

# The Front Porch

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

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023

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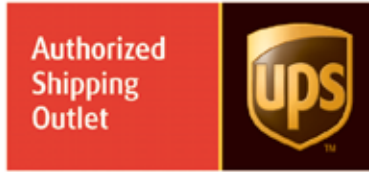
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Keeping Historic Venue Lively

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# The Front Porch

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# The Front Porch

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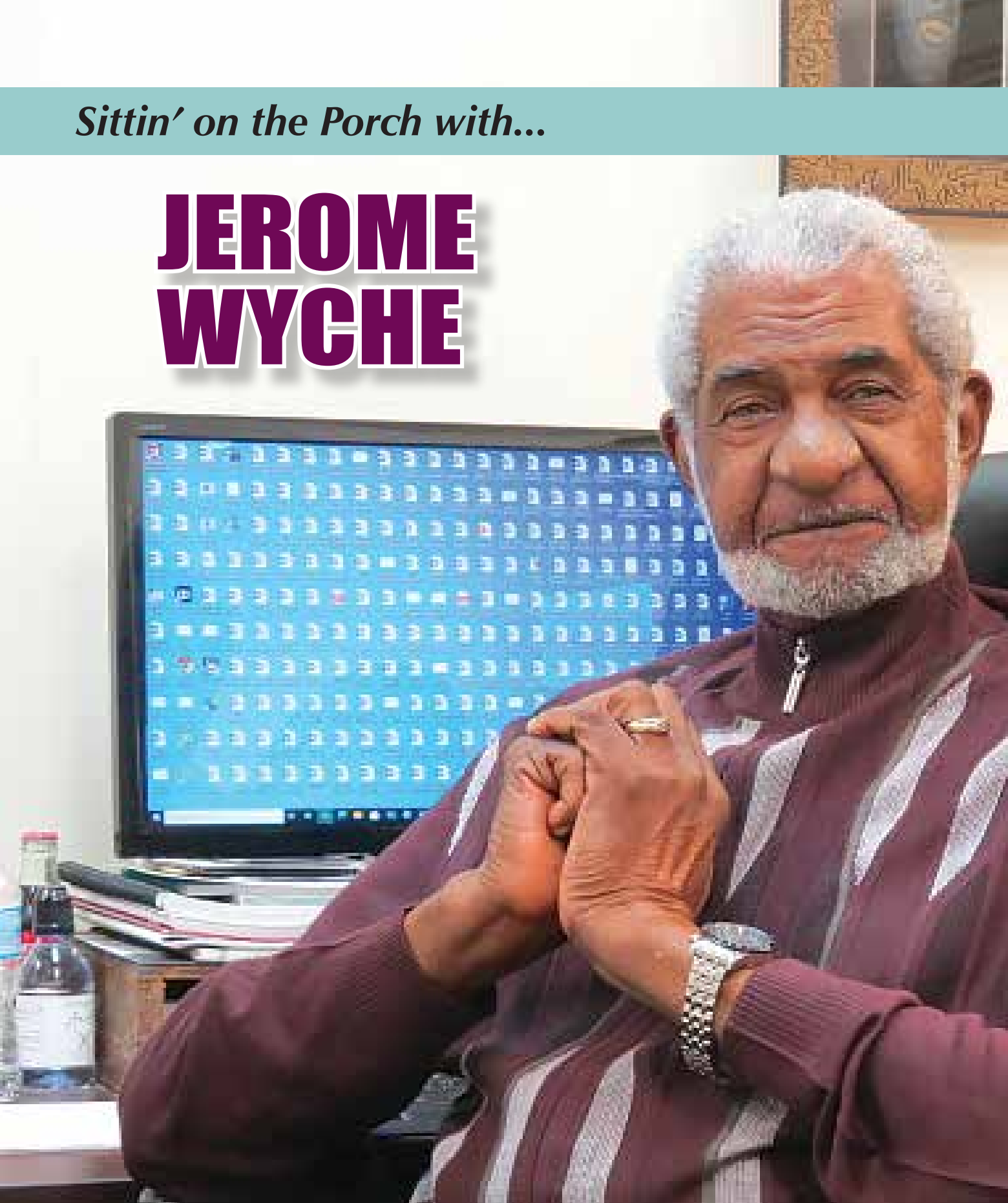


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*Sittin' on the Porch with...*

# JEROME WYCHE





### Story and Photograph by Mickey Starling

Jerome Wyche is a Madison native who returned to his hometown after a 21-year career in the United States Air Force and 12 years working as a high school teacher and administrator in Phoenix, Az. Throughout his vocational years, Wyche learned the valuable lesson that “you can always learn from others.”

Learning from and serving others seems to run deep in Wyche’s blood. His dedication to treating others with fairness and dignity served him well while working as the head of Madison County’s Solid Waste and Recycling department, a job he held for over a decade.

In 2018, Wyche took the reins of Madison’s City Manager’s position, quickly making his employees and associates feel appreciated for their hard work.

“It’s important to stay aware of the inter-connectedness we all share with each other,” said Wyche. “It’s the only way we can succeed and help others to do the same. Unity is important.”

Though Wyche is a peacemaker at heart, he has endured plenty of conflict through various problems that have arisen, as well as his share of personal tragedies. However, he is quick to point out that there is always room for hope.

“No matter what comes, you always have a choice,” reminds Wyche. “I choose to avoid negativity and surround myself with positive people. Regardless of the obstacles in life, it is important to me that I know who I am and whom I belong to.”

Wyche’s faith and sense of identity have been a central theme in his life for decades. For more than 20 years, he has been a faithful member of Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, where he teaches Sunday school and serves as president of the Stewards Board.

“I’m very proud of what we do in the community,” said Wyche. “One of my favorite activities is providing fully prepared meals for families during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.”

In many ways, the faith that flourishes throughout the community has helped define Wyche, strengthen his character and fuel his desire to always do the right thing for others.

“Madison is small and friendly,” Wyche proudly boasted with a look of deep appreciation. “There is no relationship building in a large city. Here, we have the flavor of roots.”

Although retirement may be in Wyche’s near future, he has no plans to stop looking for ways to help people, which is something he encourages everyone to do.

“We should all want to help others that are less fortunate than we are,” said Wyche. “You can’t save everybody, but you should do what you can.”

When time allows, Wyche and his wife of 30 years, Cora, enjoy family time and traveling.

“We’ve had a great life together,” reflects Wyche. “She is a solid pillar of support. She never gets excited about anything.”

Wyche, however, does get excited every time there is breaking news on TV.

“I’m definitely a news freak,” admits Wyche. “I like to stay informed, but, I also love watching westerns and history-based or action movies. My time in the Air Force probably draws me to those things.”

As the sun sets in the western sky over Wyche’s front porch, he hopes that 2023 will see people returning to have kind spirits and hearts of compassion for all of mankind.

“Our lives are built on hope,” said Wyche. “We can never dismiss it.” Though he is certain that life will continue to have its share of problems, a confident grin slowly widens across his face as he says, “Remember, no matter what you deal with, you always have a choice.” ■



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# Monticello



## KEEPING THE HISTO

### Sponsored Content

by Laura Young

*Photographs Courtesy of  
Monticello Opera House*

It's showtime! You cross in front of the Jefferson County Courthouse to face an impressive, 130-year-old redbrick building. Two curved steps lead you through a towering, stained-glass-rimmed wooden doorway into the historic Monticello Opera House.

Your ticket gets you the evening's

program from a smiling attendant, and you follow the flow of show-goers up the staircase to the second story theater, your feet stepping on wooden risers worn smooth and polished by generations of feet.

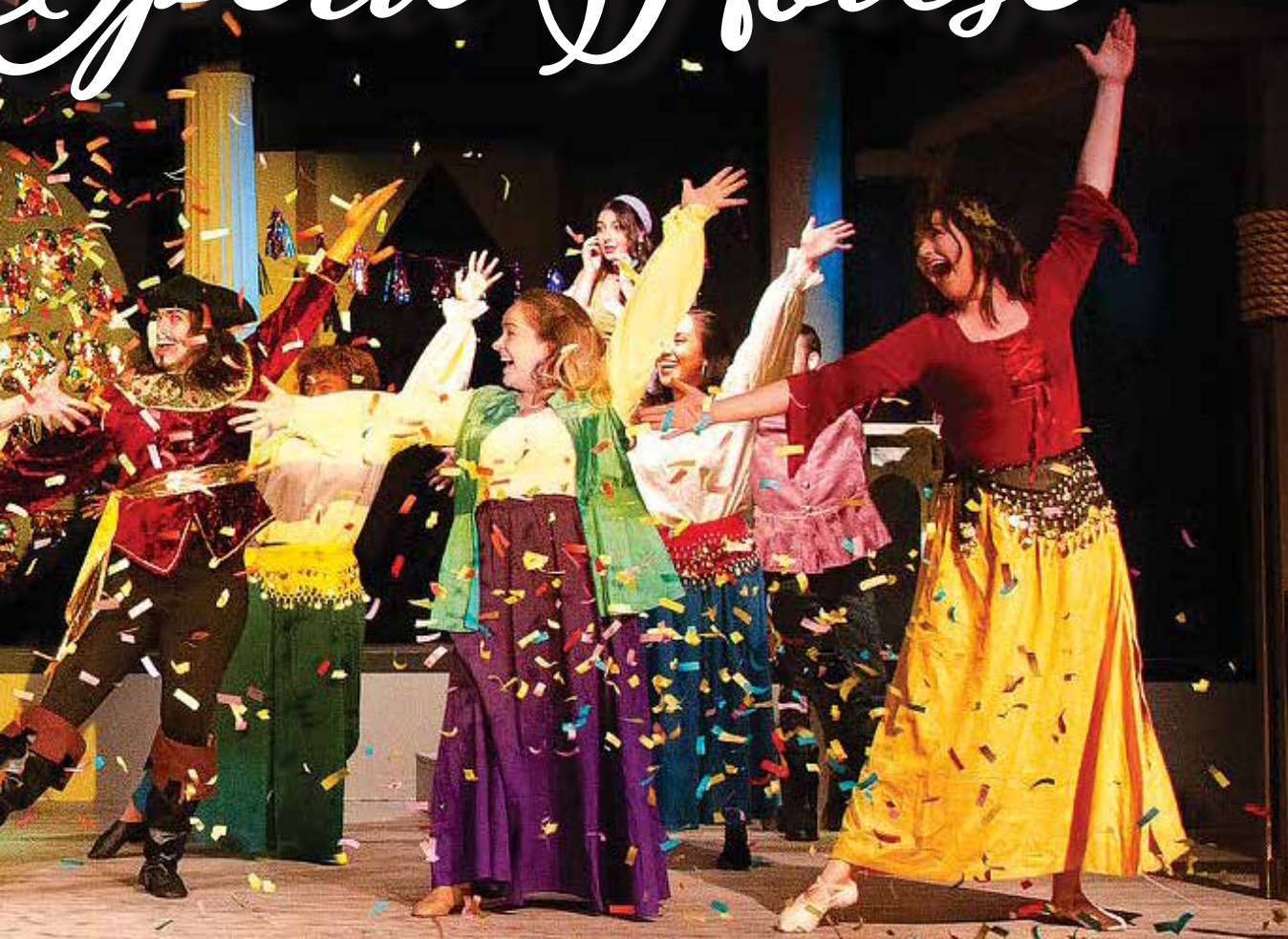
You settle into one of the 300 seats that slope down toward an illuminated, velvety red curtain. From the orchestra pit, music rises to fill the room. The house lights fade, the curtain sweeps aside, and the stage comes to life.

