway, it's open country for the hunt. Senior Master of the Hunt C. Martin Wood founded Live Oak Hounds in 1974 and has been internationally recognized in the Huntsman's Room at the Museum of Hounds and Hunting for his exceptional ability to hunt his pack for 31 seasons. Since the establishment of the "Huntsman's Hall of Fame" 24 years ago, only 40 huntsmen have been inducted, the first being born in 1865! Now, Martin rides the "250 horses" of his Tahoe. From here, he operates command central during a hunt, using a radio and Garmin GPS monitors on the dash to track the

hounds, all of whom wear a GPS collar. Two employees of the Woods, likewise equipped, ensure hounds cross roads safely and stay on property where they have permission to hunt.

It's a stunning day for a trail ride under the bright blue sky, whether it keeps to a leisurely pace or turns exhilarating if the hounds flush a fox, coyote or feral pig. The three-hour ride will cover around 20 miles through towering pine timberland and gently sloping upland hammocks of hardwood trees, including hickories and the live oaks for which the group is named.

Afterwards, the Live Oak Hounds return to their founders' home to share a potluck meal at simple picnic tables. It's a diverse group of people from all walks of life, ranging in age from eight to 82 and brought together by the alluring dynamic of humans, hounds and horses in this unique team sport.

Live Oak Hounds hosts about 90 hunts from mid-August to mid-March, and August 2022 will mark the start of their 49th foxhunting season. Daphne recalls that she began riding horses when she

Hounds



A Live Oak Hounds hunt includes a diverse group of people from all walks of life, ranging in age from eight to 82 and brought together by the alluring dynamic of humans, hounds and horses in this unique team sport. Laura Young / ECB Publishing, Inc.

was four years old. She took an interest in the sport of foxhunting many years later, when she was married to Martin and he was stationed at Fort Lewis, near Tacoma, Wash. The father of one of her friends there was the Master of the local hunt, and she bought an inexpensive horse and joined in. After that, when Martin was studying business at the University of Virginia, she participated in foxhunting there three times a week. This put Martin and Daphne in the seat of foxhunting in America, which dates back to when George Washington had a pack of foxhounds in Virginia.

They moved to the South Georgia/North Florida area when Martin went to work for Flowers Baking Co. in Thomasville, Georgia, which was founded by Daphne's family. Martin served as the company's chief financial officer for 30 years and is still on their board of directors. He grew up riding both English and Western style, and both he and Daphne became active with a foxhunt group in Columbus, Ga. In 1974, however, they decided to establish their own pack of hounds, thinking it would save them a lot

of driving time. Of course, laughs Daphne, the joke was on them, because running your own kennel and stable is much more time consuming! They started out with hounds that friends gave them, and in the late 70s moved their operation to its present location on land that straddles the Florida-Georgia line, with acreage owned by the Woods and the Flowers family in northeast Jefferson County, Fla., and Thomas County, Ga. In time, they developed the pack with foxhounds imported from England, whose natural instincts are especially suited to the sport.

They enter the prestigious Virginia Foxhound Show annually and have won the Grand Champion Best in Show prize six times, competing against 500 to 600 hounds from the United States and Canada in each show! It's their hunting ability, however, that shows the mesmerizing talent of the entire Live Oak Hounds pack.

Martin has made the breeding decisions over 15 generations of Live Oak Hounds that have made the pack what it is today. The pedigree of one of the pack's sires goes back to a 1745 English hound, and the female lineage goes back to 1786.

"By mixing and matching judiciously, I've been able to produce a kind of hound that suits our quarry, the country that we have to run in and the personality of the huntsman," says Martin, who pays close attention to each hound's ability to find and follow a scent as well as to "give tongue," or cry.

"A hound giving tongue draws the other hounds to him. Then they all cry, and that's how you follow the pack," he explains. "It's the cry of the hounds that draws people to the sport. People are members here because of the hounds. They love the hounds."

"What's fabulous about foxhunting," says Daphne, "is that one of our joint masters is 82 years old, and we have a child who goes out with us on a lead line. The whole family can participate. You can do it when you are very young and also older."

Live Oak Hounds is a private pack financed by Martin and Daphne Wood, with support from subscribers who are members of the hunt. Subscribers have voiced appreciation that Martin and Daphne have developed a group that is

Daphne Wood / Courtesy



Martin and Daphne Wood founded Live Oak Hounds in 1974. The hounds are kenneled in Jefferson County.

not elitist, has reasonable subscription fees and is open to any nice person who can ride and follow the rules of the sport.

The humans, horses and hounds involved in foxhunting all bring their own kind of impressive intelligence, athleticism, instincts and training to the sport. As one might imagine, it takes many specialized individuals to manage the complexities of a foxhunt. Martin and Daphne Wood, as Senior Masters of the Hunt, coordinate

with their greatly appreciated neighboring landowners, their Huntswoman, Aleigh Taber, Farm Manager and First Whipper-in Piper Parrish, Joint Master Mercer Fearington and Joint Master John Reynolds. Four of their five Field Masters – Katie Fearington, Ken Haddad, Dr. Larry Pijut and Cathy Taber – all live in Jefferson County. Ken Haddad is past executive director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The fifth Field Master, Mike Ledyard, lives in Thomas

County. The Woods also rely on several skilled employees who care for their kennel of 125 foxhounds and stable of 28 horses.

Joint Master Mercer Fearington was introduced to foxhunting by a friend at the age of 50. He liked his first experience so much that he went on the next 40 hunts that season. Before long, he had earned a role as a Field Master, and for the past 12 years has been a Joint Master. At 82 years old now, he still goes out on every ride, always on his amazing horse, Joey. What has had him hooked all this time?

"It's watching those magnificent hounds work," he says. "It's the beautiful country we ride over. It's the camaraderie." As Joint Master, he assists the Masters of the Hunt as needed. At Live Oak Hounds, he says he has enjoyed maintaining goodwill among the members, with the public and with the landowners.

Mercer's wife, Katie Fearington, is a Field Master and also Secretary of the Hunt. She started foxhunting in 1988 and joined the Live Oak Hounds in 1991. "Foxhunting is about being on the back of the horse in the woods with the hounds at full cry," she says passionately. "There's nothing like it!"

Huntswoman Taber grew up splitting her time between Monticello and Ohio, but now she lives on the Wood property and is hunting the hounds.

"I'm like a quarterback, and the Masters are like the head coaches," says Taber. "My role is to lead the hounds into a certain area. Then they will "draw," or space out,

Ken Haddad / Courtesy of Aleigh Taber



Huntswoman Aleigh Taber uses her voice and blows the hunting horn to control the hounds.

and use their noses. Sometimes we will go into an area where a farmer has told us he is having a problem, such as with feral pigs. The hounds are looking to find the scent trail. We give every opportunity for the game to escape and, except for pigs, it usually does. We are more excited by the thrill of working the hounds and being in nature.”

