

The Front Porch

Where the Tea is Sweet and the Talks Are Long

Johnston's

The Biggest Little
Business in Town

Mystic Jungle

Where Life Is Good

God's Plan

Images from the Bataan Death March

Bobby Thigpen

Making a Name

Check out our...
Spring 2022
Collection



Badcock
HOME FURNITURE
&more
SINCE 1904

New life blooms as the warm breezes of spring sweep away the last traces of winter. Now is the time to freshen and invigorate the home with lighter colors, fresh furniture, and bright accessories. Spring is the perfect time to clean the home to give it that refreshing "just right" vibe.

Who better to help you with this task? Badcock Home Furniture &more has everything you need – and more. We have a variety of new collections to share with you. Thoughtfully curated selections of timeless furniture and charming accessories so you can create your own inspired style for every room in your home.

Owner Andy Johnston

Branford

903 Suwannee Ave NW,
Branford FL 32008
(386) 935-3324

Manager Stephen Wells

Madison

464 Duval St,
Madison FL 32340
(850) 973-6000

Manager Mandy Whitaker

Monticello

405 S Jefferson St,
Monticello FL 32344
(850) 997-4323

Manager Rafiel Young

www.badcock.com



We Pack and Mail



Shipping . Printing . Mailboxes & more...



**UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE®**
Approved Postal Provider®

FedEx®
Authorized
ShipCenter



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 5 • May/June 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

Cheltsie Holbrook

Staff Writers

Rick Patrick
Mickey Starling
Lee Trawick
Heather Ainsley
Laura Young
Grace McAlister

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 | May/June 2022

SITTIN' ON THE PORCH -----

8 Mary Madison

COVER STORY -----

10 Johnston's

Biggest Little Business in Town

FEATURES -----

15 Rep. Jason Shoaf

Finding a Way

16 Mystic Jungle

Where Life Is Good!

18 Mya Mason

Drawn to the Arts



32

24 God's Plan

The Bataan Death March

28 Clyde Alexander

Centered on Serving

30 Fred and Cathy Edwards

Disasters and Grace

32 Bobby Thigpen

Making a Name

37 Welding A Future

Big Bend Technical College



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



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



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**



**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

**BUDGET[®]
BLINDS**

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 franchisee independently owned and operated.

The Front Porch

Meet Our Staff



Emerald Greene Parsons
Publisher



Chelsie Holbrook
General Manager



Rick Patrick
Staff Writer



Mickey Starling
Staff Writer



Laura Young
Staff Writer



Heather Ainsley
Staff Writer



Lee Trawick
Staff Writer



Grace McAlister
Staff Writer



John Willoughby
Contributor



Mark Estefan
Graphic Designer



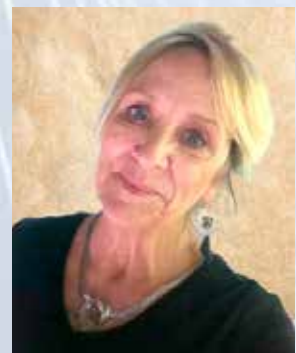
Lucy Golub
Graphic Designer



Ina Thompson
Sales Representative



Robin Jones
Sales Representative



Majken Peterzen
Contributor

Sittin' on the Porch with...

Mary Madison



Story by Laura Young

Staff Writer

Whenever Mary Madison says goodbye after a phone call or a visit, she always spreads goodwill.

"Have a blessed day," she says.

At 78 years old, Mary feels that, even when her family has experienced difficult times, she has been blessed throughout a full life. Her deep-felt hope is for those around her to have lives enriched by daily blessings as well.

Born Mary McQuay, in Madison County, Fla., to Eula Mae Robertson-McQuay and Willie Cleve "WC" McQuay, she moved to Monticello at age six, when her parents separated. She counts it a blessing that Monticello was the village that raised her, with parents, grandparents, teachers and spiritual leaders all having a

hand in her upbringing.

"Everyone was your parent," she recalls. "They kept their eyes on you."

Mary especially remembers her grandmother, Janie Robertson, being an ever-present inspiration in her life.

Mary met her best friend, Barbara Farmer Jones, on her first day of second grade. The two attended primary, middle and high school together; were college roommates at Florida A&M University together; and had their first jobs teaching at Madison Primary School together.

Being an advocate for children is an unbroken thread through Mary's life. Even before she became a schoolteacher, she helped take care of 19 siblings, being the oldest of her mother's eight children, as well as her father's 12 children.

Mary started her teaching career in

1968, but when she and her husband, Sam, started their own family, she took a 10-year "sabbatical" from teaching while her children were young. The eldest son, Reginald Madison, went on to double major in psychology and Spanish at FAMU and now works for the Small Business Administration in Atlanta, Ga. The middle child, Teresa Madison Precia, earned an education degree at Benedict College in Columbia, S.C., and is currently a paraprofessional staff member at Jefferson Somerset Charter School in Monticello. Sam Madison "Junior," the baby, received a scholarship to the University of Louisville, has had an award-studded pro football career and recently returned to Miami as the Dolphins' cornerbacks coach.

Back when her kids were young, and once Junior had started kindergarten, Mary was able to pursue a formal role as an educator. When Madison County Schools needed "a young, strong black person" to teach in an alternative education classroom, someone said, "Call Mary Madison."

Mary answered that call, and devoted the next 23 years of her career to guiding at-risk students toward greater success. Mary was able to bring not only her training as an educator to this situation, but also all her experience mothering her younger siblings and her own children.

Blessings continued to flow through the challenges. Mary typically had a class of around 12 students, plus classroom support from paraprofessionals and funding for the program. It seemed to Mary that her students often were the ones who came to school only to eat breakfast and lunch. She knew, however, that mostly "they needed to know that someone loved them." With a curriculum rooted in love, Mary taught her students life skills as well as academics. Often, they outscored their peers in mainstream classrooms at assessment time.

"I was strict," says Mary, "but they knew that I loved them." As she individualized instruction for each student, she developed a keen sense for their potential. Later, when students would look her up, she would ask them, "What are you doing with your life?" It was satisfying

to her to hear their replies, learning, for example, that one became a music minister, another served in the military, another worked as a

nearly 70 years.

While remaining active in her community and in the lives of her eight grandchildren, her “jewels,” Mary started writing her memoirs. She’s gradually filling the lined pages of a simple school composition book with insightful reflections on the past. The Treasured Memories are “A Legacy of Love.”

“I want to let my young people know that they are standing on the shoulders of the struggles of their great-great grandparents, great grandparents, grandparents and mother,” Mary says of her purpose in writing the memoirs. Here is just a glimpse:

Know this: “As fate would happen, a teacher lived up the hill on Gillislee, and when I began my teaching job, she was my mentor. I always tell that my knowledge, strength and compassion toward teaching came from her

and my internship teacher.”

Know this: “[W]hen I got the chicken pox, [t]he old traditional belief was to allow chickens to fly over your head to prevent permanent scars after [the bumps] dry up. Two things I know – it was a terrifying experience in that coop with chickens being spooked and flying everywhere, and I don’t have scars.”

Know this: “When I turned nine, I got my first live baby doll, a sister. When mother returned from the doctor the day she was born, mother got in bed with the baby and so did I. I didn’t want to leave this tiny, exciting beauty, not even to go to school.”

Know this: “Moving to the country didn’t lessen, my responsibilities as chief baby sitter and nurturer, caregiver, cook, housekeeper, laundress and beautician. If you can name it as a chore, [in all] probability, I did it.”

Know this: “The one distinct quality about our lives even during our struggles was food security. Town dwellers had small yard gardens and though the work on the farms of Black families was extremely hard, there was always food on the table. Besides the foods the gardeners and farmers raised and produced, there was an abundance of other food sources wild game: venison (deer); rabbit, raccoon (coon); o’possum (possum); duck and

turkey. There were various sources of birds – quail, pheasant, partridge and geese. Water sources were bountiful. Fish, turtle, gopher (a burrowing tortoise) and bull frog legs, even rattlesnake meat and the hide was useful. There was also an abundance of fruit trees: plum, pear and peach, not to mention berry patches. Food was extremely plentiful. I knew nothing about food insecurity until my young adulthood, via the media.”

Know this: “No matter how children are classified, I agree with a writer who said, ‘the greatest gift any parent can receive is to have children,’ and I believe children are a gift from God, whether biological or otherwise. Having had sibling children, biological children and countless other children-nieces, nephews, students and God-children – lovingly caring for them all – I feel this was one of God’s purposes in my life, but the greatest of the many children God endowed me with are my precious grandchildren... What fascinates me about children is when they are nurtured properly, without negative influence or inappropriate tutoring, is their unrefined honesty, unpredictable nature and inquisitiveness. What impresses me is how they are like sponges – whatever you pour into them, they quickly absorb it. It’s vital that we adults pour in ‘good stuff.’”



bank teller, and so on.