The event you've chosen might be a

favorite musical, a dance performance, audience-participation murder mystery, an educational forum, a live concert, a gripping drama, a comedy show, a holiday sing-along, a literary reading, a film screening or a children's theater production. Whatever ticket you hold, the Monticello Opera House (MOH) will bring the show to you like no other venue can. Steeped in history, beautifully constructed with Romanesque Revival features, shaped for near-perfect acoustics and drawing in



# Opera House



## ORIC VENUE LIVELY

diverse performers from across the arts – the MOH stands today as a proud partner in North Florida’s thriving community arts scene.

When the Opera House was built in 1890 by John H. Perkins, Monticello was a frontier town and winter resort. The theater portion of the building – the largest stage in the region at the time – brought live entertainment to northern visitors who came south to breathe the pine-scented air and hunt quail. Perkins ran three businesses

in the first-floor bays: a general store and sewing machine shop; a hardware store; and a farm implement supply store. In the area behind the building, Perkins built a stable where horses, mules and wagons were sold.

Unfortunately, when the rail lines that had brought tourists to Monticello shifted in the early 1900s, visitation to the theater plummeted, and Perkins discontinued live performances. After a subsequent movie theater venture failed,

the upstairs auditorium fell into disuse, although businesses continued to operate in the downstairs bays. Those eventually flourished as well, and in 1972 the Opera House was slated for demolition to make way for a gas station.

Thankfully, a group of concerned citizens organized a movement to save the building. They secured significant funding from the state and a number of private donors, enabling the renovation of the structure. By the 1980’s, live performances





began again in the historic theater. Today, MOH thrives as one of the oldest surviving performing arts venues in the state, a cornerstone building in the Monticello Historic District and an economic engine for Monticello and Jefferson County.

The upstairs theater offers a full season of performances every year, and the downstairs space hosts a wide range of events, from dinner theater to academic conferences, from wedding receptions to civic group meetings, from Watermelon Festival barbecues to artifact exhibits. The area out back, where wagons and mules once stood, is today a landscaped garden for outdoor events.

Artistic creativity flourishes in an environment that welcomes different ideas, perspectives and backgrounds. At the MOH, the performing arts and educational programs not only embrace the diversity of our local community but also bring in traveling shows that enrich our understanding of cultures in the wider world, from Egyptian musicians to Chinese calligraphers to Irish dancers to Hispanic theater.

MOH operates as a non-profit organization and is the designated Local Arts Agency for Jefferson County. Its ever widening area of influence reaches well beyond Monticello now, and makes it an emerging regional center for the performing arts impacting a 16-county area in North Florida and South Georgia. In 2019, it was named Best Entertainment Venue by *Tallahassee Magazine*. And its mission – to celebrate and preserve history, inspire cultural and artistic excellence, and advance educational opportunities region-wide – drives it to present a dazzling array of live production opportunities every



season.

The current executive director of the MOH, Michael Herrin, keeps it all going and moving forward with the support of many volunteers and the MOH Board of Directors. Herrin recruits talent and crews for shows, coordinates productions, manages grant funding, serves as the point person for ongoing restoration projects and steers advertising. His efforts ensure that the people who live in and visit the Big Bend area experience the power of live performance and art in general, as forms of self expression, historic documentation and communication of ideas that can change the world. It's a demanding job!

Each year, the MOH provides at least four local stage productions, six concerts, a children's theater production, two community workshops, two dinner theater productions, and 16 partner events. MOH has teamed up with the Opera House Stage Company for more than 20 years to present community theater productions. It also partners with Monticello Acting and Dance Company (MADCo) to develop musical theater programming including large productions with cast members of all ages and abilities. In association with FSU's Opening Nights, MOH provides concerts for students. It works with the Southern Music Rising, North Florida Bluegrass Association and From the Heart Studio to support local music folkways and festivals. By coordinating with local Economic Development Councils,



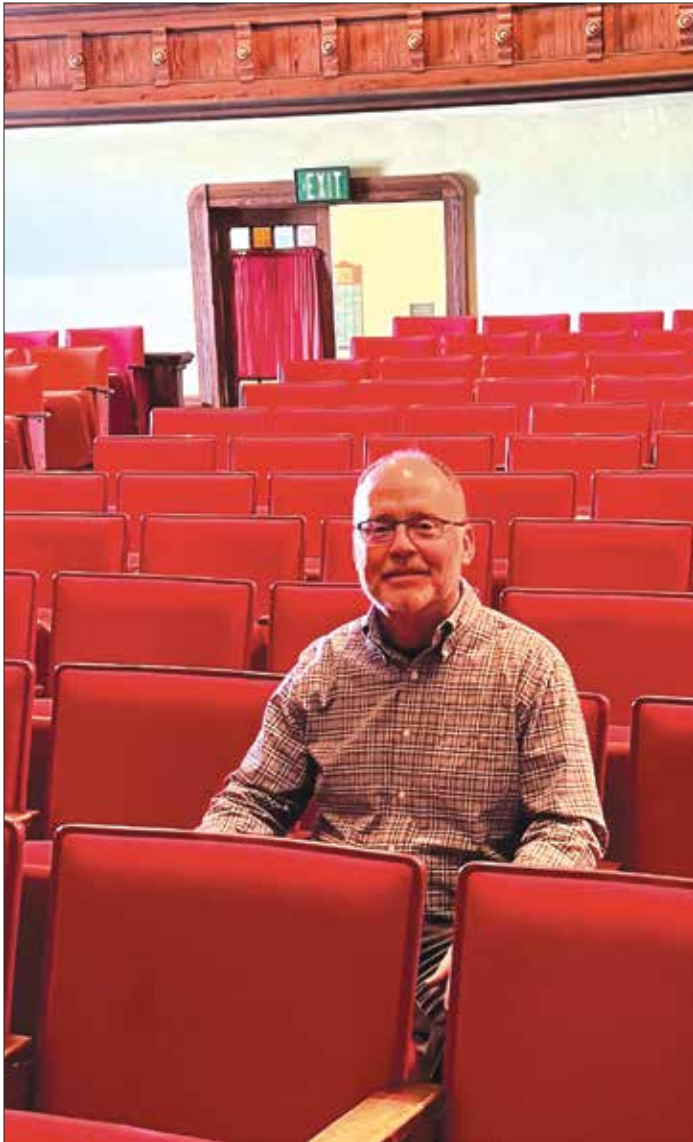
Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Development Councils, the MOH has a hand in large-scale public events, such as the Watermelon Festival (frequented by more than 22,000 visitors). Education partnerships for informative programs include the Florida Department of Health, Students Working Against Tobacco, Healthy Futures Through Arts, the Aucilla Research Institute, and local schools.

MOH clearly provides a stunning venue for local performers and audience members, but its influence ripples out to local businesses, restaurants and lodging establishments that benefit as people come to town for a show. The structure sits central to a historic downtown filled with antique shops, unique eateries and gift boutiques that all work together as an organically integrated destination. In this way, MOH is a reminder of the strength of Florida's past and how this past can create a dynamic









*MOH Executive Director Michael Herrin recruits talent and crews for shows, coordinates productions, manages grant funding, serves as the point person for ongoing restoration projects and steers advertising.*

cultural future. Locals cherish the MOH because it represents an era of prosperity in North Florida and an architectural grandeur that is difficult to match today, even with modern materials. Jefferson County residents are always ready to share this jewel with visitors who come for the arts.

To ensure that the MOH continues its important role in providing cultural events in North Florida, its Board of Directors has overseen ongoing capital restoration projects. The funds – raised through donations, fund raisers, specific event revenue, corporate sponsorships and Division of Historical Resources grants – support the board’s efforts to preserve the building for generations to come.

The MOH website, [monticellooperahouse.org](http://monticellooperahouse.org), will link you to your tickets for the next show! For further involvement, the site explains options for renting the space for your own event and outlines how to become a member or sponsor. ■

**MOH 2023**  
**SEASON**

**BLITHE SPIRIT**  
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THE DIARY OF  
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**MURDER MYSTERY**  
*Dinner Theater*  
March 24-April 15, 2023


**HOT DOGS, COOL CATS**  
with The Monticello Acting & Dance Company  
June 13-17, 2023

**GAELIC STORM**  
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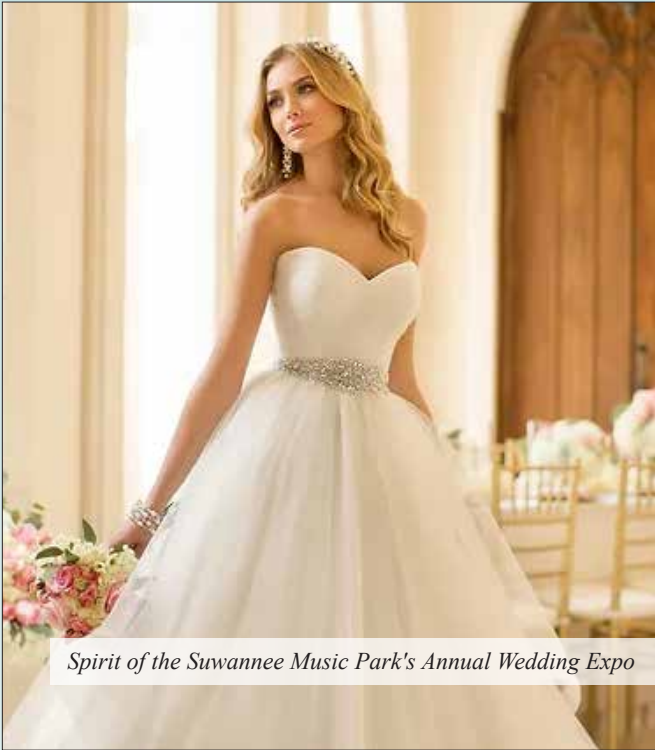
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# WHAT'S HAPPENING



*Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park's Annual Wedding Expo*

## JANUARY

### JANUARY 7

#### **Second Annual Suwannee Valley Motorsports Expo**

This event features a consignment racing auction, a trade show and a car show at the Suwannee County Fairgrounds, 1302 11<sup>th</sup> St. SW, in Live Oak. Gates open at 8 a.m., and the auction will begin at 9 a.m. Clean up your shop and find great deals on the parts you need! An assortment of asphalt/dirt track parts, street racing parts, vintage parts, tools and more will be available. Call Buzzy Berry at (407) 832-5237 for more information or to reserve your lot numbers.