Taber uses her voice and the hunting horn to interact with the hounds. Different tones and length of blowing time communicate different messages. Longer notes, for example, mean to “keep going.” Even longer notes mean “come to me.” Short staccato notes communicate encouragement. Her voice also becomes a beacon in the woods for keeping the group together.

“I really love it that foxhunting gives people a chance to unplug,” says Taber. “I also love it that there's a bond between humans, horses and hounds. No one sees the horses as tools. They are teammates. Some of them could do the job without me!” Taber enjoys having an outdoor job and says it gets more exciting the longer she does it, which is 23 years and counting!

“You get to see the hounds mature from puppies and even get to see their children and grandchildren. We are very fortunate that we have so much beautiful land – quail hunting lands – whose landowners allow us to ride across and help keep the pest population down in these areas.”

Longtime Lloyd resident, Gage Ogden, has been a member of Live Oak Hounds for 40 years. She has always been interested in horses and for many years participated in equestrian shows before gravitating toward foxhunting.

“Foxhunting is not so much a competition as you have in horse shows,” reflects Ogden. “We're out there to see the hounds work, not to kill anything. For your subscription, you can do a whole lot of



Laura Young / ECB Publishing, Inc.

Riders who are children, along with Erin O'Dwyer (left) and Field Master Katie Fearington (right), bring up the rear, already part of the next generation of foxhunting enthusiasts.

riding and have a large group of friends of all ages and professions. You don't need a fancy horse, just a knowledge of the etiquette for keeping safe. It's truly a family experience, a wholesome, fantastic sport.”

There can be a competitive element, however, for those who want it. Aleigh Taber's step-mom, Cathy Taber, is a Field Master of the Live Oak Hounds and a trainer for some of the junior riders, who not only participate in foxhunting events but also compete annually in the Junior North American Field Hunter Championship. In 2021, Live Oak Hounds had three youth from Monticello place in the top ten nationally: Emma Pretti as Grand Champion, Gavin Sacco in Fourth Place and Maddie

Pretti in Seventh Place.

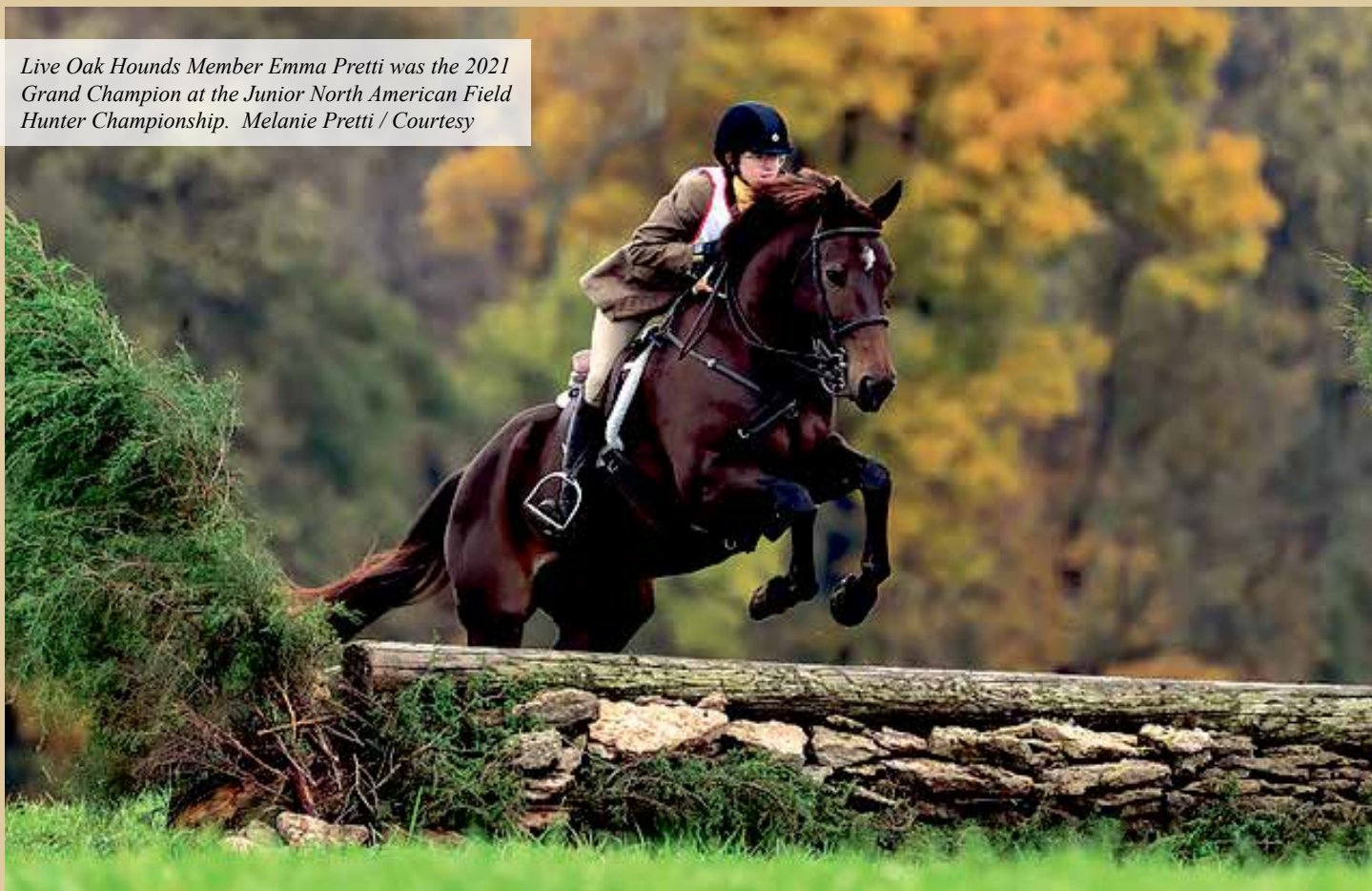
“Amazingly, this was the third time that one of our Live Oak Hounds juniors won the Grand Championship,” says Daphne. “We are just so proud of the children. They have ridden with us a lot and have truly earned this honor the right way.”

Emma and Maddie Pretti are the 17-year-old twin daughters of John and Melanie Pretti. They started riding horses around age 10 and became involved in foxhunting about five years ago. The equestrian industry is part of their homeschool curriculum, which allows them to dive deeply into learning about horse breeding, barn management and large animal care, while also completing other



Grand Champion Foxhounds Live Oak Farrier and Live Oak Maximus (black) each beat more than five hundred foxhounds from all over North America to be Best In Show at the prestigious Virginia Foxhound Show. Live Oak has won this trophy six times: four times with English Foxhounds and twice with Crossbred English and American Foxhounds. Daphne Wood / Courtesy

Live Oak Hounds Member Emma Pretti was the 2021 Grand Champion at the Junior North American Field Hunter Championship. Melanie Pretti / Courtesy



courses of study online. It also allows them to participate in Live Oak Hounds fox hunts three to four times a week. They say they were hooked on the sport from the start, and both Emma and Maddie have been awarded Live Oak Hounds signature LOH logo buttons and hunter-green collars for their hunting attire. In foxhunting, the privilege of wearing the colors and buttons of the hunt is awarded at the discretion of the Masters. Those awarded colors exhibit knowledge of the sport, its protocol and hunt territory. Members with colors have the privilege of riding in the front part of the field.