Mary is thankful that Junior was able to support her retirement at the age of 58, which means she’s been retired already for 20 years. Even so, her heart has remained in the classroom. Only a few months after she retired from teaching, she started mentoring and tutoring students voluntarily in the Jefferson County schools, and continued to do so for two decades until the pandemic hit. She’s also been an active leader in the Jefferson County Retired Educators Association.

Mary’s leadership has benefitted a number of community organizations. She’s helped coach countless Little League teams with her husband (most often for Monticello’s Chicken Delite), served 13 years as the president of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary and was a past Loyal Lady Ruler of Monticello Consistory #331 Scottish Rite Masons, Prince Hall Affiliation (PHA).

Mary’s faith inspires her every endeavor.

“I’m a firm believer in Christianity,” she says. “That’s the foundation in my life.”

Mary recalls how she professed her faith at the age of nine at the Memorial Missionary Baptist Church in Monticello, where she’s been a devoted member for



Mary’s composition book of memories continues on, with recollections of friends, traditions, love tokens and so very much more. The blessings in her life, not least of which is a keen perception of experience, flow through the ink onto the pages and from there to those to whom she is truly a blessing herself. ❖



Johnstons'

Biggest Little Business in Town

Story by Majken Peterzen and Laura Young

Coming into Monticello from the west, a busy Highway 90 slows to a small-town crawl directly in front of the local meat market and processing plant. A simple and solid concrete structure, it looks as if it's been there forever and will last another forever.

Cars fill the parking lot daily – trucks with livestock trailers pull in and out – smokers release the fragrance of sweet hickory flavored meats – and the front porch is full of well worn tables and chairs for customers to sit a spell and visit while colorful signage calls to the traffic to pull in for the best meats, and donuts, around.

An anchor of the community, Johnstons' Meat Market has been serving Monticello

and surrounding communities since the 1920's... close to 100 years. Born out of necessity as a way to process and keep meats fresh (before every household had a refrigerator), the business has grown to encompass much more. Johnstons' has endured with Monticello through depression years, war and conflict years, recession years, COVID years, and the ups and downs and "ghosts" of small town life. Remaining steadfast is its goal to be of service.

"Enter as strangers – leave as friends" has been the mainstay motto of Johnstons'. But more than a motto, it's the secret to Johnstons' success...listening and learning about its customers and neighbors. Ever growing and changing with its clientele and

community, Johnstons' has made a business out of listening. Listening to community needs and dreams, then figuring out the best way Johnstons' can help is the underlying mission of the business. By following this philosophy, Johnstons' positions itself to be a company to be relied upon, a company that keeps pace with an ever changing world, and a company that sets trends. Johnstons' became a Farm to Table, Farm to Family enterprise long before that concept was popular... all from paying attention to what the community wanted.

AT THE HELM

Johnstons' has always been a family business. At the helm these days is Hal Bennett, husband of the granddaughter of the founder. It's a role that suits him

perfectly. A natural talker and idea man, Hal feels like a friend the first time you meet him. He talks to customers, new and old, as if he's known them his entire life. Always putting in 110 percent, Hal is constantly experimenting with how to best serve his customer family and neighboring communities/organizations.

"I thrive to take care of my customers from beginning to end," says Bennett.

It's his brain full of ideas that has grown Johnston's from a small town operation to a business that rivals those in the big city. Each year, the Johnston's label goes onto three to four million products.

"We have some customers who are 100 years old and have been enjoying our signature sausage since they were kids," says Bennett. "It all comes down to great customers who keep coming back."

Customers often drive long distances for the quality products that Johnston's delivers time after time. One weekly customer shops for friends and co-workers, who give her their lists of what to pick up. She'll often then take back 30 to 40 pounds of sausage! At the same time, people will drive hours to bring livestock to Johnston's for processing. They take care of each custom order one at a time and know how to process, age, cut and prep better than most in the business. (What looks like that plain concrete building is in reality quite a large facility with the beef being USDA inspected.)

It's dizzying to watch and learn about all Johnston's does. The list includes: catering, to specialty smoked meats and handmade smoked sausage, to processing, to helping communities fundraise, to being an outlet for locally produced products, to their wide array of Meat Boxes for easy shopping, to their own line of spices and rubs, to online ordering, to providing meats to other restaurants/organizations (such as Florida State University restaurants), to supporting first responders, to having a fantastic donut shop, to turning the business greener, to supporting other local ventures, to opening a new restaurant... all in a day's work for this small town business.

When people walk into the little retail store or bring their livestock around for processing, it may not be obvious what all Johnston's has going on behind the scenes.

"No" is not in my vocabulary," says Bennett. "I just don't know how to say 'no.'"

Here are all the ways Bennett has been saying "yes."

CATERING

Johnston's can as easily cater a dinner for two as for hundreds. They are able to be as casual or formal as one might like! From containers of wings and ribs to a full-sized hog on the spit or a white-cloth sit-down

dinner, any event is possible. With their mobile kitchen, they can also cook on site for hundreds... family reunion or music festival they've got it covered.

Custom smoking is a service that many do not realize is available. Customers can call Johnston's during the week, order whatever meats they want, and they will be smoked and ready for the weekend. It might be a simple slab of ribs, a few chickens, or several Boston Butts for a crew – just let the cook know and they'll add it to the smoker.

During holiday seasons, Johnston's makes it easy to feed the whole family along with whatever company might show up. Whether it's smoked turkey at Thanksgiving, ham at Easter, or pulled pork for Fourth of July – the smokers stay full with the most delectable meats.

One special form of catering involves supporting first responders when disaster

strikes. Johnston's has a 10-year contract with Tallahassee's electrical company to support linemen when they are called to restore power service after events like hurricanes. Florida's Division of Emergency Management also has Johnston's mobile kitchen in their system, ready to be called upon to feed first responders like no one else can when they're helping out away from home.

FUNDRAISING

Here's where Hal's listening makes a difference. Years ago he realized that local organizations are always looking for a way to raise funds. Be it a school athletic team, a community service organization, a church youth group, or local non-profit – community groups often need to add to their bank account for basic needs.

Thus "The Great Southern BBQ Fundraiser" was created and Johnston's





and shopping.

DONUTS

You might not automatically think a meat market would have amazing, to-die-for donuts. But inside Johnston's is a donut shop with long lines of loyal customers taking care of their sweet tooth! The Johnston's baker is up before dawn making a wide variety of sweet delectables from scratch! There's lots of old favorites as well as new innovations (you've got to try the maple bacon donut!) Johnston's apple fritters with handmade Southern Craft Creamery ice cream is a must have.

A favorite at any age are the over sized (12"-14" across) "birthday cake" donuts covered in icing and good wishes.

PROCESSING

Johnston's works with the large livestock farmer as well as the small family farm. Every order to process meat is handled with detailed care. Ahead of processing, the farmer will talk with Bennett or a butcher to determine exactly how the meat is to be processed. When Johnston's started processing beef, they handled about three to four cows a week. Soon the number rose to eight to 10 per week. Do the math... that was around 520 cows per year. Now, with an expanded facility, this aspect of the business has grown to 1,500 per year, and he is shipping the beef to a farther and farther radius

makes raising money simple. How? An organization chooses from one of the top Johnston's smoked meats/sausage and then sells them back to the community and their constituents at whatever profit margin they feel possible. By setting their own profit margin the organization is able to raise even more funds. Johnston's handles creating the tickets, packaging, putting orders in individual containers... everything. On the pre-set date, Johnston's smokes the meats ordered and delivers them to the organization and eager customers. Groups, some as far away as 200 miles, have raised small and large amounts of money using these easy Southern Bar-B-Q Fundraisers! In April of 2022 alone, Johnston's participated in 25 fundraisers! With one simple phone call, Johnston's "Makes It Happen."