### JANUARY 7 – FEBRUARY 1

#### **“Fiber-Acababra: The Magic of Fiber” Exhibit**

The Jefferson Arts Gallery, 575 West Washington St., Monticello, Fla., is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and by appointment by calling (850) 997-3311.

### JANUARY 8

#### **Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park's Annual Wedding Expo**

Brides and grooms-to-be can mingle with area professionals who provide wedding services such as photography, catering, limousine rental, music, floral arrangements, catering and all of the other important details to make their big day special. The event will be held at 1 p.m. at the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park, located at 3076 95th Dr., in Live Oak.



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*Perry Chocolate Crawl*

# WHAT'S HAPPENING

## FEBRUARY

### FEBRUARY 8-15

#### **Perry Chocolate Crawl**

Chocolate lovers are invited to shop in Perry, Fla., the week of Valentine's Day and sample chocolate along the way in 15 shops along Byron Butler Parkway, Jefferson Street, Washington Street, Main Street and Green Street. For a full listing of participating businesses, contact the Taylor County Chamber of Commerce at (850) 584-5366.

### FEBRUARY 17-19

#### **Steinhatchee Fiddler Crab Festival**

Enjoy fiddler crab races, live music, a fishing tournament, car show, boat show, chili cook-off and more. For more information, contact the Steinhatchee River Chamber of Commerce at (352) 356-8185.

### FEBRUARY 18

#### **Madison Chili and Beerfest**

1 – 7 p.m. at Lanier Field, 281 N.W. Crane Ave., Madison, Fla. To participate as a vendor or chili cook, call Forgotten Coast K-9 at (850) 508-7386 or the Madison County Chamber of Commerce at (850) 973-2788. General Admission tickets are available at the gate. For \$5 you can sample all the chili and vote on your favorite. For \$25 you can sample all the beer and chili plus vote on your favorite.

### FEBRUARY 18

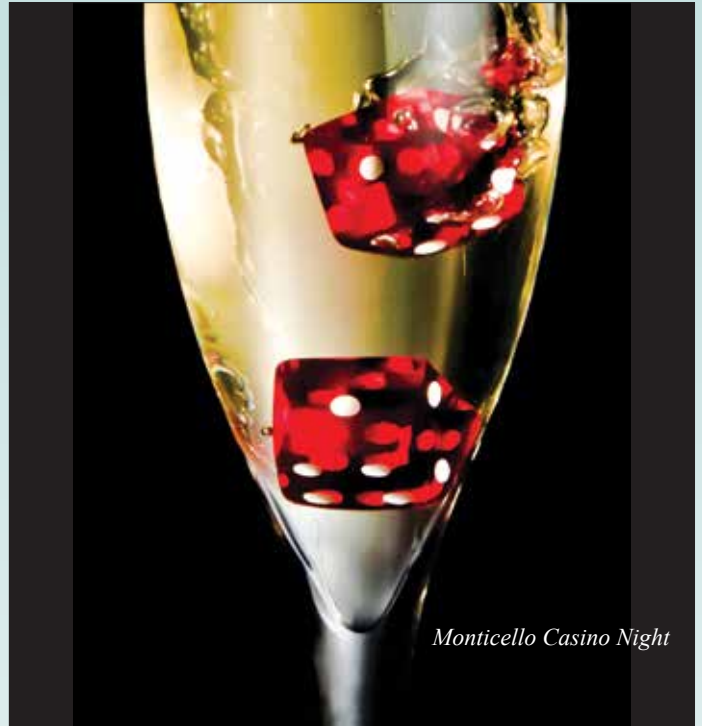
#### **Monticello Casino Night**

Enjoy a Texas Hold 'Em Poker Tournament at Jefferson Country Club, 748 Boston Hwy., Monticello, Fla. For more information, contact the Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce at (850) 997-5552.

### FEBRUARY 25-26

#### **Live Oak's Third Annual Strawberry Fest**

Two full days of family fun and festivities! Enjoy Plant City strawberries, arts and crafts, a classic car show, pony rides, face painting and so much more. Admission is \$6, but kids ages two and under get in for free. The event will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Suwannee County Fairgrounds, 1302 11<sup>th</sup> St. SW, in Live Oak.



*Monticello Casino Night*

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*Suwannee Valley Motorsports Expo*



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*Steps toward  
a new normal*

# **ADDISON BETHEA**

*Addison poses in the very same ShandsCair helicopter that provided the ride to TMH that saved her life, next to the stretcher that carried her.*



*If this young woman ever wants to see what courage and strength look like, all she has to do is look in the mirror.*

#### **Story by Heather Ainsley**

*Photographs Courtesy of the Bethea Family*

“Hey turd! You can’t say ‘bye?” was the last playful text exchange between a father and his teenage daughter before the harrowing events of Thursday, June 30, 2022. Shane Bethea watched from the seat of his tractor as his daughter pulled away from the house in her vehicle, having forgotten to say goodbye before she left for the day.

Seventeen-year-old Addison Bethea quickly responded to her father’s text before continuing down the drive, eager for a fun day scalloping with her brother and some friends out on the waters near Keaton Beach and Steinhatchee. In an area known to locals as “Big Grassy Island,” young Addison had no way of knowing that she would soon be struggling for her life against the massive jaws of a nine-foot shark.

Although sharks are a predominant member of the ocean’s ecosystem, and can be seen in most oceanic habitats, an encounter with an animal of this size is exceptionally uncommon. Even so, to have such a rare encounter be a violent one is almost unheard of, especially for the area. In fact, the odds of being bitten by a shark are just one in nearly four million, and out of more than 500 species of sharks found in the world’s oceans, only about 30



*Addison maintains an active, healthy lifestyle, and still enjoys many of the physical activities that she enjoyed before her encounter with the shark that resulted in the loss of her right leg.*

species have been reported as ever having bitten a human. Of these 30, only about a dozen species are considered particularly dangerous when encountered. The attack on this small-framed teenager by the nine-foot-long predator was the first shark attack ever recorded in Taylor County history.

Addison describes the shark attack itself as strangely painless. As the large ocean predator bit down on her leg, she felt no pain, only a strong tugging sensation. Only when she reached into the mouth of the animal to try and pull her leg free did she feel the expected sting of razor-sharp teeth.

“It was weird,” she reflects. “The attack itself was obviously shocking. The feeling of the bite, you couldn’t actually feel... it was more like tugs, without pain.”

These tugs were the start of a death-defying battle for her life that would soon be followed by weeks of surgeries and months of recovery for the young high school student.

Addison says that while it was her first time going out scalloping that year, she had spent much of the summer months out on the boat, enjoying the cool, salty waters of the Gulf almost daily. But even with this frequency of time spent out on the water, Addison says she had never seen any signs of a shark as large as the one that attacked



*Addison working on the extension of her new thigh, which has to be reconstructed using muscles from her lower leg. Being able to extend her thigh was a crucial step toward being able to walk with a prosthetic later.*

her.

“Me and my friends would sometimes see little ones, maybe about four feet long, at sunset,” Addison admits, thinking back, “but we definitely never saw a shark that big!”

Her father Shane remembers getting the chilling call that fateful afternoon.

“I wasn’t there when it happened,” recalls Shane. “I was actually still at home, on the tractor. One of my cousins called me, because Addison’s brother’s roommate was with them, and he didn’t have my cell phone number. He did have my cousin’s number, so he called my cousin, and my cousin called me. So I sort of heard it down the line.”

The cousin inquired if Shane had spoken to Rhett, Addison’s brother, who had been with her on the scalloping trip. Shane replied that, no, other than knowing that the siblings had gone scalloping together, he hadn’t heard anything. It was then that his cousin told Shane that he needed to get to the hospital in Tallahassee as soon as possible, because Addison had been bitten by a shark.

“I asked him, you know, ‘how bad is it?’ because, you never know,” said Shane. “Was it a nip, or was it, you know, missing body parts, was it death? Because most of the time, sharks will bite and then figure





*Addison and her friends enjoyed attending their Homecoming celebration at Taylor County High School.*

out, 'oh crap, I'm not supposed to eat this,' and release."

Shane continued, "He said, 'I don't know. Rhett told Nathan to get ahold of me, to get ahold of you and Michelle, and tell y'all to get to TMH.'"

It was then that Shane knew the injuries had to be significant, as Michelle, Addison's mother, lived in Melbourne, Fla., a five-hour drive from the hospital where Addison was being treated, and he knew a doctor would not recommend a visit if the circumstances were not dire.

"That was a little spooky," admits Shane, "because if he's getting ahold of both of us to tell us to come to TMH, it's probably not very good."

Even with that, Shane says that he still had no way of knowing just how bad the attack had been, or the true condition of his daughter.

"Rhett called me while I was on my way to Tallahassee," says Shane, "He asked me, 'where are you?' and I think I was right before Lamont when he called, and he said, 'you need to get there now.'"

"Rhett is always very 'matter-of-fact,'" says Shane, "so when he said 'get there now,' I was like, 'uh-oh,' and I said, 'how bad is it?' and he just replied, 'Shane, it's bad.' And I said, 'like, death-bad?' and he said, 'I don't know...' So from there, right up until we talked to the surgeons, I had no



*Addison missed the first day of school in order to meet with a surgeon to work on the reconstruction of her leg after a life-changing shark attack.*

idea what to expect."

The injury to Addison's leg was extensive. The razor-sharp jaws of the massive shark had clamped down around her thigh, and the thrashing of the huge animal had torn into her leg, ripping a monumental chunk of skin and muscle away from her body and severing her femoral artery. The exposed bone was unbroken, but the sciatic nerve of the leg was severed on one end and shredded on the distal end (the part lower on her leg). The damage was consistent with the full curvature of the shark's jaws, indicating that the bite was a full-contact encounter. This grim injury resulted in significant blood loss, and young Addison was likely saved by the swift thinking and actions of her older brother.

Rhett helped his sister fight off the enormous shark and, as a certified firefighter and EMT with the Taylor County Fire Department and the City of Perry Fire Department, he knew he had to act fast if he was going to have any chance of saving his sister's life. After pulling her out of the water, he was able to staunch the flow of blood with a tourniquet.

Contrary to what we may be accustomed to seeing in the movies, there is more to this emergency action than simply tying a knot over a wound with a bit of an old t-shirt. What many people may



*Addison Bethea*

not know is that the femoral artery, when severed, often retracts back up into the leg, as there is no longer anything to hold it in place. A tourniquet's purpose is to put enough pressure on the flow of blood to stop the blood loss as much as possible, which can give an injured person precious time to reach a medical facility before they bleed out. In order to ensure that the artery was properly cinched by the tourniquet, Rhett had to find the gushing blood vessel that had retracted into Addison's leg, and pull it back out in order to properly apply the tourniquet in a way that would be effective. It was his training as an EMT that enabled this 23-year-old to execute this lifesaving maneuver.