Emma says she got hooked on foxhunting because of the thrill of riding outside of the ring in a natural setting.

“Going that fast on a horse is an adrenaline rush,” she says. “I feel that every hunt we go to is worth it, no matter how the day goes.”

Maddie enjoys seeing her horse, Classic Marq, show her intelligence during a hunt.

“She knows the different sounds of the horn. When they do the call for 'gone away' or the long blow for 'going home,' the horse knows what is about to happen,” says Maddie. “When you're foxhunting, you experience the horsemanship being put into it and the sportsmanship. Your horse has to trust you, and you have to trust your horse.”

For both Maddie and Emma, it's not

just the fun. They enjoy the etiquette and traditions of the sport. Proper turnout for a fox hunt, they explain, includes having a clean horse, with polished hooves and a brushed tail. Their riding gear and tack must be well maintained, and they themselves must be well groomed. Their mom appreciates what a wholesome and healthy activity this is for her girls.

Like other forms of hunting and nearly every sport, foxhunting inspires admiration for the physical and mental skills of the team members, but it can also have inherent risks or elements of controversy that need oversight and regulation. For foxhunting, the Masters of Foxhound Association (MFHA) ensures that clubs follow the rules that keep the sport safe and maintain ethical fair chase. Their mission emphasizes “animal health and habitat conservation for the betterment of the sport. The MFHA promotes, preserves, and protects the sport of mounted hunting through a tradition of high standards and education to empower its members.”

When the Live Oak Hounds head out on a hunt or exercise ride, they are able to access the network of lands known as the Red Hills. Daphne and Martin Wood have been instrumental in the establishment of conservation easements in this area, which will preserve these lands from future development.

“First and foremost, I am a hunter and a conservationist,” says Martin. “I am a modern man who believes in tradition. In our opinion, conservation easements to protect the land are vital to the preservation of wild space locally. God isn't producing any more land, but He is producing more people.”

Kevin McGorty, Director of the Tall Timbers Land Conservancy, says that 100 families in the area have put 156,000 acres of land in trust. He notes that Daphne has served on the Tall Timbers Board of Trustees since 1992 and the Tall Timbers Easement Review Committee since 2004. Martin is chair of the Tall Timbers Foundation. McGorty credits their leadership with the incredible success of the easement effort. For their dedicated service, they will be recognized in April at the grand reopening of Livingston Place, formerly Dixie Plantation, now entrusted to Tall Timbers. Their efforts will ensure the protection of critical habitat, keep water clean, provide scenic beauty – and provide land for foxhunting – for generations to come. It's impossible to separate foxhunting from the timber, farming and quail hunting enterprises in the Red Hills, and the practical, social, business and sport aspects of Live Oak Hounds integrates with them naturally, meaningfully and beautifully. ■



**NORTH FLORIDA
COLLEGE**

www.nfc.edu

Sentinels stand together.



**First Annual
Spring Festival**

**April 30, 2022
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

*Vendors welcome
please contact the office*

Allison Acres is your local USDA Certified Organic farm with a total of 219 acres.

- 51 acres of blueberries for commercial and local community markets
- 37 acres dedicated to raising the best goats on our Happy Goat Farm for meat, brush clearing, or family pets
 - U-Pick blackberries and strawberries coming soon (U-Pick blueberries will be May-June, check facebook for times open and pricing)
 - 3 acres of Christmas trees for your family outing to start a family tradition.

Follow us on Facebook for updates on your locally grown organic farm products for sale.

4076 NE Hwy 150
Pinetta, Fla. 32350
(850) 929-2045 - Office



@AllisonAcresBBFarm



**We Do It All For You:
Blinds • Shades • Shutters
Drapes • Home Automation**

Request Your FREE
In-Home Consultation:

(850) 668-4835

BudgetBlinds.com/Tallahassee

Budget Blinds of Tallahassee
2533 Greer Road,
Tallahassee, Fla. 32308

Locally Owned and Operated



Style and service for every budget.™

©2021 Budget Blinds, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Budget Blinds is a trademark of Budget Blinds, LLC and a Home Franchise Concepts Brand. Each franchise independently owned and operated.

KITCH-ENCOUNTERS

Kitchen & Bath Remodeling



Over 25 years of experience
Kitchen and bath remodeling has never been easier
Top quality cabinets in traditional and contemporary styles

Kitchen Design and Remodeling
Bathroom Design and Remodeling
Walk-in Closets & More!

(850) 386-6555

2740 Capital Circle NE • Tallahassee, Fla.



TD-00002431 www.Kitch-Encounters.com



Worship – Grow – Serve – Share

Sunday Worship 10:45am

325 W. Washington St. (850) 997-2349
Pastor Sean Vickers www.fbcmonticello.org

FL-GA INSPECTION AND IMPROVEMENT

Prepurchase 4Point Wind Mit Roof

Hurricane Clip Installation

JIM ADAMS

(850) 869-9099

Madison

(229) 548-6949

Valdosta



Loan officers available until 8 p.m.
~ APPLY ONLINE ~

"Community Minded, Just Like You"

424 W. Base St. • Madison, Fla. 32340
(850) 973-2600
www.bcfcu.coop



Bradley Cooley, Jr. stands by a life-sized sculpture of Gene Sarazen, professional golf's first Grand Slam winner. Cooley and his father have created numerous statues for professional golf legends, including Sam Snead, Robert T. Jones and Kathy Whitworth.

Bradley Cooley:

THE MAN BEHIND THE METAL

Story and photos by Heather Ainsley

Nestled at the end of a narrow, winding dirt road, in the quiet community of Lamont, is the studio of a man whose intricate skill and steady hand are responsible for incredible works of art that you might unknowingly be familiar with already. Bradley Cooley, age 51, is a self-taught bronze sculptor who has spent the last 36 years bringing the forms of people and animals alike to life in metal. His body of work is as extensive as it is impressive and includes an eight-foot-tall coiled rattlesnake sculpture that rests at the foot of the Center for Access and Student Success at Florida A&M University (FAMU), located in Tallahassee. The Rattler was unveiled in January of 2021 and weighs an estimated 1,800 pounds. If it was uncoiled, the snake would be 42 feet long, seven times the size of the real snake Cooley used as a reference.