MEAT BOXES AND STOCK THE FREEZER OPTIONS

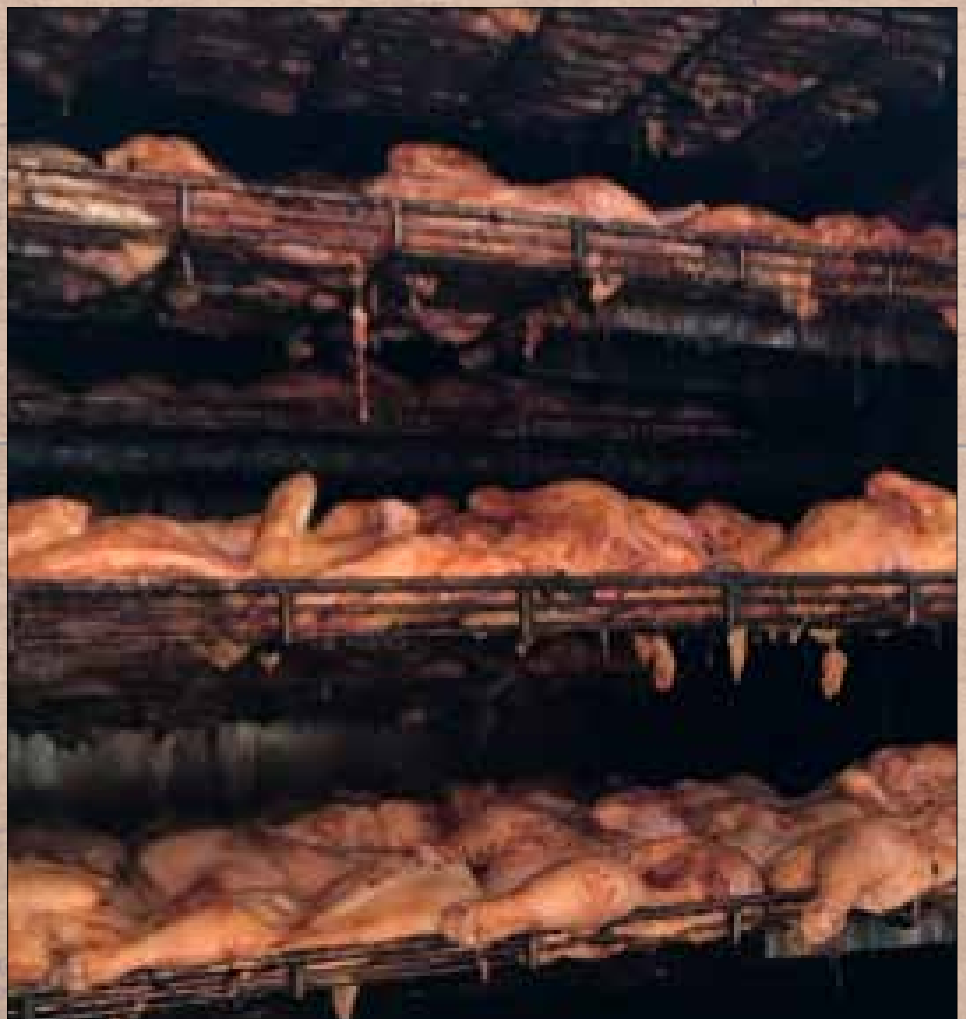
Long before boxed groceries became trendy with big companies, Johnston's created Meat Boxes for easy shopping and saving money.

Meat Boxes from Johnston's range from simple "picnic" boxes to large "stock the freezer" boxes. One can pick up a "Tailgating" meat box and have the perfect selection of meats for a game day cookout. The "Kid's Grand Slammer" meat box will feed a T-Ball crew, and the "Rise & Shine" meat box provides a fantastic breakfast for visiting company. There's even a "Veggie" box full of fresh seasonal vegetables! With 28 different boxes, just about every need is covered, but if it's not, Johnston's will design box to meet custom needs.

Johnston's can also help fight rising

prices by offering bulk purchases. It's possible to get a quarter, half or whole cow as well as half or whole hog and have it cut your way. Friends and family can go in together to buy and save, save, save.

The easiest way to save at Johnston's, however, is to come on in. Customers receive 10 percent off for just walking in



of clients, with one monthly order going all the way to Morgantown, La. Still, Johnston's handles the individual local customer with the same care as always.

INNOVATION

Among the many innovative practices Johnston's has put in place, perhaps the most dramatic is the installation of an Eco-Drum. Bennett realized over time that there was a great deal of waste in the meat processing business. He didn't like the idea of using landfills to dispose of the waste, but for years there weren't many options. This past year, however, Bennett took a huge step and installed an Eco-Drum – a large machine that processes the waste into compost! Waste from processing is placed into the machine and – with heat, rotation and magic – a few days later dry compost is ready for use in landscaping and gardening. He plans on packaging the compost in a variety of sizes for sale in the store as well as working directly with larger landscaping companies.

JOHNSTON'S RESERVE BEEF

The goal of any meat market would be to provide the best possible meats. Although there are some great companies selling meats to markets, Johnston's wanted something even better. To get to that level of excellence, Johnston's needed to control the quality and selection of beef from the beginning.

The best beef comes from a strong line, is pasture raised, and grain finished to create the right amount of fat content to create the best flavor. Johnston's now has their own JMM Reserve line of beef. The line is certified and guaranteed 100 percent Black Angus and is USDA inspected. JMM Reserve beef is aged 21 days in the Johnston's facility for the tenderness desired in a prime cut of beef.

"What it comes down to," says Bennett, "is having JMM Reserve Beef in our own display cases. And our aged beef is so tender you can cut it with a fork."

This quality of meat is difficult to find in mainstream grocery stores. Prime cuts are often reserved for high end restaurants with a "select" or "choice" cut being the most common choice for the average shopper. Johnston's sees no reason their customers shouldn't also get the prime cuts, so that's what they provide.

THE NEWEST VENTURE

Bennett doesn't rest much. He's always thinking of better ways to serve the community and to provide an outstanding product. Last year the Smokehouse BBQ kitchen was opened at the market location to offer daily lunch specials of smoked meats and homemade sides. The popularity of the smokehouse lunch service led to the next step: opening a full-service restaurant.



Johnston's Southern Style Restaurant was created.

Located on U.S. 19 in Monticello, south of the courthouse, near the Winn Dixie, Johnston's Southern Style Restaurant offers their popular lunch specials and also an evening menu of good, homestyle foods complete with Johnston's meats. "Southern

Style" has the good fortune of opening under the guidance of Chef Nick. A seasoned chef with a mastery in smoking meats, Chef Nick brings a level of excellence to the kitchen. Since joining with Hal to open the Smokehouse BBQ last year, it's clear that the community loves the way he handles "southern style" food.

ON THE HORIZON

The Johnston's brand is now becoming known widely enough to draw the interest of wholesalers. Bennett sees this as the next opportunity to grow the business. He pats a stack of pending contracts for wholesale sausage. The catch will be finding enough new employees to meet the demand. When Johnston's began, they could operate with just two or three employees. Currently, they have 23 people their team, and Bennett envisions that number reaching 30 by the end of the year, if all the pieces fall into place for expanding into the wholesale market with sausages and aged beef.

Johnston's is an example of smart entrepreneurial business practices coupled with a deep love of community.

"I would like for everyone to be proud of the old store and also what Johnston's has accomplished," says Bennett.

Ever changing, ever growing, the business prides itself on its motto, "We Make It Happen." And that is what they do! ❖





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

Representative Jason Shoaf finds a way

Story by Red Hills Strategies

Growing up in Port St. Joe, Jason Shoaf witnessed just how important the paper mill was to his community. Most of the families he knew worked at the mill or worked at businesses tied to the mill.

When the mill owned by the St. Joe Company closed in 1999, it was devastating to his community. Unemployment in the region soared above 20 percent, and the town lost half its population.

"I saw my family and friends lose their jobs. Some moved away. Many of them lost their way," says Shoaf, recalling that period of time more than two decades ago.

That's what drives Jason Shoaf in his job today, representing North Florida's District 7 in the Florida House of Representatives.

"My mission is two-fold: 1) to bring economic opportunity to our region, and 2) to ensure our next generation has the skills they need to succeed and prosper," says Shoaf.

Shoaf was elected to the Florida House in a special election in 2019, to fill a vacancy created when former Rep. Halsey Beshears was appointed to lead the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation.

Since then, Rep. Shoaf has been fighting for North Florida. Shoaf's priorities include: defending family values, championing the Second Amendment, supporting law enforcement and protecting our natural resources, in addition to workforce training.

Rep. Shoaf has brought millions in funding for the region he serves. This session, which ended in March, the Legislature published a final budget that includes nearly \$54 million to support projects in House District 7 during the upcoming fiscal year.



A few noteworthy projects receiving funding include:

- New School, Calhoun County - \$11,161,015
- Workforce Education, Wakulla County - \$91,646
- Adults with Disabilities Program, Wakulla County - \$425,000
- Airport, Gulf County - \$975,000
- Sheriff's Complex, Liberty County - \$22,000,000
- EMS Facility, Liberty County - \$1,100,000
- Apalachee Center, Leon County - \$4,730,100
- Connecting Everyone with Second Chances, Leon County - \$1,500,000
- Monticello Water, Jefferson County - \$250,000
- N. FL. College, Madison County - \$1,800,000

- Sheriff's Complex, Taylor County - \$4,617,500
- Sheriff's Communications, Lafayette County - \$500,000

Rep. Shoaf's commitment to workforce training is not only inspired by his past experience but is also driven by his present-day circumstances.

Rep. Shoaf works at the St. Joe Natural Gas Company and owns two other businesses in the community. Like many business owners in the region, Rep. Shoaf struggles to find, hire and retain skilled workers and talent in this current labor market.

"Expanding skills training brings many benefits to our community. Not only does it ensure that workers have the skills needed to support our businesses, but with the right skills, workers can pursue good paying careers and provide for their families."