Addison survived the initial attack, but the damage to her leg was a major concern. Doctors began to deliberate between several possible courses of action, including both amputation and reconstruction. Given the extent of the damage done to her thigh, it was determined that a complete reconstruction of her leg would not be feasible, and the family began to look realistically at a partial-amputation of her right leg, which would have to be executed in stages.

"For the very first part," says Shane, "they were trying to get a blood flow going to the lower leg, so they took a vein from her left leg, and used it to replace the artery

The Facebook page, "Fight Like Addison" is used to give regular updates for all of the people worldwide who have shown interest in following Addison's brave story of recovery.



*Addison is still able to drive, thanks to a special left-footed driving plate that was installed in her vehicle.*





*Addison rests in the hospital, surrounded by the loving support of her parents, Michelle and Shane.*

in her right.”

Shane admits that at first, they didn’t really understand why the doctors were so keen on saving the tissue of her lower leg, when the muscle and tissue from her upper leg was almost completely gone. He mentioned that they just went along with what the doctors suggested, trusting the process.

“They took all the tissue from the lower part of her leg, and they boned it out, and then they flipped it up to build that thigh back up,” continued Shane. “This was critical because, otherwise, they would have probably had to take the leg off right at the hip. It was never really in the cards to save the leg; it would never be functional, there was just so much tissue that was missing.”

The doctors revealed that, in order to even attempt to save the entire leg, they would need to not only take muscles from the other leg but also take sections of the trapezius muscles and muscles in the abdomen in order to rebuild the muscles in the leg that were lost to the shark. The doctors advised that, even then, the leg still might not be fully functional. It was decided that an amputation just above the knee would be the best course of action to give Addison as much mobility as possible, given the circumstances.

Following weeks of surgeries, bed rest and healing, Addison was permitted to go home in mid-August. After returning home, Addison continued to tackle her healing and recovery with gusto, and as soon as she could, she was maneuvering with the aid of crutches and rails to get around, determined to regain her mobility. Just seven weeks after the amputation, Addison had recovered enough that the doctors suggested she was ready for weight bearing, and talk began of getting her fitted with her new prosthetic leg. This swift turn-around in her recovery surprised everyone, including her father, who is both impressed and amazed by his daughter’s fighting spirit.

“Think about it,” says Shane. “People sprain an ankle and can’t walk for six weeks. This was seven weeks after an amputation; and not just an amputation, it was a rebuilding of the thigh and an amputation. In just seven weeks, they went ahead and casted the leg to create what is called the ‘socket,’ which is what goes over the leg for her to fit it inside of the prosthetic leg to walk.”

After being fitted with her new prosthetic leg in September, Addison began to practice walking on two legs again, slowly at first, with the aid of crutches. By the end of her first week with her new leg, the tough teenager was walking completely

on her own.

Although her swift recovery is an incredible feat, what is perhaps even more remarkable is Addison’s sheer determination and positive attitude following not just the attack, but the amputation and her road to recovery. Rather than focusing on the loss of her leg, Addison has set her mind on healing completely and tackling the challenges with a strong confidence and can-do attitude.

“It has been good coming home,” says Addison, “and getting back with my friends. It has been a little different, adjusting to learning how to do different stuff. It’s been easy, but it is sometimes hard; I’m still learning to swing [the leg] forward instead of bringing it around sideways.”

“Emotionally, sometimes it is difficult,” reveals Addison, “because the leg will never come back, but other than that, I am okay with it. Learning how to do stuff is kinda cool. And how fast I recovered was cool too. I know that God has a plan for everything, and that everything happens for a reason. It’s kind of like a butterfly effect – one thing leads to another.”

One positive thing Addison feels has resulted from this experience is being able to meet and inspire so many people.

“I have met a lot of people who have said that they are scared of the water, but that they are going to try to go back just because I want to. Or that, they try new things, just because I am so open,” Addison says, admitting that having such a profound effect on other people feels strange, because she is so young. “I’m just being myself, so I don’t see how I am an inspiration, but I do find it to be cool.”

In light of her life-changing ordeal, Addison has developed a wise approach to overcoming trauma.

“Everyone’s different, but I really do believe that everything happens for a purpose, and that you can learn from whatever you go through,” she says, adding, “and that stuff does get better.”

Being tossed into the public eye can be a jarring thing for anyone, let alone a teenager who has faced such a life-changing event. The Bethea family has been blown away by all the support and encouragement given by not just their

community but also the surrounding communities, as well as individuals from other states and even across the globe who have reached out to offer their empathy, love and support to Addison and her family. Just like with the rest of her recovery, Addison takes her newfound fame with grace and dignity.

"I think it's cool," says Addison, of touching the lives of so many people around the world. "I mean, it's a different country, and I'm just a 17-year-old from a small town."

Frequently while out with family, Addison will be stopped by people who recognize her face from the media and ask to take her photo or offer their sympathy and encouragement.

"Sometimes I can't even walk into Walmart without being noticed. Even though I am from a small town, sometimes people will be, like, staring for a while. Even though I have recovered fast, some stuff can be difficult," admits Addison. "There are a lot of things people don't really see me go through. When people only see me as somebody that got attacked by a shark, it can be kind of frustrating, because it's not like my personality trait. I'd like people to also see me for me. I don't see myself as a hero. I am not Superman or anything. I mean, it's nice when I get called someone's hero, but I am still just a kid at the end of the day."

The Bethea family says that, thankfully, almost all of the encounters with the public have been rich with support and positivity so far, and any negativity has been swiftly stamped down. Addison's strength and resilience continues to be a driving factor in her experience of being thrust into the public eye, and she enjoys meeting people who have found inspiration in her story.

"You don't ever really realize just how tough somebody is, until they go through something like this," says Shane. "I'd probably still be crying in a corner somewhere, but she's just trudging right through it and getting back to everything she did before. We've talked about different things, you know, while she was in the hospital and through rehab. One day we were at rehab, and she was upset, and she said she just wanted to be normal, and I said, 'baby, so what is normal? Because

my normal is different than your normal, and your normal is different than this person's normal, and this one is different than that one's normal. You make your own normal. You are normal. You have things that are different than what you did before, but once you get there, that is your norm. Everybody is different. Everybody's problems in their lives are a little different, but you make the most out of it. When something like this happens to you, life isn't over. Life will be changed, yes, but life's not over."

As Addison continues to define her "new normal," she has her sights set on the future and is eager to explore everything that lies ahead. Rather than hide behind the terrifying events of the day of her shark attack, Addison has accepted them as part of her journey in life. She has a continued love of the ocean and harbors a peace with the animal species responsible for taking her leg.

"You have an idea of what scientists say," says Addison. "They say [sharks] will bite and release, but that wasn't true for this case. It came back for me four times, but I don't hate sharks or anything and don't want any harm done to them."

Addison says she has enjoyed being home at last, and moving forward with her

life. She has been enjoying spending time with friends and, so far, has been successful at staying active, learning by trial and error how to navigate the world around her with her new prosthetic. She has even considered a future in modeling, as she has a friend who also has a prosthetic and is a professional model.

In the meantime, Addison continues to be a beacon of hope, inspiration and strength for so many. Those wanting to keep up with her story can follow her Facebook Page, Fight Like Addison, for regular updates on her recovery journey. Those who wish to help with medical expenses can donate via CashApp at \$AddisonBethea or send donations to the GoFundMe account set up under the name of "Medical Expenses for Addison Bethea, shark attack." The family is grateful for all of the people who have so far donated, offered their encouragement and sent gifts and cards to this young survivor.

In the words of Randy Pausch, "We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand." In light of the cards dealt to her, Addison Bethea is staying positive, working hard and discovering her very own definition of what it means to be "normal." ■



*Addison with her brother, Rhett, who helped her fight off the nine-foot shark and was able to provide potentially life-saving emergency medical attention at the scene.*





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*Merv Mattair with his family, members of the Boyz to Kings organization and Atlanta-area business leader Frank Argenbright, Jr., returning home on one of Argenbright's private jets following a trip to Atlanta where members of Boyz to Kings met with managers and executives from Argenbright's parent company, the Argenbright Group*

## Merv Mattair and Boyz to Kings: ***Not this one!***

**Story by Rick Patrick**

*Photographs by Boyz to Kings  
and Rick Patrick*

When Madison native Merv Mattair speaks to the young men in his mentoring and leadership program, Boyz to Kings, he speaks with a level of credibility that few can match. No doubt, Mattair sees a bit of a reflection of himself in the young men in the program. In many ways, Mattair's own

life serves as an inspiration and a warning for these young men, and Mattair does not shy away from sharing his story, the good and the bad.

In revealing his own story, Mattair tells of being a teenager and the influences of the world around him. Unfortunately, these influences were not always the most positive kind. This was particularly true for Mattair when it came

to how he viewed females.

"I used to see females as 'playthings.' Then I contracted a venereal disease at the age of 14," recalls Mattair.

At age 15, still viewing women as objects, Mattair's girlfriend became pregnant. Looking for the easy way out, Mattair, still just a teenager himself, heard from older men in his neighborhood that he could simply "pay child support" and



*Looking others in the eye while shaking hands is one of the fundamental tenets taught at an early age by Boyz to Kings.*



*Boyz to Kings members, staff, mentors and community leaders celebrate the ribbon-cutting for the new Boyz to Kings Headquarters, in Madison.*

not be bothered with the complications of fatherhood. At this point, Mattair's own father, Curtis, stepped in and informed Merv that he was not going to abandon that child or hurt that young lady and that he was "going to do the right thing," or he would have to deal with Curtis "in a physical way." This forced Mattair to step up and be accountable for his actions. Years later, Merv and his girlfriend, Denise, were married and Merv began to take on the roles of husband and father, roles that he quickly began to enjoy. Looking back now, Mattair readily admits this was one of the best decisions he could have made.

After spending time working with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Residential Program, Mattair quickly saw the need for positive role models in the lives of young men, before they reach the point of incarceration.

According to an abstract by the U.S. Department of Justice, "The Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency reports that the most reliable indicator of violent crime in a community is the proportion of fatherless families. Fathers typically offer economic stability, a role model for boys, greater household security, and reduced stress for mothers. This is especially true for families with adolescent boys, the most crime-prone cohort. Children from single-parent families are more prone than children from two-parent families to use drugs, be

**In 2009, Mattair  
launched a mission "to  
restore the birthright  
of all young men while  
empowering them to  
live to their  
full potential."**

gang members, be expelled from school, be committed to reform institutions, and become juvenile murderers. Single parenthood inevitably reduces the amount of time a child has in interaction with someone who is attentive to the child's needs, including the provision of moral guidance and discipline."

Mattair did not need a great deal of social research to come to these conclusions. He could see the evidence with his own eyes in the lives of the young men he saw who had found themselves already in the criminal justice system. Mattair decided to find a way to "intentionally cut through the pipeline to prison and poverty."