His journey in bronze sculpting began with influence from his father, also named Bradley Cooley, who passed away in 2017. It was a significant goal of the father-son duo that their work showcase and immortalize Native American people with historical and cultural accuracy, and to date, the pair have created over 40 life-sized bronze sculptures depicting America's First People, most of which are currently on Seminole reservations. Several of their pieces, however, can be appreciated publicly. One, called "Seminole Family," is located on campus at Florida State University and features a native family of 1830. Another, called "A Walk Through Time," is located at the Museum of Florida History at the R.A. Gray Building. Bradley Cooley, Sr. first began his sculpting for personal use, creating detailed Native American mannequins for artifacts that he discovered. Over the years, people kept buying these figures, and after some consideration, Cooley Sr. decided to make a business of it, casting the final sculptures in bronze to ensure their survival over long periods of time. His son began helping out, and together the two of them created a vast body of work, which Bradley Cooley Jr. continues to build upon.

"I created my first bronze when I was 15 years old. It was of a Native American

fisherman gutting a gar," says Cooley. "Bobby Floyd owns it." As he flipped through a large binder full of photos of his past work, Cooley continued, revealing that the process of creating bronze sculptures requires skill in various mediums, including clay sculpting and sketching. "In the beginning, I did create kiln pieces, where I would sculpt in clay and have it fired in a kiln, but I moved on to casting in bronze as I got further along in technique."

The process for creating a bronze sculpture is complex and has multiple stages. The first stage is the conception of the project, where Cooley spends long hours sketching and rendering an idea or concept on paper. He uses photographs and sketches



Bradley Cooley, Sr. first began creating sculptures as mannequins to hold Native American artifacts that he had found on his property. People kept buying the figures from him, and a business was born. Cooley ventured into bronze casting so that his sculptures would last longer.

to create a form that he will eventually turn into a three-dimensional piece. Once he is satisfied with an idea, he begins the next step of creating a metal skeleton. The skeleton serves as the structure for the piece, and is wrapped with a wire mesh that gives the sculpture form. Clay is soon added to the wire, roughly at first to build dimension, and then carefully, to refine the shape and create details.

"The first month or so is my favorite part of a sculpture," says Cooley, "In that first month, you're doing a lot of clay work. You add a lot of clay and there [are] a lot of big changes happening. Toward the end, there is less of the clay work and more detail work, and that can become pretty tedious." The clay he uses is Roma Plastilina, an extremely pliable modeling clay that is oil-based and non-hardening. When a project has reached completion, and the sculpture has been molded, the clay is then removed from the metal skeleton and reused for future projects.

A finished bronze sculpture can take anywhere from six to 12 months to complete, depending on its size. A full-sized figure takes around nine months to a year to create, while tabletop pieces take around six to eight months. For some pieces, sheer size lengthens the time frame; in 2005, Cooley and his father took on an endeavor that would take a year and a half to reach completion, in the form of a pair of white-tailed deer that stood over 20 feet tall, each with antlers spanning over six feet wide. The final sculpture, measuring in at 20 feet tall, 10 feet wide and 28 feet long was brought to Farmington, Pa., where it was installed at Woodlands Outdoor World for all to see.

Once a sculpture is fully formed in clay, it must then undergo a series of molding steps before it can be cast in bronze, a process that takes an additional four months to complete.

"When I finally do finish a piece, there's a certain level of satisfaction," says Cooley, although admittedly that satisfaction is relatively short lived for the eager artist. Once one project is complete, he often quickly begins work on the next one. "You get one done, and add it to the list. Then you get started on the



Bradley Cooley, Jr. and his father, Bradley Cooley, Sr., work on the life-size memorial sculpture of famous musician Ray Charles, which will rest in Greenville, his hometown. Photo Courtesy of Tallahassee.com

next one." It is this steady work flow that has enabled Cooley to create such an impressive body of work. With well over 40 life-size and larger-than-life-size sculptures, and an additional 60 tabletop pieces, Cooley has a lot to show for his hard work and dedication to his craft. His sculptures are featured in over 15 different museums and galleries, have won him numerous awards and recognition over the years and are on display both domestically and internationally.

Through his 36 years of sculpting, Cooley has sought to share his knowledge and experience with other aspiring artists, even teaching 3D Art and conducting studio seminars for art students attending North Florida College and other surrounding schools. His advice for artists is to practice both dedication and determination. "Art is not the easiest to get into," says Cooley, "For example, not everyone needs a bronze statue, you know? As an artist, you need to be persistent; it will help you be accepted. Find your audience, and don't give up. You have to keep that determination going."

Bradley and his wife, Jenny, have been married for 24 years, and together have two children, Holden (age 18) and Marissa (age 20). While he does not pressure his children to follow in his artistic footsteps, Cooley welcomes and encourages their participation. Holden helps out with various projects in his spare time, including doing

a lot of the detail work. "Holden helped with the rattlesnake piece for FAMU," said



This sculpture is based on Bradley Cooper, Jr.'s daughter, Marissa, when she was six-years-old. The sculpture serves as a whimsical fountain in Cooper's studio.

Cooley, "He did a lot of work on the scales. I'm not sure if he has his heart set on it, but he does help me out quite a bit."

Although his level of skill and talent is boldly apparent in his work, Cooley is remarkably humble about his artistic abilities. When asked how long it took him to get so proficient at his craft, he shook his head good-naturedly. "I think an artist is always growing," he said thoughtfully, "You get faster over time, and you get to know anatomy better, but I don't think that you are ever 'done'. You are constantly learning. Back in the 90s, a life-sized piece might take me six months or longer to create, and now, a piece in the same range might take me four months."

While he steadily builds his art prowess, Cooley stays busy with his job as Project Manager for Alert Construction, and also hosts air boat tours with 5 Rivers Adventures.

Cooley says that the airboat tours began much as his father's journey into statue creating began, with demand. "I used to go riding along the Wacissa River," Cooley remembered, "Soon, every time I would try to go on a trip, people would want to come along, and soon I was giving regular tours!" With regular tours along the river, Cooley came up with an idea to charge a small fee that could go towards repairs and upgrades to the boat to enable him to continue to give

rides to people.

These days, Cooley likes to focus on educational trips, tours that provide passengers with not just an exciting boat ride, but also information, teaching them about the ecosystem, wildlife and Native American history that is so prevalent along Florida's riverways. For more information about airboat tours, you can call (850) 544-2797 or email 5riversfl@gmail.com.

Some of Cooley's other well-known pieces of bronze work are:

The Ray Charles memorial, unveiled in 2006 and consisting of a dedication plaque and bronze statue in a small plaza, sits alongside a pond in Haffye Hays Park, in the center of Greenville, Fla.