Rep. Shoaf observes that North Florida is experiencing a transformation since Hurricane Michael. The recovery is slow, he acknowledges. But, it's important to get it right.

"The recovery process is slow. It's my job," says Shoaf, "to ensure our communities get the relief and support we need to come back stronger and better than ever. High inflation brought on by the federal government is complicating the road to recovery. Costs are high, and they continue to rise. That's driving some of our valued community members away from the region. The challenge will be: how do we rebuild, increase economic opportunity and create opportunities for our next generation to prosper, while protecting and preserving what makes our region so special."

Port St. Joe is special to Rep. Shoaf. It's where he grew up, and it's where he's raising his family. He and his, are raising their 13-year-old twins. ❖



MADISON
REALTY GROUP, LLC

FOR SALE
850-973-4458

Crystal K Bochnia
Broker
(850) 973-7333

Ann Sapp
Realtor
(850) 464-0671

Beth Meggs
Realtor
(850) 545-5184

P.O. Box 505
Madison, Fla. 32341

www.madisonrealtygroupllc.com





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



Life is good at
Mystic Jungle





Story by Grace McAlister

Mystic Jungle Educational Facility is one of Live Oak's unique, hidden treasures. The non-profit is owned by Vera and Mark Chaples, both native Floridians with a lifelong passion for caring for animals, both domestic and exotic. Vera's 37-year career in the veterinary medical field started by volunteering in Ft. Lauderdale at Three Oaks Animal Hospital at the age of 13.

Mystic Jungle is able to offer lifetime homes to exotic wildlife through donations, sponsorships and grants. To make a donation to the facility, visit mysticjungle.org/donate online/.

Though many different kinds of animals can be found at Mystic Jungle, the facility is best known for its big cats. In March of 2018, the facility received Trip the Bobcat, whom Mystic Jungle considers their most tragic case. Mystic Jungle received a call regarding an injured bobcat skulking around a residence on April 24, 2018. Attempting to rescue the bobcat, Mystic Jungle placed an uncamouflaged trap within 50 feet of the residence.

Vera says, "I did not want to remove an animal that was capable of surviving. My thought process was that the cage and the environment reeked of mankind. This cat would have to have been desperate for food to even consider going into that trap."

One week later, Mystic Jungle received a call that the bobcat had been captured. When Mystic Jungle's staff arrived, it was evident that the bobcat was not just injured; it was horrifically maimed. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Mystic Jungle's veterinarian deduced that this injury was the result of a snare or an illegal steel-jaw trap. Trip had either chewed his leg off or wrung it off while attempting to escape. If one of Trip's back legs had been severed, he could have

been released back into the wild; however, it was his front left leg, and bobcats need their front legs to fend off predatory attacks. FFWC told Mystic Jungle that Trip's options were to be euthanized or permanently homed at Mystic Jungle. Three-legged Trip has now happily settled into his new home at Mystic Jungle and is an excellent example of why sanctuaries like Mystic Jungle are important.

Bengal tigers Lepa and Bo also found their forever homes at Mystic Jungle after being seized from the home of Steve Sipek and Melanie Boynes. Lepa and Bo, along with black leopard Oko were seized after FFWC launched Project Greystoke, which created laws banning big cats in Florida; however, after a two-year legal battle, it was decided that Lepa, Bo and Oko would not be allowed to return home. Shortly after this decision was made, Oko tragically died at another facility, and Lepa and Bo, after pleas from Sipek and Boynes, were sent to Mystic Jungle. Mystic Jungle became the forever home for the duo. Lepa and Bo arrived at Mystic Jungle scared, confused and angry.

Vera reports that "Bo arrived at the Jungle, not only terrified but extremely hostile. The look in his eyes was sheer terror." She adds that she has never seen an apex predator shake as badly as Bo did. "It truly broke my heart. This cat has seen a lot." Mystic Jungle had to find a non-traumatic way to remove Bo from his travel cage, because Bo, in his state of terror, refused to exit. The Head Keeper of Mystic Jungle drummed on the back of Bo's travel cage, making a sound that would not spook him, but annoy him enough to move away from the sound. The facility was seemingly surprised at how well the plan worked, as Bo just stood up and walked out. The cats received regular visits from Sipek and Boynes and lived long and happy lives at Mystic Jungle. They quickly adjusted and were

delighted to greet visitors. Bo peacefully passed away on October 21, 2021, and Lepa followed six months later on April 8, 2022.

Mystic Jungle is located at 13429 US Hwy. 129 in Live Oak and is only open to the public on Saturdays, for the animals' comfort. Vera contrasted Mystic Jungle with a zoo: "Nobody wants to be stared at all day every day, so we are open only on Saturdays." On Saturdays, Mystic Jungle does educational tours, to help those who may not have a clear understanding of the purpose of an exotic animal sanctuary. Tours discuss conservation and preservation of all species of exotic animals, putting their main focus on the Asian leopard that is being eradicated due to conflicts between humans and leopards. The facility includes lions, tigers, lemurs, bobcats, leopards and other animals that locals would not typically have the opportunity to see up close. Additionally, the facility is kept as natural as possible to keep the animals as comfortable as possible. Mystic Jungle also offers private tours, which can be scheduled by calling (386) 264-8910. ❖



Mya Mason

DRAWN TO THE ARTS



Story by Heather Ainsley

Some talented artists are born through long, arduous lessons and years of strict instruction, the painstaking refining of their skills coming at the guidance of great masters. Other artists may come from families that are chock-full of skilled craftsmen, and are nurtured into their mediums with love and attentiveness, born into a world as colorful and creative as the paintings they grow up watching come into form. Still other artists, like Mya Mason of Madison, Fla., happen upon their creativity all on their own, discovering their passion for art independently, as an expression of their innermost thoughts and feelings.

While Mya has always had an affinity for creative expression, she has, at the tumultuous age of 13, recently taken a more serious pursuit of her artistic endeavors, using acrylic, oil and watercolor paints to begin building a colorful and unique body of work. She attributes this newfound creative drive to growing older, and she says she gains inspiration from the way things, people and places around her make her feel. Her mother, Emmie Panza, says that from as young as two years old, Mya showed great determination with art crafts and coloring activities. She still treasures a collection of Mya's more elementary projects like finger paintings and early drawings. While those works show the rudimentary hesitation of youth, Mya's more recent art shows a clear evolution in her personal style and an eager development of talent, technique and imagination.

"I've always enjoyed art projects," says Mya. "When I got a little older and started feeling more, I began putting my emotions into my paintings to give my work meaning."

Her work comes mainly in the form of acrylic paintings depicting a variety of



subjects, although she uses charcoal for sketching and dabbles in oil and watercolor paints as well. Out of all the materials she uses, her favorite medium to work with is acrylic, as she finds that variety of paint to be a more forgiving medium than other varieties.

"I find acrylic paint to be easier to work with," she says. "I sometimes work with oil or watercolor paints, but for me, acrylic paint is just easier, because it dries faster and is much less messy."

Since the dawn of civilization,

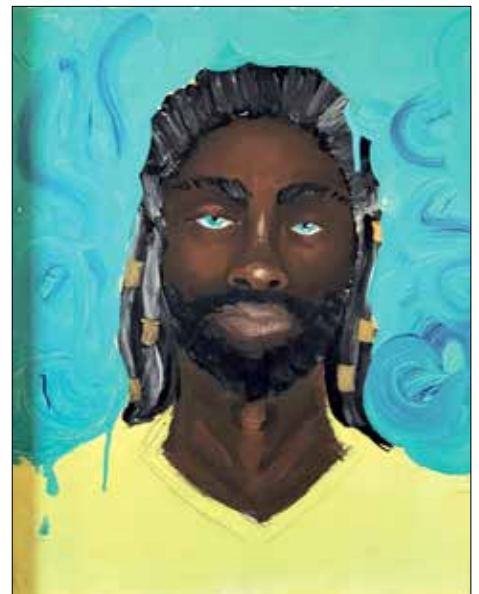
humankind has used art as a means of recording day to day life. We use color and form to convey messages, fabricate feeling and explore dreams, using seemingly mundane and unremarkable materials to create elaborate artistic creations capable of expressing those feelings, messages and dreams to the world around us. Works of art can translate across countless generations, countries and cultures, making art a truly powerful connector for mankind, no matter what the medium is. Each painting, sculpture, poem, recipe, building or melody created by an artist is a window into their lives, their minds and, perhaps most of all, their hearts. Anyone viewing a piece of said artwork is allowed a humble peek through that window.

For Mya, her art symbolizes an escape from her day to day life.

"I don't really have a difficult life," says Mya thoughtfully, "but if I ever have a lot on my mind, or if something happens, my art can give me a place to go, mentally, to just take my mind off of things. It's a good way to take my mind off of school, or to just have an outlet when I need one."