In 2009, Mattair launched a mission "to restore the birthright of all young men while empowering them to live to their full potential." It began with a 4:30 a.m. vision that quickly turned into reality when Mattair began using his

backyard "man-cave" to serve two to three young men life skills lessons and afterwards enjoying hot dogs and other meals prepared by Denise. He and Denise would sit and eat these meals with the young men as family. Mattair began to involve partners from various walks of life and professions, including healthcare, law enforcement, education and ministry. Mattair began utilizing 12 guiding principles that became the backbone of his program. These 12 guiding principles are:

- Respecting self (January);
- Reading literature (February);
- Improving our appearance (March);
- Honoring family (April);
- Accepting accountability (May);
- Never giving up (June);
- Respecting our Queens (July);
- Staying physically fit (August)
- Making positive decisions (September);
- Respecting our Elders (October);
- Learning from other people's mistakes (November);
- Praying internally (December).

More and more parents began enrolling their youth to receive the services offered. Soon, Mattair began to see the results of his efforts. School grades began to improve. Respect began to be shown. Leadership qualities began to emerge. Mattair could see "boyz" making the slow transition to becoming "kings."

Although he will quickly say the success of the Boyz to Kings program has



been a community effort, there is no way to separate that success from the strength of Mattair's personality. A combination of part evangelist, part consummate salesman and part motivational speaker, Mattair's passion is clearly infectious. A mere few moments around Mattair will fill anyone with the confidence that anything is attainable.

This level of confidence was borne out in November of 2022, when a group from Boyz to Kings was invited to Atlanta by business leader and Madison County native Frank Argenbright, Jr., head of the Argenbright Group, which is headquartered in Atlanta. While there, Mattair was invited to speak to a group of managers and executives from the Argenbright Group. As Mattair told his story with humor and enthusiasm, these business leaders sat hanging on Mattair's every word. No doubt, many left the meeting feeling inspired to tackle their own jobs with renewed enthusiasm. When Mattair finished speaking, more than one of the executives asked how they could personally support Boyz to Kings.

Since those early days in Mattair's man-cave, more than 1,800 young men have been served through various events and activities. Currently, the program maintains a group of 60 to 85 boys, from five to 17 years of age. Many of the young men who have come through the program have gone on to earn college degrees, join the military, become gainfully employed in a number of professions and start successful families of their own. The success of the Boyz to Kings program has caught the attention of statewide leaders. Under the direction of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, the formula that Madison County has used has become the template for other prevention programs around the state.

The statistics may show that young men who grow up in poverty with few positive examples of men to look up to are much more likely to find themselves in trouble with the law, members of street gangs, living a life of crime and violence. However, the young men of Boyz to Kings will defy those statistics and shout with one strong unified voice of a king, "NOT THIS ONE!" ■



# I Am Boyz to Kings

## I Am Boyz to Kings

I Am In Control Of My Choices- I Refuse To Blame Others- I Am Great- I Am A Leader- And I Am Royalty- I Take Pride In Treating Others- Just How I Desire To Be Treated- Respecting Females Is Not An Option- It's A Requirement- Valuing My Family- Being Respectful- And Being Responsible- Makes Me A King- I Will Not Settle For The Crumbs Of Life- I Will Not Waste the One Life That I Have- I Will Listen- I Will Learn- I Will Self Discover- Then I Will Apply The Content- When You Look At Me Now- You Should See Greatness- When You See Me In The Future- You WILL See Greatness-

## For, I Am Boyz To Kings

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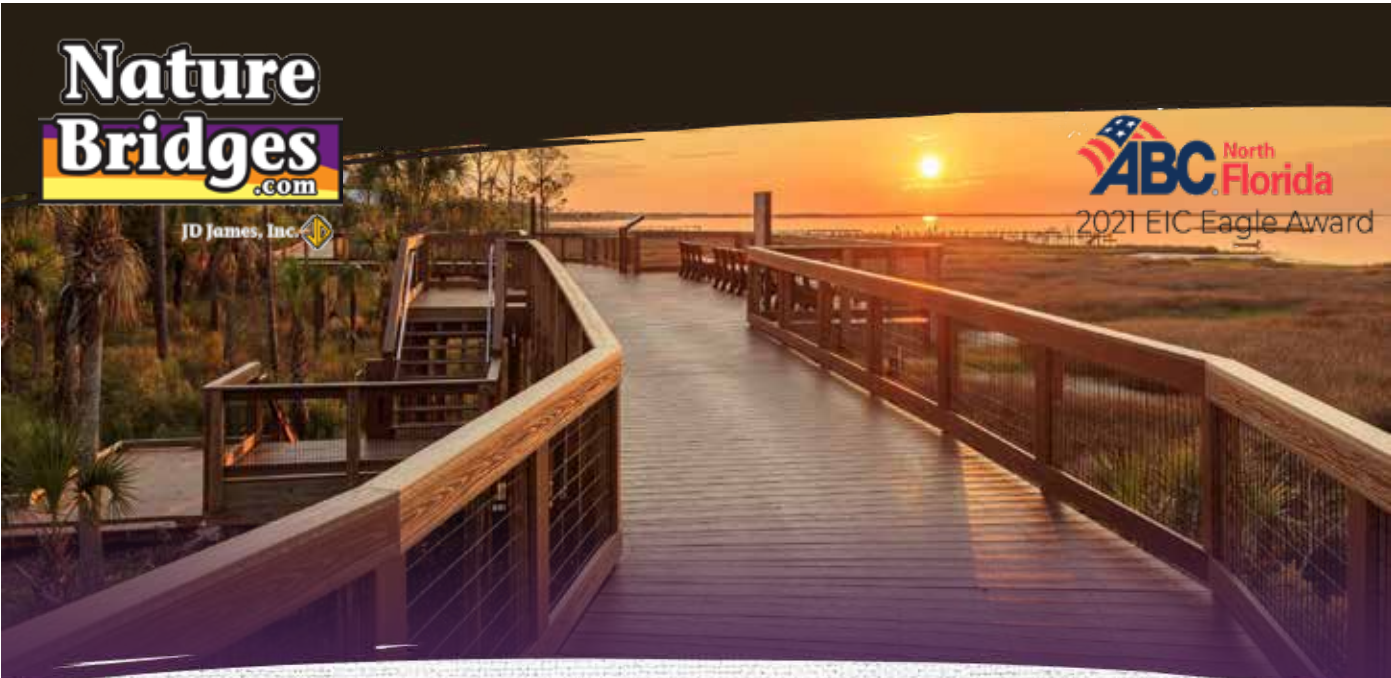
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# “Well, I guess it’s time to —Clarence Miller

Story by Lee Trawick

Photographs Courtesy of Clarence Miller

Clarence Miller has lived a colorful life for the last 102 years, just as his family before him. His mother was the cousin of the famous American novelist and poet, Ernest Hemingway, and his grandmother was the goddaughter of Ulysses S. Grant. He has lived through 19 different American presidencies, all the way back to Woodrow Wilson.



Clarence Miller as a young Navy man

Miller was born on December 21, 1920, in Galveston, Texas, despite growing up with the understanding that he was born in 1921.

“Back when we were born, you didn’t need a birth certificate to start school,” Miller says. “They just took you to school and told the teacher your age, and that was it.”

It wasn’t until he traveled to Houston, Texas, in 1942 to join the United States

Navy that he needed a birth certificate. He therefore had to travel back to Galveston to retrieve his birth certificate.

“When they gave it to me, I just put it in my pocket. I didn’t look at it,” Miller recalls.

It wasn’t until he returned to Houston that the recruiter informed him he was actually a year older than he thought. Miller was in fact born in 1920, not 1921.

Miller grew up through the Great Depression.

“I was so young I didn’t think anything of it,” says Miller. “It was tough times, but I was raised in it. We just thought that was the way things were.”

At the age of 10, he went to work as a caddy to help his family make ends meet. Miller doesn’t hang his head about having to go to work at 10 years old; he embraces the fact that back then you did what you had to do. There was no time or place for an “oh, poor me” outlook. Miller enjoyed his time on the golf course, something he would eventually come back to later in life. He reflects on his childhood and admires his father for keeping the family together and sheltering them from the harsh realities of the Great Depression.

Miller admits, “Times were bad enough back then that I made just as much money caddying as my father made at his job. If I caddied 18 golfers in a day, I could bring home what my father did,” he explains.

While struggling to raise their family and make ends meet, without ever letting their children feel the stress of the world around them, his mother, Elizabeth Hemingway, and Clarence Miller Sr. raised their family with strong morals and values. Miller prides himself on his morals and the chivalry taught to him as a young boy that



Clarence Miller as a caddy in his young teenage years

he still carries with him today.

At the dinner table, the Miller family did not eat until their mother sat down. Then to further show their respect and appreciation for the matriarch of their family, they did not get up from the dinner table until she did. It was a matter of respect for their mother, who put in the effort to make them dinner. The least they could do is sit down and enjoy their time and dinner together. That was not the only chivalrous conduct instilled in Miller that he would carry with him throughout his life. To this day, he does not wear a hat inside a building or while eating or saying prayer. All of this he attributes to his upbringing.

Miller recalls his morals and values playing a role on the golf course one day when he was fired as a caddy. Miller laughs today when talking about it.



# to sign up”



*Clarence Miller with his great nephew, Brayden Lamb, who is following in his footsteps into the United States Navy*



"A gentleman wanted me to hold his cigarette. I refused. They stunk and would make my hands stink. I wasn't going to do that. The golfer told me I was fired," Miller recalls. "I returned to the clubhouse where I thought I would be put to the back of the line of all the caddies."

Instead, once the golf pro heard why Miller was fired, he told him to sit down and get the next golfer that came rather than going to the back of the line. The golf pro felt Miller's job was to be a caddy, not someone's puppet. So while he was fired, he was honored for standing his ground, understanding his duties and not being bullied just because he was a boy.

Miller enjoyed the quiet, simple life in Galveston. After graduating from Kirwin High School (now O'Connell College Preparatory School), Miller worked at a service station then took a job with the Army Corp of Engineers. It was there his fate would find him in a life of service. One day in 1942, Miller recalls looking out over the port of Galveston and seeing two Navy destroyers.

"Well, I guess it's about time we sign up," Miller said then to his buddy standing next to him.

From there, Miller made his way to Houston to sign up for the United States Navy, and to discover his actual birthdate.

That was just the beginning of what would be many surprises throughout his military career. Miller never had to attend Basic Training back then but was sent directly to his first duty station at Norfolk, Virginia, as a Yeoman. While Miller was low in the ranks of the military, he was assigned to count soldiers for various reasons. Miller was not happy with this job and would eventually bypass his commanding officer to tell an upper ranking officer on his base of his abilities to write shorthand and type. Miller was immediately told to sit in a chair and begin working for him.