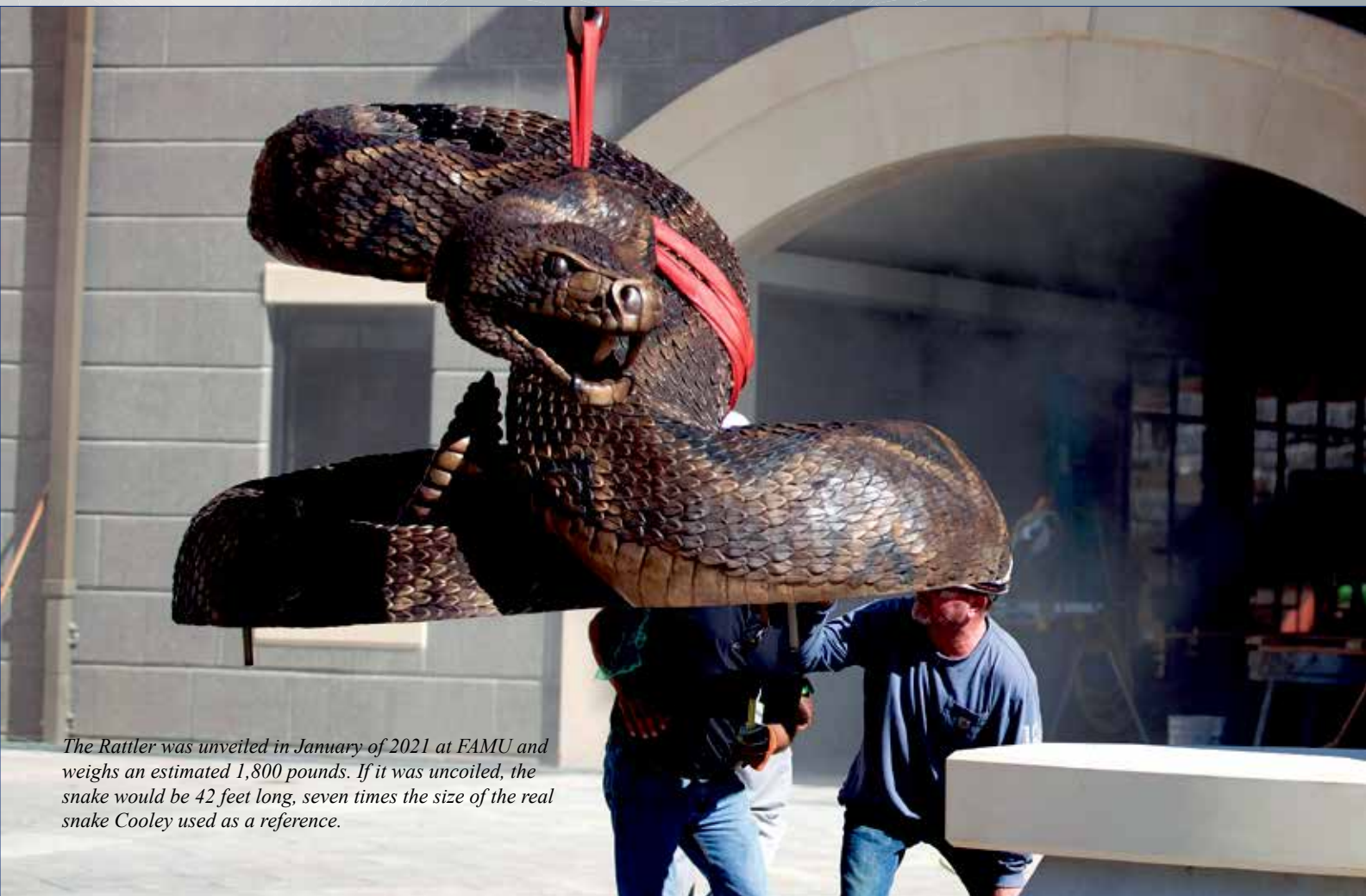
Otis Redding "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay," presented in 2003, was featured on the NBC Today Show as well as Southern Living magazine, and depicts American soul singer/songwriter Otis Redding playing guitar.

Bobby Bowden, unveiled in 2013 outside the football stadium at Samford University, in Birmingham, Ala., where Bowden played and coached football.

Currently, Cooley has several projects in the works, including a bust of a man that he is completing as a commissioned piece, called "The Mungen Bust", and a Native American statue. While the next few months will be full of intricate detail and long hours of facial feature studies, the world eagerly awaits future projects destined to come out of the incredible studio of Bradley Cooley, where all the magic happens. ■



One of his current works in progress, "The Mungen Bust" has undergone several steps in the sculpting process. Once he puts the finishing touches on it, the clay sculpture will be cast and will start the four-month process of becoming a bronze sculpture.



The Rattler was unveiled in January of 2021 at FAMU and weighs an estimated 1,800 pounds. If it was uncoiled, the snake would be 42 feet long, seven times the size of the real snake Cooley used as a reference.

Carl Joseph

STILL AN INSPIRATION



Story by Rick Patrick

Anyone from around Madison probably knows the story of Carl Joseph. Born in 1961, one of 10 children, to a single mom who worked in the tobacco fields, earning just \$2.50 per day. Life in those circumstances may have been difficult for anyone. Add to that fact, Joseph had only one leg, one would think prospects for young Joseph would be very limited. One would be very wrong.

Joseph's mother never allowed young Joseph to think that just because he had only one leg that he was limited in any way. "Just because you got only one leg doesn't mean you can't stand on your own two feet," Joseph recalls his mother telling him. "I never even heard the word 'disabled' until I got to public school," said Joseph.

This attitude followed Joseph into high school, where he continued to play both football and basketball. He not only played, he excelled. In his best football game at Madison High School, he had eight solo tackles, six assists, two pass break-ups, and a key fumble recovery during a shut-out victory over rival Taylor County during his senior year. Over the years when Joseph was at Madison High School, he caught the attention of the rest of the nation. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* gave Joseph their "Most Courageous Athlete Award." He was even

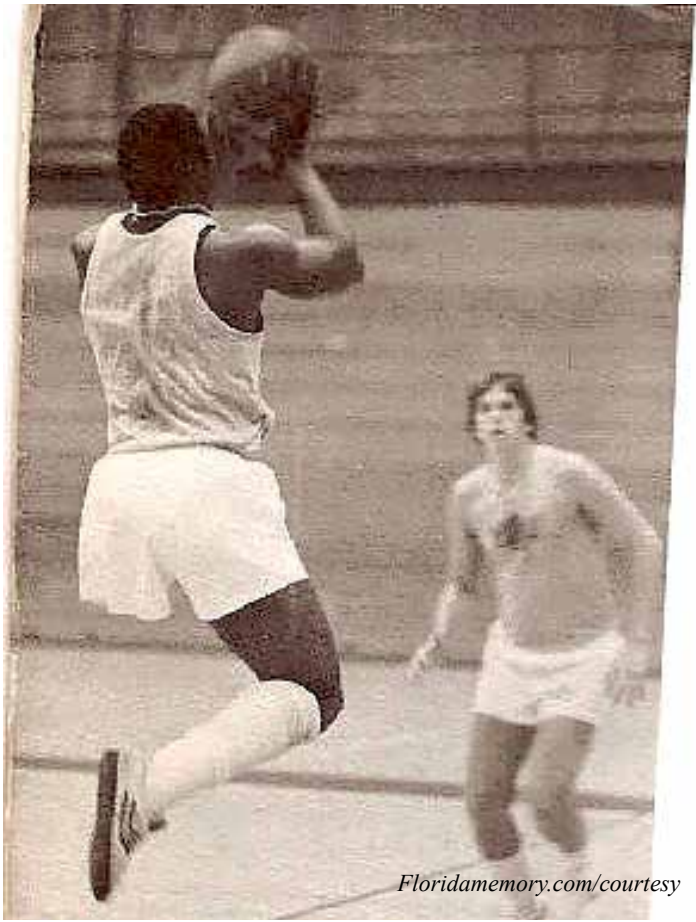


Currently, Carl Joseph (back row, far left) serves as the Athletic Director and a physical education teacher at Madison County Central Schol. He also served as an assistant coach for the basketball team this past season. [Photo by Rick Patrick/Greene Publishing, Inc.]

featured on television shows such as *That's Incredible*.