Like many creative people, Mya struggles from time to time with artist's block. Artist's block for painters is similar to writers having "writer's block." It is an abstract term that describes a period of time when an artist has no motivation or ideas for new work. It can be caused by stress, anxiety, burn out, or can also have no definable cause at all. Artist's block can be difficult to overcome, even for experienced artists.

"Sometimes it is difficult to find motivation to paint," says Mya, adding that the struggle is compounded when other people make requests for art that she doesn't feel connected to. "People might make requests and they need it by a certain time, and that pressure can make it hard to work on the



project or find motivation for it. I either have to force myself to paint, or wait for the motivation to kick in on its own. The artwork always looks better when it happens organically – when there is no pressure, and I can take as much time as I want.”

Commissions are in no short supply for this young artist, who has received many requests from the community where she lives, from design inquiries for concept art for the walls of patient rooms at Madison Health and Rehabilitation Center, to a recent request to paint a mural at the new building at her school, Madison Creative Arts Academy. While many of these larger commission requests can be intimidating for such a young artist, Mya tries to accept jobs she feels connected to, and has accepted smaller requests in the past for customers wishing to take home a piece of her work. “I don’t know if I’m going to do the mural,” she admits. “It’s a lot of pressure, and I don’t want to mess up. I’m just not sure if I am ready for something like that.”

Her advice to other artists is to try not to let their art become something stressful.

“Don’t stress too much,” Mya says simply. “I know that doesn’t really sound like much, but it’s important. Don’t force it. Just let it flow.”

When she isn’t working on her paintings, Mya finds enjoyment in some other creative areas, including reading and teaching herself how to play the guitar. When she was younger, she participated in dance for about seven years, and during five of those years she took part in competitions. While her dancing years are for now on hold, her painting years have only just begun to unfold, and her family is excited to see where her art will take her.

“The whole family is very supportive of her and her art,” says Emmie, whose husband, Matt Panza, enjoys occasional art sessions with Mya. She adds that Mya’s dad, Sean Mason, and his wife, Alecia, are also very supportive and excited to see where her talents will lead. Mya also has two siblings, a younger brother named Henry (age 5) and a little sister named Braelyn (age 6), who both look up to their big sister. Collectively, the family also has three dogs.

In school, Mya maintains good grades, and is an A/B student. When she grows up, she is interested in seeking out a creative career.

“I think I would like to either be involved in film, or art,” she said, after some contemplation, “maybe an art professor, or working in the film industry.”

When asked where interested people can view her art, Mya laughed shyly.

“Probably on my mom’s Facebook page. She is always sharing stuff on there.



I don’t really show my own art that much. I guess if I get better, I’d be more likely to show it off a little bit, but...” she shrugged. While Mya may be humble in regards to her artwork, there is no denying her sharp talent. Her work features a blend of photo-realistic and cartoon-style individuals, as well as beautiful landscapes and scenes. One of her more recent projects,

a waterfall painting on her bedroom door, shows an impressive sense of composition, brush technique, imagination and whimsy. Her portraits of people show a great skill for blending colors and a growing understanding of facial structure, hair texture and facial expression that is uncommon in an artist so young. Her landscapes convey a sense of comfort in the soft color palettes she uses and the gentleness of the scenes that she brings to life on the canvas. Images of mountains, delicate clouds, and still, peaceful waters captured in the glowing light of dawn or twilight transport the viewer to quiet and breathtaking locations, a welcome removal from a busy “nine to five” life.

Art, in its most basic definition, is communication. A painter can, with every brush stroke, every selected color, tell a story, share a dream or convey an emotion to their audience. A single painting can be translated innumerable times to say something different, depending on who





is viewing it. Art is universal, a language hidden behind our spoken and written words, an intangible part of the human race, woven and interlocked within the very fabric of who we are as a species.

It is timeless, limitless, and wonderfully everlasting, for as long as some among us create, art will always exist. In the words of Suzy Kassern, "The journey of the sun and moon is predictable. But yours, is your

ultimate art."

With her paintbrush in hand, Mya Mason is well on her way in her artistic journey through life, and the rest of us can't wait to see where it takes her. ❖





U-Pick
May 28, 2022

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

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

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

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



**NORTH FLORIDA
COLLEGE**

www.nfc.edu

Sentinels stand together.



Worship – Grow – Serve – Share

Sunday Worship 10:45am

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

**The Insurance
You Need
For The Surprise
You Don't!**

**Swann
Insurance**



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

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

God's plan



Photos courtesy of History.com

Images from the infamous Bataan Death March in the Philippine Islands in 1942, orchestrated by the Japanese.

Story by Lee Trawick

We celebrate July 4th as America's birthday, but perhaps to some in White Springs, Fla., July 4th may mean a little more. On July 4, 1922, John Henry Odum was born in White Springs, around the same time that Clyde L Hillhouse was eight years old in White Springs. Hillhouse was the son of Cora Hillhouse, a school teacher at Hamilton County High School. Several years after graduation, Hillhouse joined the United States Army Air Corp at 26 years old in October of 1940. Hillhouse found himself in the Pacific campaign, where he later became a Prisoner of War at Osaka Main Camp Chikko Osaka 34-135, where he survived the famous Bataan Death March. He was later liberated by United States Army forces three and half years later.

In White Springs, Odum grew up in a poor and unstable home. He often went without and had to fend for himself at an early age. At the age of 16, Odum saw his way out of White Springs and the chance to finally find stability in his life, but he would need help in order to do so.

As a youngster, Odum was a mischievous young man who lacked discipline and structure because of the lack of a family foundation. While he had a mother and father who were involved in his life, Odum often found himself living by his own rules. Then when the time came for Odum to leave White Springs, the help would come from the most unlikely of

places: a school teacher in White Springs, Cora Hillhouse, the mother of Clyde Hillhouse.

Cora understood Odum's home life and the lack of structure in his life; therefore, when she was asked if she would forge his mother's signature, allowing him to join the United States military, she was hesitant. She took the time to pray about the decision, knowing the dangers he could possibly face. After she felt at peace with her decision, she indeed forged the signature allowing Odum to leave White Springs and possibly find the structure and discipline he so desperately longed for. It would be that decision that would change not only his life but the lives of the Hillhouse family forever.

It is unclear what unit Odum was assigned to in the United States Army Air Force, as many of their assignments were classified, and the details of their assignments are protected. During Odum's military training, it was obvious to his ranking officers that he flourished throughout his training. He became a soldier they could rely on and felt comfortable attaching him to a unit of such importance. At the same time Odum was in training, Hillhouse was in the middle of the Pacific campaign, where his unit was eventually overrun, and he and most of his unit were taken hostage.

All the while, back in White Springs, Cora had a heavy heart knowing her son was involved in such actions and conflicts, and knowing she had sent an underage young man to the same possible dangers. One day, Cora received a letter from the United States War Department, stating that her son has been listed as missing in action in the Philippines. Over the next three years, Cora would receive random letters that were sent out of the prison camps. So much of the letters had been redacted and cut out that it was hard to get hope that they were real. There was nothing specific in the letters, no names or anything that indicated they were from her son. One

day, however, the Japanese military made a mistake and overlooked a very unusual family name that Clyde had written in his letter. Cora could not believe it, and she knew at that moment that her son was alive. While she got confirmation of his survival, the question was still this: Would he ever come home? Then, after three and half years, her prayers were answered with God's grace and the most unlikely soldier.

In 1945, the war had begun to take a turn for the Allied forces. The United States had ended the war in Europe and had solely focused on the action in the Pacific campaign. The power of the United States laid siege on the Philippine Islands in hopes of liberating the Philippines and rescuing their soldiers who had been held captive by driving the Japanese occupants out.

It was then that Odum found himself and his unit assigned with liberating a prison camp on the island. As the camp was liberated with very little resistance, Odum saw a sack of bones walking towards him amongst the soldiers inside the prison camp. Odum knew by the walk that the soldier was Clyde Hillhouse from his hometown. The two had not seen each other since they were back in White Springs, but the very soldier Cora Hillhouse took a chance on was the very soldier that would put his arms around her son, rescue him from the midst of hell and bring him home.

The two soldiers returned to White Springs after the war, and while they may have never spoken of their time in the war, the bond they shared carried on for generations. Later in life, the two built their own families in White Springs, and to this day, the two families have kinship between them. The two soldiers have both now passed away, and their stories have passed on with them, but the power of God's plan remains alive and vibrant throughout White Springs because of two unsuspecting soldiers and a schoolteacher who risked her reputation to try and save a lost boy. ❖





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**



FLAUPR00111

*Florida Farm Bureau General Insurance Co.
*Florida Farm Bureau Casualty Insurance Co.
*Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Co., Jackson, MS

Auto • Home • Life



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



Clyde Alexander: *Centered on serving*

Clyde spends time with some kids while taking photos for a commercial during his time in the European Basketball League.