"But sir, I have to tell my commanding officer," Miller said at the time. He recalls the high ranking officer replying, "You sit right there. I'll take care of that. You now work for me." From that point forward, Miller humbly began climbing the ranks and worked for the top brass officers at the Navy's headquarters and home port of the



*The home where Clarence Miller grew up in Galveston, Texas*

United States Fleet Forces Command. He served there from September of 1942 until October of 1945.

Miller reflects, "I lived a protected life during WWII, as I served there at Norfolk, Virginia, throughout the duration of the Second World War."

Following that war, Miller eventually returned to Galveston, but civilian life did not sit well with him. Despite living a good life back in his hometown, the military was where Miller really felt at home. He chuckles when reflecting on the two different Americas he now has lived in: one before the war in the Great Depression and now in the ever flourishing America. He talks about growing up in an era when he was called in from playing in the street, given a quarter and told to go to the store to pick up apricots and bring back the change. With those apricots, his mother mixed flour and water to make four fried pies, and that's all they ate for weeks. Later, living in an America with money, he would look back on that time, and his respect for his father would grow into admiration for how he and his mother had made things work all the while shielding their children from ever knowing the financial strain that had strangled everyone in America.

Although Miller had success in the civilian world, the military is where



*What the times were like in 1920, when Clarence Miller was born*

Miller would flourish. After being out of the service for nearly nine years, in 1954 Miller would made his way back into the Navy, yet again as a Yeoman, with the help of a friend who was a Chief Yeoman in the Navy Reserves. Miller laughs at his friend's persuasive techniques that helped him find an assignment in the Navy.

"A buddy of mine was in New Orleans when I told him I wanted to go back to the Navy. He took an Admiral friend of his out fishing and told him I wanted to rejoin the Navy," Miller recalls.





*Clarence Miller alongside his grandson, Micheal Bullis, who also has retired after a distinguished military career.*

"The Admiral told him that was great, but the Navy didn't have any openings at the time. His buddy told him, that's fine, but you find him an assignment or swim back to shore."

Miraculously, Miller found himself in the Navy yet again a month later. He would serve another 24 years, from 1954 through 1979. He tries to downplay his military career, however. He does talk about being the Caribbean on the USS Taconic in 1961 and hearing that a Navy nuclear carrier was leaving Norfolk, with its destination being the Caribbean as it readied itself for an invasion of Cuba, for what was later called the Bay of Pigs. Miller recalls learning the severity and urgency of war, when he originally thought that ship would take days to arrive, only to wake the following morning with the destroyer alongside their bow. It was at that point Miller understood the intensity of war as the tension swarmed everyone aboard for what lay ahead. While the invasion was a disaster for the Cuban rebels and United States Central Intelligence Agency, it was not at the hands of the United States Navy, as they sat on high alert for a go-ahead that never came from the White House administration.

Many things have changed throughout Miller's life. He has seen America evolve

through economic depression, World War triggered by the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Korean War, Cold War, Bay of Pigs, Cuban Missile Crisis, presidential assassination, Vietnam, Watergate scandal, Woodstock, the 1979 Oil Crisis, Iran Hostage Crisis, another presidential shooting, the Gulf Wars, another presidential scandal, another attack on America in 1993 and again in 2001 at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, followed by the decades long war against terror and many, many other events in America's history over the last 102 years.

Miller has experienced many victories throughout his life as well as many losses, such as the loss of his parents in 1971 and 2006, despite his mother living for 103 years, following his grandmother who lived for 110 years. Miller would lose his wife to cancer and his oldest son to multiple sclerosis at the age of 42. However, he has six grandchildren by his two remaining children.

Through Miller's life, going all the way back to his childhood, one thing has remained constant in his life: his love for magic. Today Miller laughs about his title as a magician, something he still carries with him. He still holds all of his magic tricks and trinkets dear to his heart and would love to one day pass them down to someone who is interested in magic.

Although Miller has lived longer than most, no one would ever know it by visiting with Miller as his youth is still as vibrant today as it was 40 years ago. On Wednesday, December 21, 2022, Miller celebrated his 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday, in typical fashion for him. He, his wife and lifelong friend Christine Miller travelled from their home in McAlpin, Florida, to Cedar Key, where he has become a bit of a local celebrity. The Millers have celebrated his birthday for years with an annual trip to Cedar Key. The local hotel, which is regularly open only Wednesdays through Sundays, will open for them even if his birthday falls on a day when they usually are closed. Miller loves seafood and people, and Cedar Key is able to provide both every year for his birthday. The celebration typically lasts for several days in Cedar Key, as it has become almost a local holiday for the residents there.



*Clarence Miller as Grand Marshal of the Buckeye Lake parade in Ohio*

Miller takes pride in his grandson and great nephew, who also have chosen a life in the United States Navy. His grandson, Micheal Bullis, has now retired, while his great nephew, Brayden Lamb, is just beginning his career. Miller's advice for them was simple: "The best thing you could do is find a group of friends, of good running mates." He goes on to say, "I loved my time in the Navy, and would join again today if I could." ■



*Clarence Miller as a small child in Galveston, Texas*



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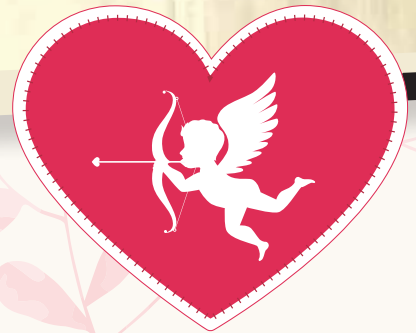


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# GLEN AND FLORIDA SMITH

## *A Valentine Story*

**Story by Jessica B. Webb**

In the summer of 1964, two hearts joined together to begin a lifelong journey full of love and hope for the future. They

each had dreams to reach for and vowed to travel the road together in good times and in bad. From that union, a cherished family was formed which now spans four

generations, and the two hearts still beat as one.

Florida Davis Smith and Arthur 'Glen' Smith are the heartbeats of this loving

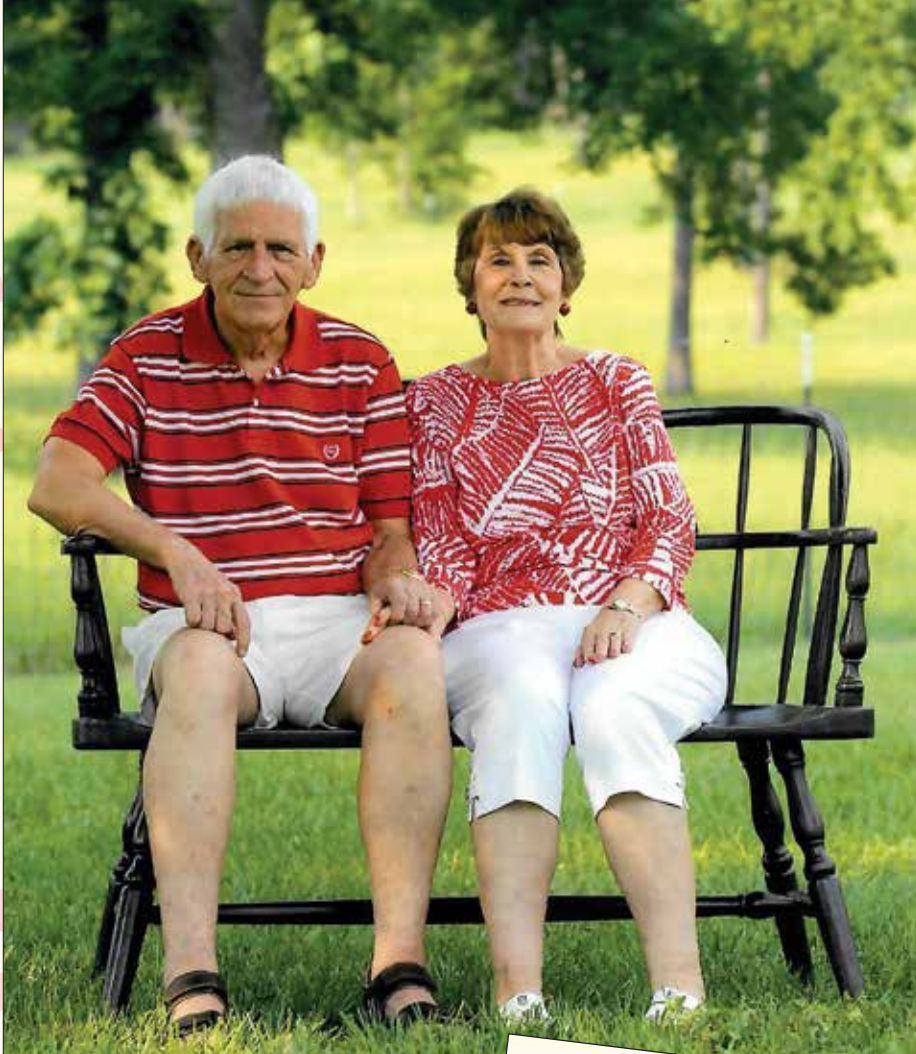
family. During their 59-year union, they have had plenty of good times and made sweet memories. And, just as any other family, they had their share of heartache and tough times, much of which was hidden from public view.

Florida Davis was born in Madison during World War Two and lived there the majority of her life. She attended schools locally, and upon graduation from Madison High School, she attended Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, for one year. She then transferred to Florida State University (FSU) and earned a bachelor's degree in education in 1962. Florida is the great-granddaughter of W.T. Davis, who was a local contractor and state senator. Many of the homes he built are still standing throughout the city of Madison, and the W.T. Davis building on south Range Avenue is named after him. His office, as well as the office of one of his sons, was housed in that building which is now owned and occupied by the Treasures of Madison County.

Glen Smith moved to the Cherry Lake community with his family when he was about 10 years old. The son of a naval officer, he was born in Portsmouth, Virginia. During the war, he lived with his grandparents in Tennessee, attended school for a year in Bermuda, and lived on the naval base in Jacksonville until his father retired. At that time, the family bought one of the original Cherry Lake houses with a little acreage and set up a mini-farm. Glen attended the Cherry Lake School while his father drove the Cherry Lake school bus. Upon graduation from Madison High School in 1959, he joined the Air Force for four years, two of which were spent in Japan.

Even though the duo attended four years of high school together, neither found any interest in the other. After graduation, they went their separate ways. However, in the summer of 1962, both were home for a visit, she from school and he from the military, and they met by chance. They decided to go on a date and actually took a liking to each other. By the next year they were engaged, and the rest is history.

For the most part, Glen and Florida have lived a quiet life in the same quaint home in Madison. When the couple was first married, they lived in Tallahassee while



Glen studied business at FSU and Florida supported them with her first teaching position. Glen quips that he was proud to marry a rich school teacher, as Florida got paid once a month and they treated themselves to dinner out on payday. Glen supplemented their income by driving a school bus, but since he was a student, he was only paid half the salary of a regular bus driver.