Playing sports with only one leg has actually spawned some humorous events. Once while playing basketball, the referee called him for "traveling." In basketball, if the player with the ball is stationary, he can only move one foot without dribbling the ball. He can pivot on his other foot, but it must remain stationary. If he moves that "pivot" foot without dribbling the ball, it is called "traveling" and results in a turnover. When he was called for "traveling," everyone in the stands burst out in laughter. Joseph questioned how can he be called for traveling with only one leg? The referee later admitted, "You were so hot tonight in the game, I had to call something. I had to give the other team a chance." After all these years, Joseph still laughs when telling that story.

After high school, Joseph went on to play football in college. The famed collegiate football coach, Jackie Sherrill, at the University of Pittsburgh, convinced Joseph to come to Pitt, but after one semester, Joseph came back closer to home to play at Bethune-Cookman College, in Daytona Beach, Fla. After playing at Bethune-Cookman, Joseph attended camps for professional football teams but "those guys were so much bigger and faster than I was.



I think I was there mainly for 'inspiration'," said Joseph. Over the years, Joseph developed a close friendship with Sherrill that continues to this day.

Inspirational is an easy way to describe Joseph. He continues to inspire others with his incredible life story. He was inducted into the Florida High School Athletic Hall of Fame in 2009. He has had two books published telling his story; the latest, a book targeted toward middle school children, *Some Called me "Superstar,"* was published by Red Onion Press. Joseph has also served as a minister and as a musician with a gospel group, "Elder Carl Joseph and the Spiritual Gospel Tru-Tones." Joseph has been in contact with a number of writers and producers interested in making his life story into a movie. When speaking of the possibilities, Joseph says, with his trademark wide smile, "I still believe."

He still sees his life in terms of providing an inspiration to others, especially his students. "There's a reason for everything

in life. If the Lord can use my story to inspire others, then I'm happy with that," said Joseph.

Today, Joseph teaches physical education and is the athletic director for Madison County Central School (MCCS). When given the opportunity to coach the football team at MCCS; Joseph declined, stating that he was in favor of a younger coach. Although you may not see him on the sidelines, in the hallways Joseph is always ready to give a word of support and encouragement to any student he may encounter during the day.

Joseph's message continues to strike home with the youngsters with whom Joseph interacts. "He's the best coach I've ever had," said former student Tashawn Redding.

Joseph's latest book ends with a message anyone can take to heart. "I'm hoping that my story will inspire you to do as well as you can in everything: school, religion, [or] sports. Dreams are possible. They do come true. Just be sure to carry a towel to wipe the sweat." ■

DEAL'S *Famous*

OYSTER HOUSE

"The finest people in the world walk through our doors"

2571 West U.S. 98 • Perry, Fla.
(850) 838-DEAL (3325)

Join us for Lunch or Dinner
Dine-In or Take-Out

Hours of Operation
Tuesday - Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. • Closed every Sunday and Monday

Oysters
call to reserve pints or bushels

Girls Gone Kayaking

Story and photos
by Dawn Perez



Whenever people ask about favorite things to do on the Gulf of Mexico, a common answer is fishing. But have you ever tried fishing by kayak? Kayak fishing on the Gulf is an experience unlike any other. Along the shores of Taylor County in Florida, you will have the opportunity for an adventure not found in many other places. Kayaking allows you to be in full control and go where you wish with little effort. The Big Bend and Taylor County offer countless creeks along the longest, most pristine, undeveloped coastline in the entire state and is home to the Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail. Beautiful scenic trails, abundant wildlife and the largest collection of rare species of birds are found here. The grass flats offer a plethora of Specked Trout, Red Fish, Flounder and Black Bass. Because of the shallow grassy waters, it's a perfect breeding ground for all these species.

Kayaks can travel through shallow and narrow waterways, providing access to more remote sweet spots for fishing. When you fish by kayak, you are your own captain, need very few supplies, and if you catch and release, you don't need a cooler, except a small one for drinks. Along the Taylor County coastline, there are several outfitters located in Steinhatchee for those who don't own their own kayak. Some of the best places to launch are Dallus Creek, Steinhatchee, Hagans Cove and Keaton Beach, Hickory Mound, as well as Yates and Spring Creek. The scene around you will be exhilarating, where the only sounds you'll hear are the breeze, the water lapping against your yak and an occasional seagull.

When choosing a kayak, consider how sturdy it is, test its maneuverability and make sure it's light enough for you to carry. It's best to have a yak that's at least 12 feet long when kayaking on the Gulf. For safety, you must take a personal floatation device and carry a whistle. If you attach it to your life jacket, it's easy to find when needed. If you're looking for a teacher to increase your success as an angler, consider Pat McGriff, with One More Cast Guide Service, who runs his Charter business out of Keaton Beach. In these types of shallow waters, you'll probably be most successful with live bait such as shrimp or pin fish with a Cajun Thunder float, but an artificial lure like a Bass Assassin Sea Shad Electric Chicken Soft Bait might also bring a catch.

For more information about kayak fishing in Taylor County, Florida, outfitters available, lodging or kayak charters, go to www.TaylorFlorida.com or to learn more about the Big Bend Saltwater Trail go to www.myfwc.com. ■



Botino's life is a cautionary tale against communism

Story by Mickey Starling

Photography courtesy of Juan Botino

Nothing about Madison resident Juan Botino's life started out easy. Born prematurely on November 21, 1953, in Versalles, Matanza, Cuba, he entered life struggling to breathe. His bluish tint had doctors sending him home to die. Botino's innovative grandfather had other ideas and quickly built an incubator, complete with a 40-watt light bulb, to provide warmth for baby Juan. His quick thinking probably saved Botino's life, who did quite well as a result of the incubator's assistance.

This wouldn't be the last time that Botino's grandfather, Juan Clemente Abascal, would need to think quickly. Cuba was in the midst of turbulent times, as Fidel Castro was in the process of overthrowing the dictatorship of President Fulgencio Batista. Castro succeeded in 1959, after a successful military coup. Part of the popular support for Castro was his repeated promise of restoring Cuba's constitution and free elections. He also promised equality for Cuba's citizens. Amidst all this flowery rhetoric, a different reality was unfolding right before the eyes of Botino and his family.