Story by Mickey Starling

Photography Courtesy of Clyde Alexander and Mickey Starling

Everyone in Madison County who has ever crossed paths with Clyde Alexander will tell you that he makes a difference in the community. This world traveler settled in Madison around 1973 and eventually took a job with North Florida Junior College (NFJC), teaching education courses at Madison Correctional Institute.

"My mother said I needed to settle down," chuckles Alexander.

Settling down was not on his radar for many years prior to taking that job.

Alexander graduated from Canisius College, in Buffalo, N.Y., where he played center and power forward on the basketball team. His first outing on the court was a memorable one, playing against St. Bonaventure, from nearby Allegheny, N.Y. Starring on this team was future NBA legend Bob Lanier. He would later suit up against another future NBA Hall of Famer, Calvin Murphy, who went on to play for the Houston Rockets.

Alexander was later drafted by the Buffalo Braves, alongside another future NBA standout, Bob McAdoo. After being cut by the team, he tried out with the Denver Nuggets and was again cut. However, Alexander was far from finished playing basketball. He began a lengthy career in the European Basketball League, first playing for a team in Italy for one year before moving on to Finland, where he played for five years. Next up was a six-year stint playing in Sweden.

Not long after beginning the job at NFJC, Alexander was given the opportunity to coach the college's basketball team, the Sentinels. He remained the coach until the program was closed in 2007. The program had a shoestring budget, and Alexander



At Canisius College, it was a common sight to see the 6 ft. 7 in. Alexander rise above the competition.



Clyde Alexander continues to stand tall as a role model to athletes and a servant to his community.

had to hold fundraisers in order to purchase uniforms for the team.

"It was a struggle to build a solid team because we didn't have as much to offer as bigger schools," said Alexander, who still managed to help several of his athletes reach higher levels in the sport.

After the basketball program closed, Alexander continued serving the college as the director of the fitness center until his retirement in 2016. Retirement did little to slow Alexander's love for the sport and desire to help students in any way he could. He continues to assist the basketball teams at Madison County Central School and

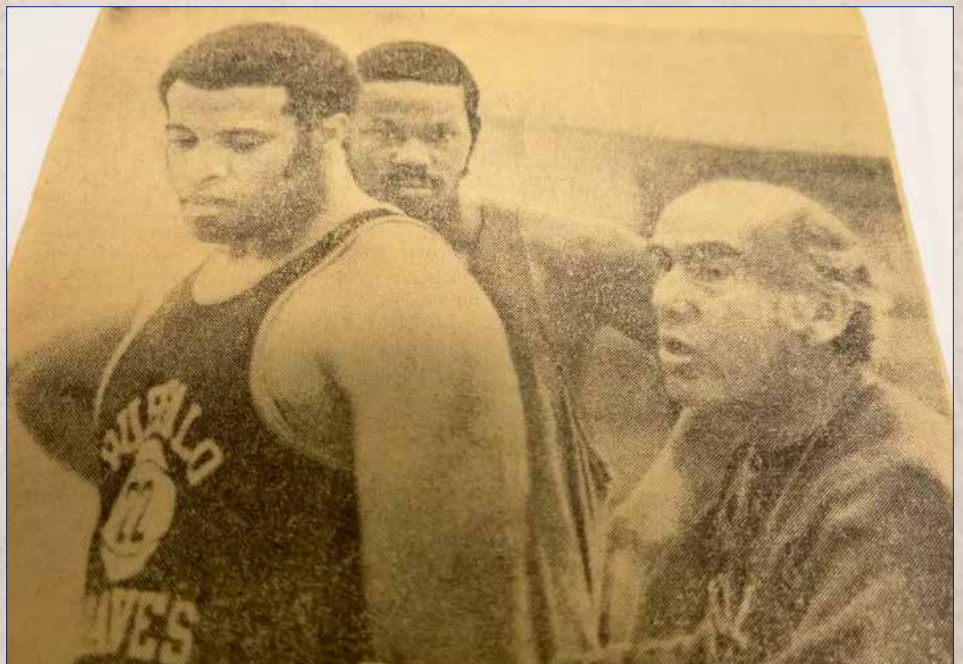
Madison County High School. He also serves as a part-time representative with the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes, assisting Area Director Steve McHargue in the Madison schools.

He is a firm believer in lending a helping hand and serving others whenever needed. Alexander is currently one of the leaders of Madison County Community Farm Share, which now provides boxes of fresh groceries to the community on a regular basis. This ministry started out on a much smaller basis about five years ago, before connecting with the Farm Share organization through his brother, Pastor Douglas Alexander. Alexander and others in the ministry have been known to regularly travel more than 300 miles in one day in order to provide extra food for hundreds of people who have benefitted from their labor of love.

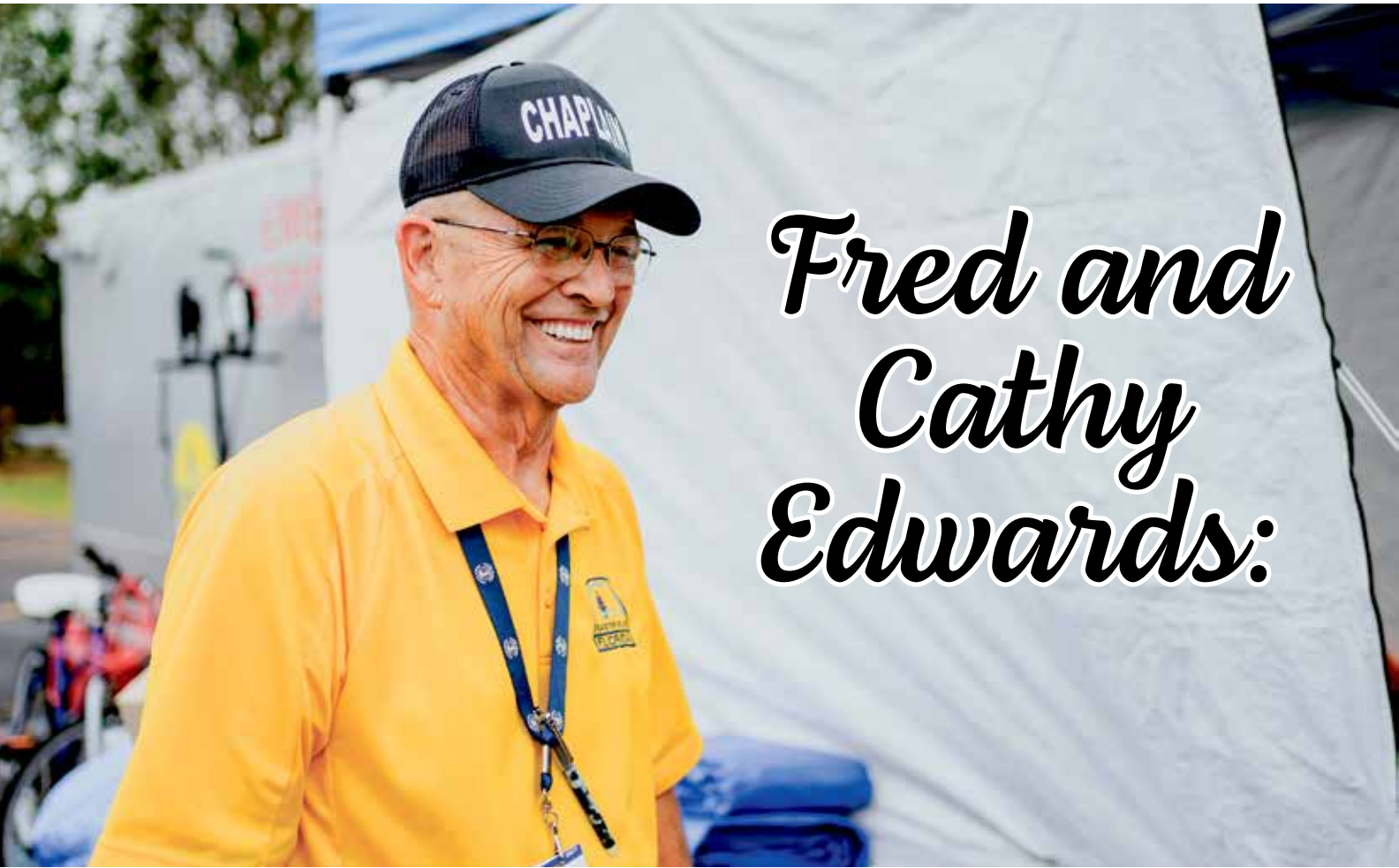
"I want to keep helping people," said Alexander. "It's a family thing, and we have great volunteers, though we could use some more men [to help with the heavy lifting]."

Besides his many acts of kindness to the community, Alexander has also served as a member of the Madison County School Board for 26 years.

Though basketball has been good to Alexander, it has mainly served as a path for his true passion of serving others and pointing them to Jesus. He has used his influence well to form better athletes and even better citizens. He is always coaching, whether it be on the court or in everyday life. He is faithful to point others to the surest path to victory, a life-long relationship with Jesus. ❖



Clyde Alexander (left) is used to demonstrate a play by Buffalo Braves Coach Jack Ramsay (right). Ramsay would later coach the Portland Trailblazers for 10 years, winning the NBA Championship in 1977.