Florida fondly remembers that school "wasn't for Glen," and they moved back "home" to Madison. Their original plan was to travel when Glen rejoined the Air Force, but as plans change unexpectedly, so did theirs. Florida's father, W.B. Davis, Jr., had a small business in town. When he died, it was decided that Glen would take over the family business, which he expanded into what is now known as Smith Abstract and Title Co. Many years during that time, Glen enjoyed investing in and improving land throughout Madison County.



Florida recounts that Glen went to the office every day, including Saturdays, and he never missed church on Sundays. What most people don't know, because the family hid it so well, is that for 20 years Glen was an alcoholic.

"He was a good provider," Florida recalls, "and we feel it's important to be



honest with people. The truth will set you free."

He started drinking in the service and continued after his marriage. He often drank with friends, sometimes at his office once the workday was done. With Glen, once he had one drink, he continued drinking until he usually fell asleep.

Even though these years were tough on the family, they stayed together. Florida recounts that the children had a good home life even though she thought about leaving their father. After throwing his clothes out into the yard twice, she decided against doing that again because she was the one who had to pick everything up and put it back away. She stopped teaching for 14 years to raise their two children, Margaret Ann and Ben, and eventually she was able to obtain her master's degree in Specific Learning Disabilities. Besides teaching elementary-age students, she worked at the county office later in her career and helped start the program for ESE students. At Glen's urging, she eventually retired from education after 25 years.

The couple attended a Catholic marriage conference in 1976, and that,

according to Florida, changed their outlook on life. Glen realized what was truly important to him and made a commitment to stop drinking. It was a tough road, and he attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in Valdosta every night for 60 days. From there, the couple took the opportunity to use Glen's illness in a way to help others. They started working in several Christian ministries including Walk to Emmaus, Chrysalis and the Kairos prison ministries, which included Kairos Outside for released inmates. Glen didn't hold back when he began speaking to the groups and opening with "I am an alcoholic." They shared their stories and their hearts to help others with similar situations, and Florida recalls those years as wonderful. They enjoyed working side by side.

The couple still lives in the same modest house they built in 1969. Daughter Margaret Ann has twin boys, Brandon and Brad, who love to visit their grandparents. Brandon and his wife, Meghan, have a daughter, Brynnlie, and are currently a military family. Son Ben and his wife, Juana, have one son, Luke, and while they have moved away, they return often. Florida

has been active in the Madison Woman's Club while Glen was in the Rotary Club for more than 50 years. Both are long-term members of the First United Methodist Church.

Florida is the last surviving member of her Davis lineage, and her roots were planted deep in Madison County. Today she enjoys reading and working in her yard, and she drives Glen to the office every day. It's hard to give up the same routine you've had for 57 years, so Glen still goes in daily to visit with the customers and have lunch at his desk. His daughter is now in charge of the business as his memories are softly fading.

Through it all, Florida and Glen have remained steadfast in their love for each other. They enjoy just being together and sharing the same interests. A lifetime of memories has been made for their children and grandchildren, and while Glen is slowly losing some of those memories, his heart is still just as big, he has the same sense of humor that only he can have, and he has that special twinkle in his eye, especially when Florida is close by. ■

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# THE “IMPOSSIBLE”

Story by Lee Trawick  
Photographs Courtesy of  
Lindsey and Daniel McCall

**In the world of sports, questions often arise when someone is undefeated: Who have they played? Who have they fought? Well, in the young life of four-year-old Lane Alan McCall, he is undefeated and has conquered more than most. If he never has another fight, he retires as a Hall-of-Famer. Lane entered this world as a fighter; therefore, he only knows one way of life: to fight.**





Tallahassee Memorial Hospital (TMH) has partnered with Florida State University to allow the Florida State Seminoles to honor an outstanding fighter who has come through the TMH New Born Intensive Care Unit (NICU) before every home game.

On Saturday, October 15, 2022, before the Florida State Seminoles took on the Clemson Tigers, Lane was honored on the football field in front of 80,000 screaming fans. The young boy stood tall and waved to the crowd, unaware of his fight and the battles he endured. That day, Lane stood taller than anyone in the stadium as a true warrior.

Lane is the son of Lindsey and Daniel McCall of Suwannee County. When Lindsey was 20 weeks along in her pregnancy, just one month after finding out the gender of their baby, her water broke at midnight on July 5. She was admitted to TMH for the next 20 days. There, she was put on bed rest for the duration of her pregnancy. At that point, Lane's survival would depend on his mother.

Lindsey recalls the stress of the NICU doctor coming in to talk to her and Daniel about infant survival rates at certain ages. The pressure was nearly unbearable upon learning that babies born before 23 weeks are considered "preivable," which means they have virtually no chance of survival. At 23 weeks, her baby's chances of survival were 23 to 27 percent. At 24 weeks, his chances jumped to 42 to 59



*Four-year-old Lane McCall was honored by Tallahassee Memorial Hospital and the Florida State Seminoles as a Kick-Off Kid on October 15, 2022.*

percent, but the goal was to try and get to 32 weeks. Then, just four weeks later, at 24 weeks and five days, on July 26, 2018, Lindsey began the scariest moments of her life, to that point. The decision was made to do an emergency cesarean delivery (C-Section), due to their baby being in distress.

Everything went from bad to worse for the McCalls. They no longer lived in a world of a best-case scenario; they had to begin preparing themselves for the worst. Even with the odds stacked against her and Lane, the family did have many positive options. Lindsey tried to deliver Lane

naturally. Unfortunately, after determining that Lane's head was stuck in her uterus with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck, the doctors asked Lindsey how she wanted to continue.

She answered, "Get him out as safe as possible."

In that instance, the doctor dropped his head and said, "This is going to be impossible. Let's get to the OR now."

The following five seconds were like a scene from a movie as they immediately sprang into action to try and save the life of Lane.

"They didn't even waste time



unplugging the machine from the wall; they pushed the bed and the plug came with us. It was so fast and scary," recalls Lindsey.

There was no time for discussion or an exchange of "I love you" between Daniel and Lindsey. In an instant, she was rushed through the halls. Daniel was told to stay and wait there, with no one around to ask questions to or lean on for guidance or support.

Daniel was left in silence.

Lane arrived, despite the odds, but he was far from being out of danger. His fight was just beginning, a fight he had to face on his own. Weighing one pound eight ounces, Lane was only 11 and a half inches long. He was born at only 24 weeks and was just beginning to develop surfactant protein. Surfactant is a fatty substance that helps one breathe by making it easier to open the air sacs in the lungs. That is not all Lane's body was developing that week while in his mother's womb. His nostrils were beginning to open, and he would practice breathing amniotic fluid through them. The vestibular system was developing in his inner ears, which helps a person maintain balance and recognize if they are upside down or right side up. Lane's body would have to develop these as a newborn, along with the rest of the developments an unborn child usually develops while remaining in the womb until 40 weeks.

Yet Lane survived.

Lane was placed in a specific type of incubator called the Giraffe Omnibed. This provides a controlled environment for a baby in respiratory distress and helps regulate their temperature as well. It would be 17 days before Lindsey could hold her son for the first time. That time would come when Lane's condition was trending from unstable to worst, when the doctors suggested she hold him skin to skin in hopes of regulating his heart rate, body temperature and breathing as well as stimulating his digestion and interest in feeding. Once again, Lane's life relied on his mother's touch.

Over Lane's first 45 days, his condition remained critical and unstable. Lindsey recalls just sitting with him throughout the night many times. Even on



several occasions, after rough days, she would return at midnight, sometimes after visitors' hours, just to sit and check on him.

Lane remained in the NICU for a total of 96 days, where he fought countless battles of ups and downs, such as possible brain bleeds and blindness. One day his vital signs would be at good levels, and in an instant, his levels would drop, again sending everyone into a state of chaos. Some days his levels would consume the day as they would gradually go down. To help regulate him, he received several blood transfusions, in a desperate attempt to keep him alive.

Finally, after 96 days in the NICU, Lindsey and Daniel could welcome their son home in Suwannee County for the first time. Today, Lane is four years old and a thriving little boy looking forward to starting school next year. After being nominated to be a "Kickoff Kid" at the Florida State Seminoles game, Lane was honored to attend and was celebrated by 80,000 fans wearing garnet and gold.

While some may question Lane's claim to being undefeated, he can answer: he's

defeated the odds, the "impossible," and he did it all before his first birthday.

No matter what lies ahead of Lane as he creates his path forward, one thing will remain. He will forever be an inspiration to all of those who know him. Lane has proven to be a fighter and a warrior and will continue to be throughout his life. ■



*Lindsey McCall held Lane for the first time 17 days after he was born, when it seemed only his mother's touch might keep him alive.*

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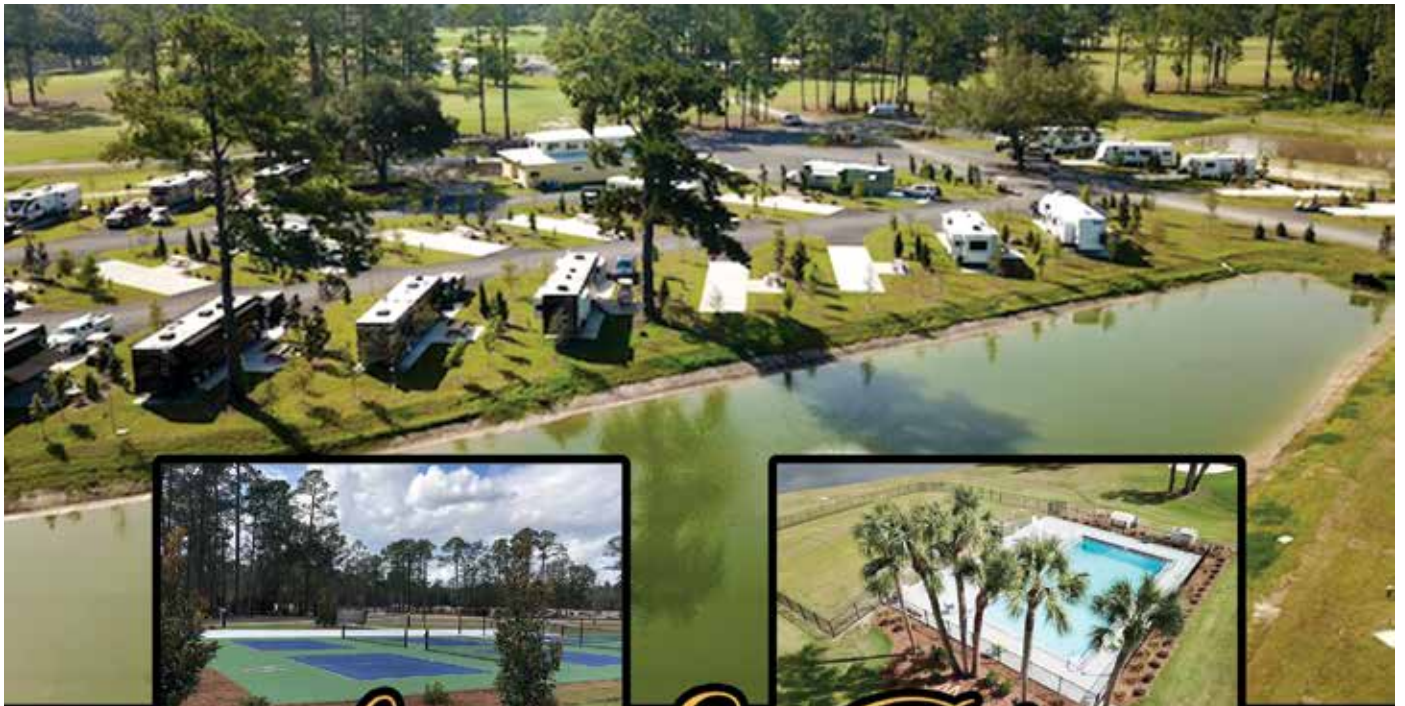
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# WALK YOUR WAY TO

# *Wonderful!*

*For many people, a daily stroll through the neighborhood or along the fencerows of one's property lines will do the trick.*



## Story and Photography by Laura Young

A nippy morning softened by patchy fog gives way to a bright blue sky glimpsed through tree branches recently gone bare. Toward evening, high wispy clouds catch the first blush of sunset and the scent of pine needles drifts down with the cooling air from the canopy toward the walking trail. It's winter in North Florida, one of the most enjoyable times to be out and about.