Botino remembers an afternoon visit to his grandfather's farm house, when soldiers on horseback approached and locked the gated entrance to the property.

"This belongs to the government now," the soldiers declared. "You don't live here anymore."

Though Juan was too young to lose property at the time, he did feel the sting of losing the horse his grandfather had given him. Juan was only able to enjoy one ride before the horse became the property of the new regime. Fortunately, Abascal was a skilled engineer, who secretly built a boat and soon escaped Cuba with a few friends, promising he would send for the rest of the family soon.

Similar devastation awaited Botino's father, Juan Valentin Botino, who soon lost his job at a printing company, as the communist government continued to take over private industry. As a Batista supporter, Juan's father was a marked man, with even his brothers and sisters turning against him. The Cuban culture was rapidly being transformed into the likings of a military state. Crucifixes were removed from walls, replaced with photos of Castro and Russian President Joseph

Stalin. Religion was officially banned and children soon were asked to begin spying on their families. Because much of Botino's family opposed Castro's regime, they were labeled "worms." This title was far more than a simple insult. It identified families who were given 6 p.m. curfews and whose every move and communication were closely monitored. The Botinos and others

us, and I'm going to take some of them with us."

God obviously had other plans because, as the prayers continued, the knocking ceased, and the soldiers just went away.

Botino still vividly recalls his childhood, watching anxiously as low-flying planes, piloted by Cuban exiles, flew over



devised code words so that they could speak more freely without detection. While the family struggled under the new reality of being dependent upon food rations from the government, they did receive news that Botino's grandfather had safely reached Marathon, Fla.

Harassment from soldiers was a common fact of life in the new Cuba, but on one occasion, that harassment turned into a deadly threat for the Botino family. Late one evening, soldiers approached their door, pounding repeatedly and promising to escort the family to a firing squad. Castro made sure the citizens were well acquainted with firing squads, since one of the two television channels they were provided broadcast live firing squad massacres throughout the day. As the soldiers continued their beating on the door, Botino and his family prayed.

His father took a position behind the door, saying, "If they get in, they will kill

the streets and dropped pamphlets that encouraged the people to resist Castro's revolution. Russian anti-aircraft artillery was positioned at the end of Botino's block, attempting to down the planes.

"As history repeats itself today, I pray for the innocent children who will face misery, hopelessness and loss of freedom," said Botino. "Once communists take power, they will do whatever it takes to hold on to it, and the world watches."

As time went on, Botino's grandfather continued to work to have his family reunited. Eventually, Juan and his grandmother were allowed to board a plane headed for Miami. The pair was met with jeers and insults from loyal communists who lined the approach to the plane. A year later, Juan's father was forced to leave without his wife and daughter. A few months later, they were allowed to leave.

All three were flown to Chicago, Ill., since the United States government did not

want all of the Cuban immigrants sent to Miami. It would be two years before the family was reunited in Miami.

Miracles continued to take place in Juan's life. After hearing that his father had arrived in Miami, the difficult task of locating him began. Amazingly, Juan and his grandfather happened upon him while walking down a street one night.

"He had no idea where to go or where we were," said Botino.

Early in his new adventure in America, Botino remembers receiving good advice from his grandfather.

"This is the greatest country in the world. Make sure you give something back," he said.

Juan certainly agreed with his grandfather, and he purposed to make a difference for others with his life. In the middle of all of the upheaval and changes, Juan's beloved grandfather sought to restore happier memories for the young man. Fishing trips were a favorite method for the two to share time together. On one blustery afternoon, Juan remembers the pair got caught in a storm while fishing. They weathered the storm as best they could, and they were eventually rescued early the next day. Sadly, Juan's grandfather suddenly passed away later that morning. In the middle of his sorrow, Juan was grateful that God had allowed his grandfather to live long enough to get them back home safely.

"Just another one of God's miracles," said Botino.

As life settled down a bit, Botino went on to finish high school in Miami and was attempting to join the military when his uncle, Dr. Osvaldo Benitez, who was working as a physician in Madison, asked him to take a job as an orderly at Madison County Memorial Hospital (MCMH). Botino liked the idea and soon moved in with Benitez, working from 4 p.m. to midnight and taking classes in the mornings. Even his walks to work were exciting. It was pretty common for Botino to come across some angry dogs on his way to work, so he routinely traveled with a few bricks at his disposal to ward them off. His first day on the job was eventful, as Botino helped the busy staff with three bloody patients who came to the emergency room. His skill with the patients got the attention of hospital staff, and they increased his interaction with patients. The hospital went on to send Botino to Emergency Medical Technician (E.M.T.) school, where he was only the 159th student to graduate with the training.

Botino briefly left Madison to work as an E.M.T. in Liberty City, near Miami. He learned quickly how demanding the job could be, as he found himself working five days straight when he arrived. A



Juan Botino attended a wedding with his father, Juan Valentin Botino, in the 1980s.

chance meeting occurred in 1980, when Botino was working a scene, when Florida Highway Patrolman Pete Bucher greeted him. Bucher is a Madison resident who had met Botino while he was working at MCMH.

"Sheriff [Joe] Peavy wants you back," said Bucher.

Botino was more than happy to return to the happy confines of Madison County,

and he was back for good in March of 1981.

He briefly stayed at the home of Carlton Burnette, Sr., who was in charge of the E.M.T. department. In 1987, while the service was still under Sheriff Peavy's direction, Botino took over for the retiring Burnette. A few years later, the county took over E.M.T. services, and Botino continued to work to bring in grants to fund further improvements for emergency medical services. After 43 years of devoted service to his profession, Botino retired in 2015.

"I've got the bad back to prove it," said Botino, who has lifted thousands of patients during his career. "I still miss the crew and patients," stated Botino fondly.

Of the numerous awards Botino has received over the years, he is still most proud of receiving his American citizenship.

Despite the horrors that Botino has endured and escaped, there is always a delightful and sometimes mischievous grin on his face. His sense of humor would leave you to believe he has lived a charmed life. Perhaps his demeanor is inspired by the pleasant memory of his grandmother's love and care, as she faithfully gave young Juan his daily dose of Spanish wine and raw egg yolks to keep him healthy.

"No Flintstone vitamins for me," laughs Botino.

No doubt, much of his joy is a result of seeing God move miraculously through his life on numerous occasions, including finding the love of his life, Karen, his wife of over 37 years. Botino met Karen in 1984, while transporting her to the hospital. His excellent care for her prompted Karen to give him a phone call to express her appreciation. The pair ended up talking for three hours, and they were married three months later.

"Best accident ever," recalls Botino, who characterizes his marriage and life with a familiar theme: "God has a plan for us." ■





MADISON RV & GOLF RESORT

Madison, Florida's newest
RV resort with a focus on
the *golfing lifestyle*



Stay and play at Madison RV & Golf Resort, which features access to world-class golfing, top-notch amenities, close proximity to area attractions and much more.