Fred and Cathy Edwards:

9/11, NATURAL DISASTERS AND THE GRACE IN BETWEEN

Story by John Willoughby

One of life's most persistent and urgent questions is, what are you doing for others? The answer to the late Martin Luther King Jr.'s question is simple for Fred and Cathy Edwards.

Between the hurricanes, floods, and sudden structural collapses, the Edwards can be found in the mission field: not just holding out a hand for prayer, but a helping hand to feed the hungry, house the homeless and do what it takes to lift the spirits of those in the dark after everything they have has been taken from them ... all thanks to the Florida Baptist Disaster Relief and Recovery ministry.

Since 2001, Fred and Cathy have

left their North Florida home when duty calls, whether it be the flood of 2021 in Steinhatchee or the 2005 calamity that was Hurricane Katrina. Most recently, the Edwards assisted in a 2021 Metairie mission, after Hurricane Ida struck.

A branch of the Southern Baptist Convention (whose disaster relief ministry is the third largest in the country), the Florida Baptist Disaster Relief has allowed Florida residents to act swiftly and effectively as Christ did to help people.

The mission of the ministry is to "make a difference" in times of disaster by connecting Florida Baptist Churches and Associations to people and communities impacted by disaster and by responding

with help, healing and hope that demonstrates and shares the love of Christ.

Both Fred and Cathy play a role in the disaster relief-based ministry: Fred as a spiritual care and chaplaincy coordinator and Cathy in an administrative and training capacity. Others volunteer in the North Florida area, known as Region Two to the ministry, including John Sunderland of Perry (operations specialist manager) and J.D. James.

Although many jobs start off slowly for new employees, this wasn't necessarily the case for Fred as he anticipated his first call to action. Fred was a full-time pastor at Suwannee Baptist Church in Suwannee, Fla., in 2001, when he signed up for the

Florida Baptist Disaster Relief organization. He had regularly attended Florida Baptist Conventions and meetings, and was intrigued by the thought of assisting others in the midst of disaster.



“When we moved to Suwannee [in 1995], the Storm of the Century was still fresh on everybody’s mind,” Fred noted. “Flooding was a big thing, being on the coast.”

In June, his training commenced. “I didn’t really know what would happen after that, other than I just knew that if there was a problem, they went and helped,” he stated.

By the end of September, he found himself in a hotel on Times Square while the world continued to process what remains the most devastating terrorist attack on American soil to this day: the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centers.

Weeks after the Twin Towers fell, covering blocks among blocks of concrete, steel and glass structures with ash and soot, Fred worked one block from the wreckage, cooking and feeding those with boots on the ground, removing debris and those who perished. He worked from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.

“We had to go through six armed-guard checkpoints. They would check us, and they’d check the vehicles we were in,” Fred explained. “We worked with the Salvation Army at that time, feeding people 24 hours a day. At about three o’clock in the morning, when we would get caught up enough in the cooking, we could go down to Ground Zero. One edge of the street just dropped off into the hole. At the other edge of the street, we had a canteen set up. We had drinks and snacks, over-the-counter medicines ... anything anybody would need.

“You stand there on the edge of that road, and it just drops off. There were just literal roads down there. It almost looked like Tonka toys down there. Watching those big cranes, they’d get ahold of them

beams and some of those things would still be glowing orange. You just smelled that stench. It just smelled like death. It was something you just didn’t forget.”

One of Fred’s most memorable moments of his time at Ground Zero, he recalls, was meeting a man by the nickname of “Big Frank.” Frank Silecchia discovered the 20-foot cross of two steel beams while working on the clearing debris.

“On one arm of that, there was a fireman’s jacket that had been melted to the [steel]. His jacket was still hanging on the edge of that cross,” Fred added, noting the big stature of Silecchia.

Since then, Fred’s desire to serve with the Florida Baptist Disaster Relief has been solidified. “It was something; it was a very memorable experience,” he states.

Because a majority of their missions occur during hurricanes in the middle of the year, trainings are held in the first half of the year when there’s hardly any activity. “The first day of training is kind of like drinking water out of a fire hydrant,” Fred says jokingly. “But we try to give enough information that when you leave there, you know who we are and what we’re about.”



There are a wide-variety of options to choose from as far as service goes. Among them are the feeding ministry, clean-up and recovery, chaplaincy, temporary child care, on-site management, administration, logistics, and communication and technology.

“What we do is a lot more than taking trees off of houses or even handing out a hot meal,” Fred noted. “We use disaster relief as a tool, if you will, to be able to

reach people and show them the love of Jesus. If they feel that and begin to ask questions, then we certainly will be able to tell them about that.”

In their last call-out to Louisiana, Fred recalled a science teacher who approached Fred and a chaplain, commenting on how amazing it was that a group such as Florida Baptist Disaster Relief would just come and help for nothing.

“We just told him that’s sort of what Jesus did for all of us,” Fred explained. “We prayed with him [and] he accepted the Lord. It’s not an unusual thing ... We were there for 29 days, and I think on that particular callout, we had 37 instances of where that sort of thing happened.”

“They can’t understand why you’re doing it for free. You can tell them why.”

Much of their actions as an organization are swift, beginning as soon as officials allow them to proceed. He recalled responding on a whim to the apartment building collapse in Surfside, Fla., just hours after it occurred and being allowed to minister to those in need thanks to proper credentials. “The day [officials] let us in, we can move our stuff in, set up and go to

work,” Fred added.

According to Florida Baptist Disaster Relief, the organization seeks to involve every church and member in this ministry. The next training for Region Two will be held on Saturday, May 21, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Immanuel Baptist Church, located at 2351 Mahan Dr., in Tallahassee, Fla. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.

For more information about the organization, visit flbaptist.org. ❖





Bobby Thigpen (right) shares a laugh with Hall of Famer Carlton Fisk (left) during a White Sox practice.

Bobby Thigpen:

MAKING A NAME

Story by Rick Patrick

Photos Courtesy of Bobby Thigpen and the Chicago White Sox

The Thigpen name is not an unusual one in the Madison County/Jefferson County area. In fact, it is a rather common name. In the late 80s and early 90s, the name Thigpen became a common name among White Sox fans on the south side of Chicago, thanks to Bobby Thigpen, a young man who was a three-sport star athlete and member of the Class of 1981 at Aucilla Christian Academy (ACA).

Although he excelled at football and basketball, it was on the baseball diamond that he truly found his place. At the time, he played shortstop for the Warriors and helped lead the team to the 1981 Class 1A State Title game.

After high school, Thigpen went on to play baseball for Seminole Community College, where he caught the eye of Coach Ron Polk, of Mississippi State University (MSU). Coach Polk offered Thigpen a scholarship, and Thigpen became a member of a Bulldog baseball program that would play in the 1985 College World Series and feature future Major League players Will Clark, Jeff Brantley

and Rafael Palmeiro. Starkville seemed to be a good fit for Thigpen, who enjoyed the small town atmosphere of the eastern Mississippi town. "Starkville was awesome," said Thigpen in a later interview with Steve Robertson of *Gene's Page.com*. "I am from a very small town in North Florida, so it felt like being back home. The people were so great. It made a very easy adjustment for me. That's one of the reasons I like it so much. The people acted and talked like all of the people from my home town. All of these years later, I know I made the right decision by going to Mississippi State. It's like going home for me." Mississippi State has returned that gratitude to Thigpen by naming him to the Ron Polk Ring of Honor. In September of 2021, Thigpen

was also named to the MSU Hall of Fame Class of 2021. "I will be honest, I never expected all of this coming from where I came from," said Thigpen. "Who would have thought that a kid who grew up by the railroad crossing in Aucilla, Fla. would have his name recognized by a school like Mississippi State. I would have never imagined that was ever going to happen."

Thigpen was drafted by the Chicago White Sox in the 1985 amateur draft. After spending time playing in Omaha, Neb., in the minor leagues, he made his Major League Baseball debut on Aug. 6, 1986, with the White Sox. He played for the White Sox from 1986 to 1993, when he was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies. While with the Phillies, he appeared in two World Series



games, but injuries had greatly affected his game. In 1994, he spent a brief time with the Seattle Mariners. Thigpen's final Major League Baseball game was on April 27, 1994. He later played a two-year, 58-game, stint in Japan for the Fukuoka Daiei Hawks.

In 1990, Thigpen had what was probably the peak year of his near eight-year career in the Big Leagues. In May of 1990, he was named the American League Pitcher of the Month. He was also voted to represent the American League in the 1990 All-Star game. In 1990, he received the American League Relief Man Award after setting the single-season record of 57 saves that year. That record stood for 18 years, until 2008, when Francisco Rodriguez saved 62 games in 2008. Four times, Thigpen had at least 30 saves in a single season, from 1988 through 1991.

