

# The Front Porch

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

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Tail Up**  
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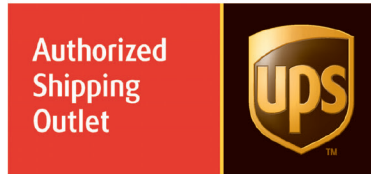
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*Photos Courtesy of Argenbright Holdings*

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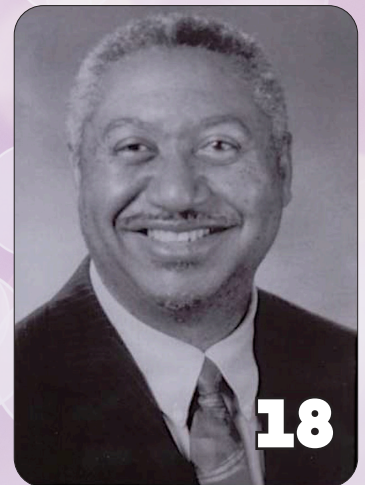
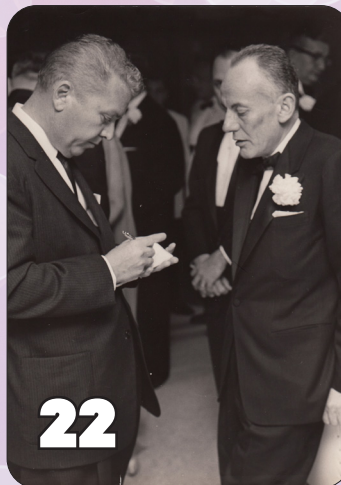


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# The Front Porch

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*Sittin' on the Porch with...*

# Christina McCulley

## Story and Photography by Christian Peterson

Christina McCulley is an internet sensation straight out of the tri-county area. She was born on June 12, 1979, in Valdosta, Ga., to Marvin Smith and Debbie Reid. She also has a younger brother, Lindsey. She grew up around the tri-county area of Hamilton-Lafayette-Suwannee, specifically in Jasper, eventually graduating from Hamilton County High School in 1997. After graduation, she attended Lake City Community College, where she earned her cosmetology license. Eventually, she was married to Ryan McCulley, and the couple took up residence in Jennings.

After earning her degree, McCulley founded her own salon and named it Revived Beauty Salon because she “wanted

people to feel good on the inside as well as on the outside when they left.” She is adored by her customers, with some even saying, “You make me feel better than a doctor.” She does this by providing two different services at the salon. First, she offers the normal services a salon will provide, focusing largely on hair care. However, as stated earlier, McCulley is also focused on how one feels on the inside. She is a proud Christian and is not afraid to let the world know. If she feels led by God, she will pray with or over her clients. However, her hard work and love for encouraging and helping others does not end there.

McCulley is an open book, which has helped her amass an impressive online following. She has always loved

encouraging and motivating others. Her website, *ChristinaSmithMcCulley.com*, is full of links and advice to bring anyone out of the dumps. The site has options for consumable items that can help with problems such as low energy, weight loss, focus, happiness and general wellbeing. She even has an Amazon storefront page available on her website. Here, she shows off a variety of products for individuals, especially ones she mentioned through her social media page, specifically as seen on TikTok. She also shows off great items she learned about from her work at the salon, including hair growth products; products to help prevent lice; and other hair products she loves or advises people to use. One of her most heard phrases is, “I got it from Amazon.” Her influence doesn’t end there



either.

McCulley has 40,000 followers on her Facebook page. She garnered the followers by posting daily, sometimes multiple times a day, to share words of inspiration, jokes or funny moments from her life. Furthermore, McCulley has more than 65,000 followers on TikTok, another area where she can drop positive vibes into other people's lives. Throughout her page, you can find videos from McCulley's everyday life, where she discusses different fun things she does throughout the day. Furthermore, there are fun family videos, dances and even advice.

Yet, McCulley can't be stopped; she's always moving and trying to help others.

"I'm very open and real about my struggles and flaws. But I'm also very open about my faith and what God teaches me through those struggles."

As a very busy woman, McCulley already has little free time, and on top of that, she is a mother with one kid still at home. However, every person needs some personal time, and McCulley takes

advantage of that to help others. She runs a podcast called "Closet Confessions with Christina: Real, Raw and Relatable." Each episode runs around 25 minutes long, where Christina takes some "me time" in her closet. She records in there because, "that's the only place I can get some quiet time." During this podcast, McCulley attempts to, "get real and raw about life struggles." In each episode, McCulley sits down and talks about different issues she may have experienced in her life.

More importantly, she offers advice from a Christian perspective, especially on how to handle life situations in a Christ-like way. Some common topics McCulley will talk about are anxiety, addiction, fear, forgiveness, mercy and loving your enemies. The podcast is available on both Spotify and Apple podcasts. Links to both sites can be found on McCulley's website.