One of the best and easiest ways to enjoy nature or your neighborhood while also maintaining health and fitness is walking. In fact, some equate the simple act of walking to taking a wonder drug!

It's good not only for the body but also the mind. It doesn't matter whether you're looping through your neighborhood, strolling down a beach, following a path in the woods or meandering through a local park, nature offers a calming effect that many sources note can reduce stress, improve mood, increase focus, promote faster healing and support graceful aging. A number of studies show surprising health benefits from regular walking. The bottom line is that people who walk at least 20 minutes a day, at least five days a week can expect to have significantly more well days of feeling good physically and mentally.

With so many reasons to get outside and walk, it makes sense to work a daily walk into a morning routine, as part of a lunchtime break or when winding down in the evening. Anyone anxious about walking alone might consider buddying up with another walker. Walking with a partner can further boost overall wellbeing, be fun, build friendships or deepen family relationships.

Now we arrive at the question of "where" to walk. Luckily, North Florida's interesting small towns and abundant natural beauty make finding great places to walk outdoors easy — through a neighborhood, around town, at a local park or on a larger trail system.

To explore your options, check with your county's parks and recreation department, contact your local Chamber of Commerce or give the phone app All Trails a try. With the app, you just put in your location, narrow the search for Walking, and you'll have near instant access to information about a variety of paths, including a map, their length, surface type and estimated time to enjoy it. This can be a great way to discover a local route that can work for you daily



*Monticello resident Barbara Morris walks along the Monticello Bike trail almost every day.*

as well as places you can explore on the weekend or a holiday. The app also offers a Community feature that can help you connect with other walkers near or far.

## Here are some possibilities for folks who live in or visit Jefferson County: Around Home

For many people, a daily stroll through the neighborhood or along the fencerows of one's property lines will do the trick. A regular route provides a great way to make frequent contact with those who live nearby and enjoy the gradual progression of seasonal changes in the landscape. Many neighborhood streets also intersect with designated walking trails. Jefferson County residents David and Linda Ricke walk daily in their Tally Hills neighborhood, and then once a week they drive into town to walk the nature trail at the Monticello Ecological Park with their dog, Lord Beasley.

## Monticello Ecological Park

The Monticello Ecological Park offers a 3/4-mile nature trail that is right in town at

1000 S. Water St. A leisurely stroll here will take you through mixed hardwoods and pines, leading to an elevated boardwalk across a spring-fed stream, with exercise stations along the way. The loop trail offers options that allow you to spend 20 minutes or an hour here if you like. Reviews on Trip Advisor land this park consistently in the Excellent range, and visitors have commented that it is a relaxing, enjoyable and fun to explore. According to one couple, this "beautiful and peaceful stroll" is "perfect to hold hands and walk next to your favorite person in the whole world."

## Chase Street Park Clifford Brown Park

A short loop walking trail is located at Clifford Brown Park, at the intersection of Chase Drive and South Railroad Street. It is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and also has a picnic pavilion, playground equipment, a mini soccer field and parking for access to the Monticello Bike Trail.

## Monticello Bike Trail

The Monticello Bike Trail for is for walking as well as biking. The paved





*Jefferson County residents David and Linda Ricke, who walk daily in their Tally Hills neighborhood, drive into town once a week to walk the nature trail at the Monticello Ecological Park with their dog, Lord Beasley.*

pathway runs for two miles from north to south through the city, parallel to Railroad Street, along the abandoned railroad line. Monticello resident Barbara Morris, who was recently seen out enjoying an afternoon stroll where the trail crosses West Washington Street, says she walks this trail almost every day. Access is easy, whether by foot from a nearby neighborhood, cycling to a cross point or driving to a nearby lot and walking from there. Motorized traffic is barred from access. The north end of the bike trail connects by a sidewalk to the Jefferson County Recreational Park.

### **Jefferson County Recreational Park**

Jefferson County Recreational Park has a paved, shaded walking trail that encircles the property located at 1380 Mamie Scott Drive, with parkour activity points and rest stops along the way. The park also contains a baseball/softball complex, tennis and racketball courts, a playground and covered picnic areas – all great ways to make a walk part of a broader day of fun outdoors.

### **Around Town**

Monticello's downtown has sidewalks, well-marked crosswalks, local shops/





restaurants and points of historic interest that work well for a 20-minute stroll. Walkers from surrounding neighborhoods can be seen including downtown in their walking routes, and the atmosphere lends itself well to pairing walking with a shopping excursion. Local organizations

sponsor a number of sip-and-stroll events throughout the year as well. In response to a Monticello News poll about walking, Hayley Peeler said, “We live close to downtown, so we often walk downtown from our house. My friend and I meet at the vacant subdivision north of the dog track. Walking with others is a great opportunity to chat and bond! Walking with my kids has allowed my four-year-old to master his scooter while I push my two-year-old in a stroller.”

### The Florida Trail

Robbie Slack also responded to the poll, saying he likes to walk on the Aucilla Sinks section of the Florida Trail. According to the Florida Hikes! website, this trail offers 4.4 miles among the most geologically weird piece of any National Scenic Trail and is by far the most fascinating segment of The Florida Trail. For information about guided hikes along sections of The Florida Trail through the Big Bend area, visit [floridatrail.org](http://floridatrail.org).

### Econfina River State Park

This park in Lamont meanders through pine flatwoods, oak-palm forests and salt marshes dotted with pine islands. Here you can enjoy walking 14.8 miles of wooded trails, which are also accessible for off-road bikers or horseback riders, that take you to a panoramic view of coastal sand dunes. For more information, visit the Florida State Parks website or call (850) 487-7989.

What are the places near you that make walking for your wellbeing both

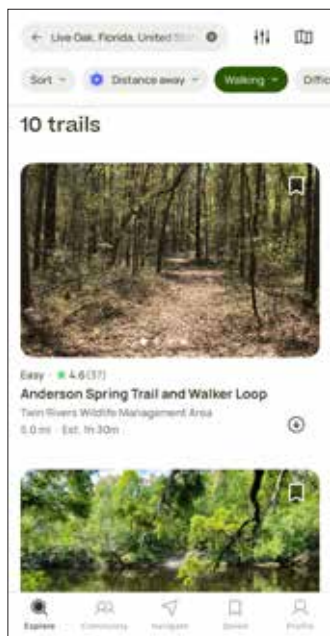
easy and interesting? You may want to look into the Four Freedoms Trail in Madison, Anderson Springs Trail in Live Oak, Peacock Springs Interpretive Trail in Mayo and others described in the All Trails app or by your local parks director.

Then it’s time to get started. Beginning a new routine sometimes presents challenges, and becoming a regular walker is no exception. Research shows that joining others who have similar intentions helps us to be more successful at meeting our personal health goals. One program offered through local UF/IFAS extension offices is Let’s Walk Florida!

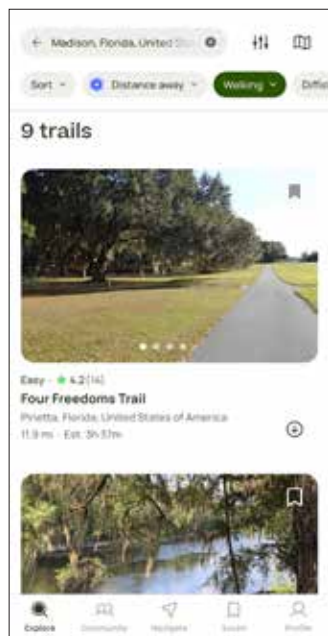
### Let’s Walk, Florida!

This statewide, virtual healthy lifestyle education program and physical activity challenge supports people interested in benefiting from regular walking. During a 10-week program, participants receive weekly eGuides, engage in weekly eConnections with a local health educator and other residents from your area, and track and report your physical activity minutes. This virtual community provides education, support, accountability and a certificate to all participants while also offering prizes for competitive folks. You can learn more about this program at [programs.ifas.ufl.edu/lwf/](http://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/lwf/).

Whether you participate in an organized walking program or develop your own plan of action, walking outdoors, even for just a little while each day, can put you in touch with both the wonders of nature and wonderful you. ■



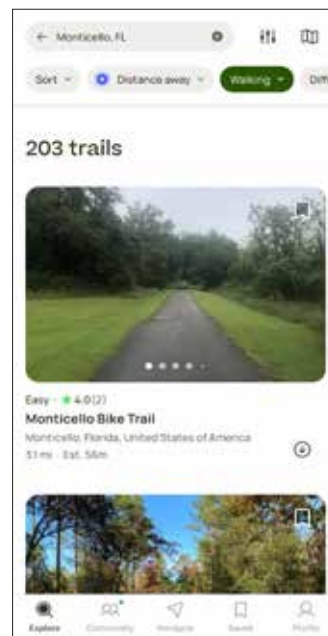
AllTrails Live Oak



AllTrails Madison



AllTrails Mayo



AllTrails Monticello





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**& BREWFEST**

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**February 18, 2023 | 1 pm - 6 pm | Lanier Field**

 **\$5 ticket:** unlimited chili samples   
**\$25 ticket:** unlimited samples of craft beer and chili

Gates open	1 pm	<u>Cash Prizes and Awards:</u>
Judging begins	2 pm	Fan Favorite Award
Craft beer samples start	3 pm	Judges' Best Overall Chili Award
All votes must be in by	4 pm	Judges' Scorchers Award
Awards given	6 pm	

**ID REQUIRED  
TO DRINK**



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