OPENING WINTER 2022 — RESERVE YOUR SPACE NOW

- ◆ 95 spacious RV sites that are big rig friendly with back-in, pull-through and waterfront options.
 - ◆ Pet friendly, so bring your pups to our dog park for a run!
 - ◆ All lots are spacious, 80' long x 37' wide, with beautiful landscaping for privacy.
 - ◆ All monthly stays receive complimentary golf cart and golf at Madison Country Club!

445 SW COUNTRY CLUB RD. ◆ MADISON, FLA. 32340
(850) 688-0363 ◆ INFO@MADISONRVRESORT.COM



Crystal K Bochnia
Broker
(850) 973-7333

Ann Sapp
Realtor
(850) 464-0671

Beth Meggs
Realtor
(850) 545-5184

FOR SALE
850-973-4458

P.O. Box 505
Madison, Fla. 32341



www.madisonrealtygroupllc.com

FORT MADISON
SELF STORAGE (850)973-4141



Unit Sizes:
5x10 - \$35/m
10x10 - \$55/m
10x20 - \$110/m
(Plus sales tax and one-time \$10 set-up fee)

Hwy. 53 South • Madison, FL




Thomasville Bedding Company™
Family Owned Since 1969

Tempur Pedic Dealer • Latex Sets
Custom Beds • Electric Beds

(229) 226-8650

Open Mon-Sat
14606 Hwy 19 South
Thomasville, Ga. 31757
thomasvillebedding.com

The Daylily Store
— Open April-June —



Plant a rainbow!

124 Horner Dr. • Homerville, Ga. 31634
(912) 520-0452
thedaylilystore.com

100% CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IS OUR GOAL!

DUNHAM BODY SHOP
FOREIGN & DOMESTIC
Body & Paint Work
Frame Straightening

~ **FREE ESTIMATES** ~
INSURANCE WORK WELCOME

11615 U.S. Hwy. 319 N.
Thomasville, Ga. 31757
(Past Walmart, across the street from Stallings Dodge Chrysler Jeep)

(229) 226-2077



Zac Petty: Chiefland's rising star

Story by Mickey Starling

Photography by Joe Wilson/Tiny Hat Productions and Bill Thompson

Chiefland native Zac Petty grew up hearing sweet melodies strumming from his father's guitar. His dad, Lyle, had played the guitar for many years and knew the importance of starting early in order to hone the needed skills to play well. So, without consulting Zac, Dad informed his 12-year-old protege of his new hobby. "I've got you a guitar, and you are going to take lessons," said his father.

In this case, the old adage, "Father knows best," certainly rings true. During his two years of lessons, Zac's love for the guitar steadily grew. He was soon playing on the worship team at Calvary Temple Assembly of God, alongside pianist Delores Leggett Walker.

Playing with Walker was a great educational experience for Petty, who learned all the chords, how to play with a group and much more. "Those three years made me really good," remembers Petty. "The accountability to others really made

the difference. Mrs. Walker was very helpful and patient with me. She was the biggest influence on me in my early years."

Playing with the worship team would prove invaluable to Petty in the years to come. He had picked up skills that would have eluded him in guitar practice or solo performances. "You have to learn to play with a beat and form a cohesive unit to get a song right," said Petty.

Everything isn't just about playing the right notes for Perry. "Stage awareness is one of the most important things I've gained,"

said Petty. "Listening to what is going on around me helps me know what to provide during a performance. The key is knowing when to play and when not to."

His now vast experience playing in bands has placed him on a fast track for success. Now performing with about 10 bands, as needed, Petty loves his role as a "hired gun." Word of his talents and dependability have spread throughout the music industry, which has opened doors to play at some amazing venues.

Last year, Petty found himself playing in a band that was opening for Travis Tritt, who was performing at Francis Field, in St. Augustine, Fla. Darrell Rae was asked to open for Tritt, but he wanted to play with a band instead of going solo for such a major performance. Rae called a nearby recording studio, searching for a recommendation for a guitar player. The owner of the studio didn't hesitate. "Zac Petty is the best in this area," he said with confidence. Just playing with Ray, who has a song on Spotify with more than a million plays, was huge for Petty. "It was a wonderful night," recalls Petty.

Other wonderful nights are in store for Petty in the near future. He will be playing with the well-known Chris McNeil Band at a private party for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in May.

McNeil heard Petty playing an impromptu off-stage guitar solo at Ole Red Orlando, a large restaurant in Orlando, Fla. Petty seamlessly added to the flow of "Seminole Wind," by John Anderson, as it was being performed onstage. McNeil approached him afterwards, saying, "Hey dude, who even are you? You need to join my band." Petty agreed and has since played with McNeil on more than 30 occasions.

While Petty loves every moment he spends playing the guitar, a lot of pressure comes with performing at the professional level. An example of that pressure was never more apparent than in 2018, as he prepared to play in The Country Music Showdown, in Live Oak, Fla. "I had three days to learn about 25 songs," said Petty. "It was worth it, though, because that show got me recommended to Travis Tritt."

In the midst of his busy schedule, Perry and his father co-own C & C Health Foods, in Chiefland. The pair bought the business in 2019, after giving it a lot of prayer. Lyle became interested in nutrition and health foods after seeing incredible improvements to his health as a result of their use.

With his steady guitar gigs, the business and playing on his church's worship team, Petty has a busy life. Yet, success has not moved him away from his roots in the church. "I missed three services last year," said Petty. "I only miss church if I'm sick." It's always refreshing when you encounter someone like Petty, who puts God ahead of their God-given talents. ■



April 9 Fiddler's
Steinhatchee, Fla.

April 16 "Wind-FM Battle of the Bands,"
Ocala, Fla.

April 17 Ole Red
Nashville, Tenn.

April 23 Fiddler's
Steinhatchee, Fla.

April 27 Charlie Horse
Ocala, Fla.

April 30 a.m. Ellisville Car Show
Ellisville, Fla.

April 30 p.m. Ellie Ray's
Branford, Fla.

ZAC PETTY
2022

We Grow, Slaughter, Dry-age & Process Our Beef



**Pre-packed, premium boxes of meats
for any occasion**



**Free
Meat
Box**

**Register for a free
meat box when
you stop in**

**Monthly
drawings**

**Enter as Strangers,
Leave as Friends!**

**1480 W. Washington St., Monticello, FL 32344
850-997-5622
www.johnstonsmeatmarket.com**

Walt's



Make it yours! Today.



We aim to please.

Walt's Live Oak
Ford

US Hwy 129 North, Live Oak, Fl.
(386) 362-1112
www.waltsliveoakford.com

Walt's Live Oak
Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram

1307 W. Howard St. / Hwy 90, Live Oak
(386) 362-1042
www.waltsliveoakcdjr.com



VISIT
MADISON

Our Attraction is Only Natural

Florida's Best Small Town

(850) 973-2788 • www.visitmadisonfl.com