Over his Major League Baseball career, Thigpen had an Earned Run Average (ERA)

of 3.43, with 201 saves, 376 strike-outs and 238 walked batters. Many of the top hitters of the time had trouble hitting against Thigpen. Notably, George Brett, the Kansas City Royals great, only went one-for-15 for a .067 batting average against Thigpen. Another Hall of Famer, Cal Ripkin, Jr., only managed four base hits in 19 at-bats for a meager .211 batting average when facing Thigpen. Kirby Puckett also struggled at the dish against Thigpen, going two-for-13 for a .154 average. Five Hall of Fame hitters have a combined 12 hits in 75 at-bats during their careers for a batting average of .160.

Since the close of Thigpen's playing career, he has coached and managed for the White Sox organization. In 2007 and 2008, he managed the Bristol White Sox, in the Appalachian League. In 2013, he was named bullpen coach of the White Sox until the close of the 2016 season.

Thigpen retired from baseball in 2016. Since then



he has enjoyed hunting, fishing and spending time with family. He currently lives in the Tampa, Fla. area. "It was a great time," said Thigpen of his baseball career. "I enjoyed the game and all the people I was able to meet. Now, I especially enjoy the time I can spend with my grandchildren." He still

frequently visits the Jefferson County area, as well as his "college home" of Starkville, Miss.

Although there are many Thigpens in our immediate area, if you ask any White Sox fan on the south side of Chicago, they will likely come up with just one name, Bobby. ❖



- 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



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.

- 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.

Quality Focused Care, One Resident at a Time!

www.madisonhealthand rehab.com



WATER MELON FESTIVAL

A Slice of the Good Life



**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

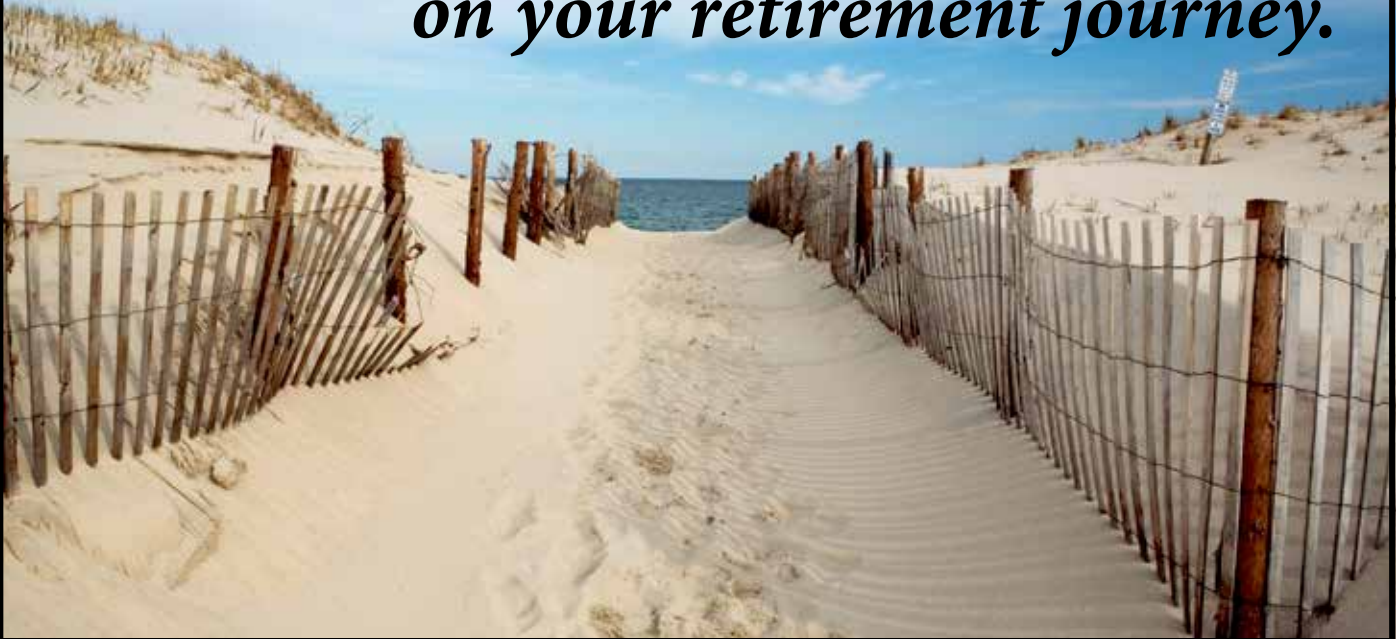
**JUNE
18**

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



Here to guide you along the way,
on your retirement journey.



Professional financial advice designed to
help you achieve your financial and lifetime goals.



J. Byron Poore II, *Financial Planner*

The Retirement Services Center
Located at Madison County Community Bank
301 E. Base Street
Madison, FL 32340

850-253-6939
byronpoore@mccbflorida.com
www.mccbretirement.com

Securities offered through Securities America, Inc., Member FINRA/SIPC. Advisory Services offered through Securities America Advisors, Inc. The Retirement Services Center, Madison County Community Bank and Securities America are separate companies. • **Not FDIC Insured • No Bank Guarantees • May Lose Value • Not a Deposit and Not Insured by any Government Agency**



Hunter Fain (center) stands with Big Bend Technical College welding instructors Tim Brown (left) and Cecil Gainey (right) after placing second nationally in a SkillsUSA national welding competition. Photo courtesy of Perry Newspapers

WELDING A FUTURE

Story by John Willoughby

For a number of North Floridians, welding is more than just a hobby or a career — the art of welding is a lifestyle. After less than a year of being on the job and placing nationally in a skills-based competition, one Mayo young man knows what it means to live by the welding rod.

Hunter Fain, a 2021 graduate of Big Bend Technical's welding program, is now one of more than about 400,000 certified welders in the country. Currently preparing for work in a Nuclear Power Plant in North Carolina, Fain has proven himself up to the task, by being named a top finisher in the SkillsUSA Welding Championship.

Winning the silver medal for placing second nationally, Fain competed in the summer of 2021, just before concluding his post-secondary with Big Bend Technical College. The announcement confirmed that his work in the local, district and state-wide qualifying periods were not in vain.

Fain and another student, who did not place in their respective high school division, were among hundreds across 30 states, vying for the goods.

"Each year, students from local high school and post-secondary welding programs compete in SkillsUSA competitions," said Big Bend Technical College Director Jodi Tillman in a Perry Newspaper article.

"Contestants participate in a timed-competition designed to test their ability to use various welding tools and processes.

These include weld-measuring gauges, oxy-fuel and plasma arc cutting processes, flux core arc welding, gas metal arc welding, gas tungsten arc welding, and shielded metal arc welding," Tillman stated.

"Both students represented their school, community and state exceptionally well," she concluded.

Born in Sarasota, Hunter grew up in a traveling family, but never gave up his time in school for the family business. Larry and Tabby Fain, Hunter's parents, often spent time on the road at fairs, where the neon lights shone bright, overseeing as many as 15 concession stands at any given event.

Typically, Hunter would spend his summer months in Ohio or Pennsylvania. When school was in session, however, his grandfather, who knew the art of welding, would care for him while his parents were away taking care of business. Occasionally, on the weekends and holiday breaks, he would give a helping hand at local fairs.

While attending Lafayette High School — before graduating in 2020 — Hunter took part in a school field trip to the Perry-based college. Recalling that his grandfather knew the art of welding, and not really knowing what he wanted to do after his time in high school was up, he signed up for the class.

And so it began. He drove back and forth from Mayo to Perry for a year and a half, starting the winter before high school graduation, learning MIG, TIG and stick-and-rod welding, which afforded him the

opportunity to earn such a distinguishing honor.

Fain credits his exceptional effort to his success. "Put your mind to it," he stated, when asked about giving advice to others who are looking into a like-minded career.

Could it have come at a better time? With 2020 being plagued by the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, his family's fair food and beverage business was nonetheless impacted by the shutdowns and mandates. He credits CareerSource for assisting in paying for Big Bend Technical College tuition.

Fain notes that should his first-place counterpart choose not to compete on the international stage, he will take the opportunity to compete for the world title.

On any job, welders may study blueprints, monitor the process to avoid overheating, maintain equipment and/or calculate dimensions related to a project. Welding is more skills-involved than one may think. Attention to detail and manual dexterity are just one of the many qualities needed to become successful in the trade.

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job outlook for the next eight years predicts an eight percent employment increase in the trade, an on-average rate. Yearly, almost 49,200 openings for not only welders, but cutters, solderers and brazers give the opportunity for newly-certified welders the chance to live life to the fullest.❖



VISIT *MADISON*

Our Attraction is Only Natural

Florida's Best Small Town

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

Walt's



Jeep

DODGE



Fire Up Your Summer!



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

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