In her personal life, McCulley's main focus is her family.

"My favorite thing is being at home with all my family under the same roof. With two older kids who like to do a lot,

those days are getting fewer and fewer."

McCulley married her husband, who was also her high school sweetheart, the day she turned 20 years old. They have been married for 23 years and have three children together. Their first two kids are their daughter, Logan, who is 20, and their son, Lance, 17.

"We were done after two kids, but God had other plans for our third child," she says.

Years after the older two, McCulley was blessed with a third child, her son, Collin, who is now eight years old. The year that Collin started kindergarten was the same year that Logan was graduating from high school. Logan now studies in the Registered Nurse program at North Florida College. McCulley lives with her husband and son on their 400-acre family farm, bought just after World War II. McCulley's husband, father-in-law and son operate the farm, where they raise cows and grow crops. To learn more about Christina McCulley, visit her Facebook page, Tik Tok or website. ■



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*Frank A. Argenbright, Jr. (left) chats with Karan Ishwar (right), CEO of Argenbright Holdings, parent company of the Argenbright Group of Companies.*

## FRANK ARGENBRIGHT, JR.:

# *Madison native living and spreading the American dream*

### **Sponsored Content by Jackie Reedy, Unifi Aviation Services**

*Photos Courtesy of the Argenbright Group*

Around the world, CEOs and owners of large companies are often remote figures we know through their intermittent tweets or as the primary voice on a quarterly earnings call. But occasionally, the curtain is lifted, and we have the opportunity to meet someone like Frank A. Argenbright, Jr.

As demonstrated by his ever-increasing list of professional accomplishments, Frank has a natural ability to grow successful companies – a talent strengthened by his

humble origins. Once a frontline employee himself, Frank expertly navigates his relationships with frontline employees and Wall Street executives alike.

### **Roots grow deep**

Born and raised in the small town of Madison, Fla., (average population 3,500) near the Georgia state line, Frank describes his younger self as “not a good student.” Initially hindered by undiagnosed learning disabilities, Frank developed an unfettered determination and drive that facilitated his career trajectory. Now, with a career

to be proud of, Frank has founded several companies that have created personal and professional opportunities for others. He continues to funnel the lessons from his modest start into the customer-focused, boots-on-the-ground organizations that have built his legacy.

### **Loyalty stands strong**

Each of the companies that Frank has founded have grown substantially over the course of its operating life. Without investing large capital in marketing and advertising, each company has grown

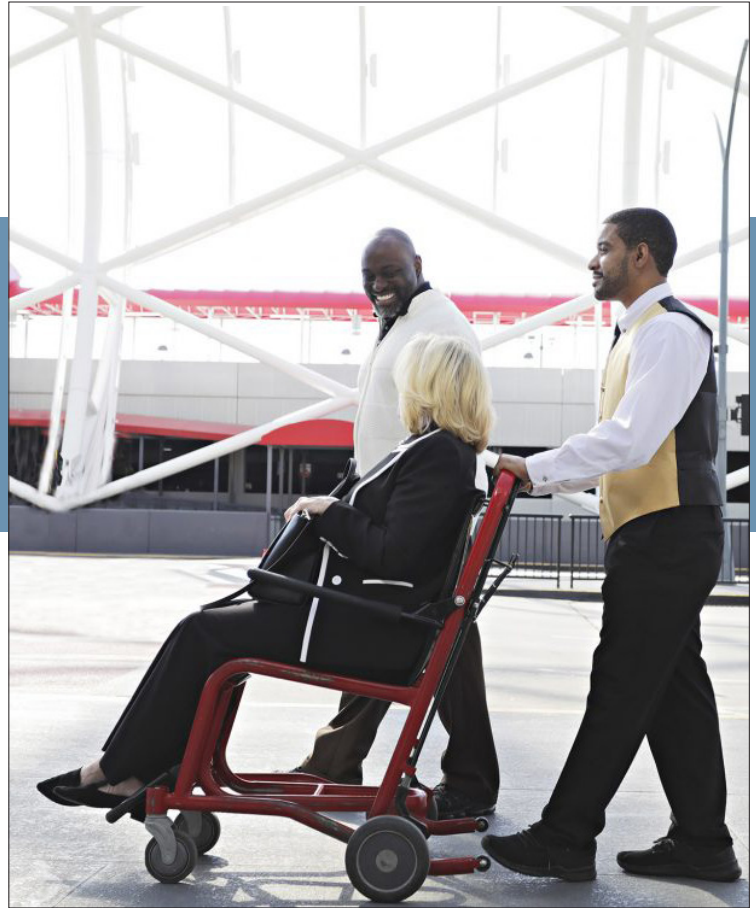
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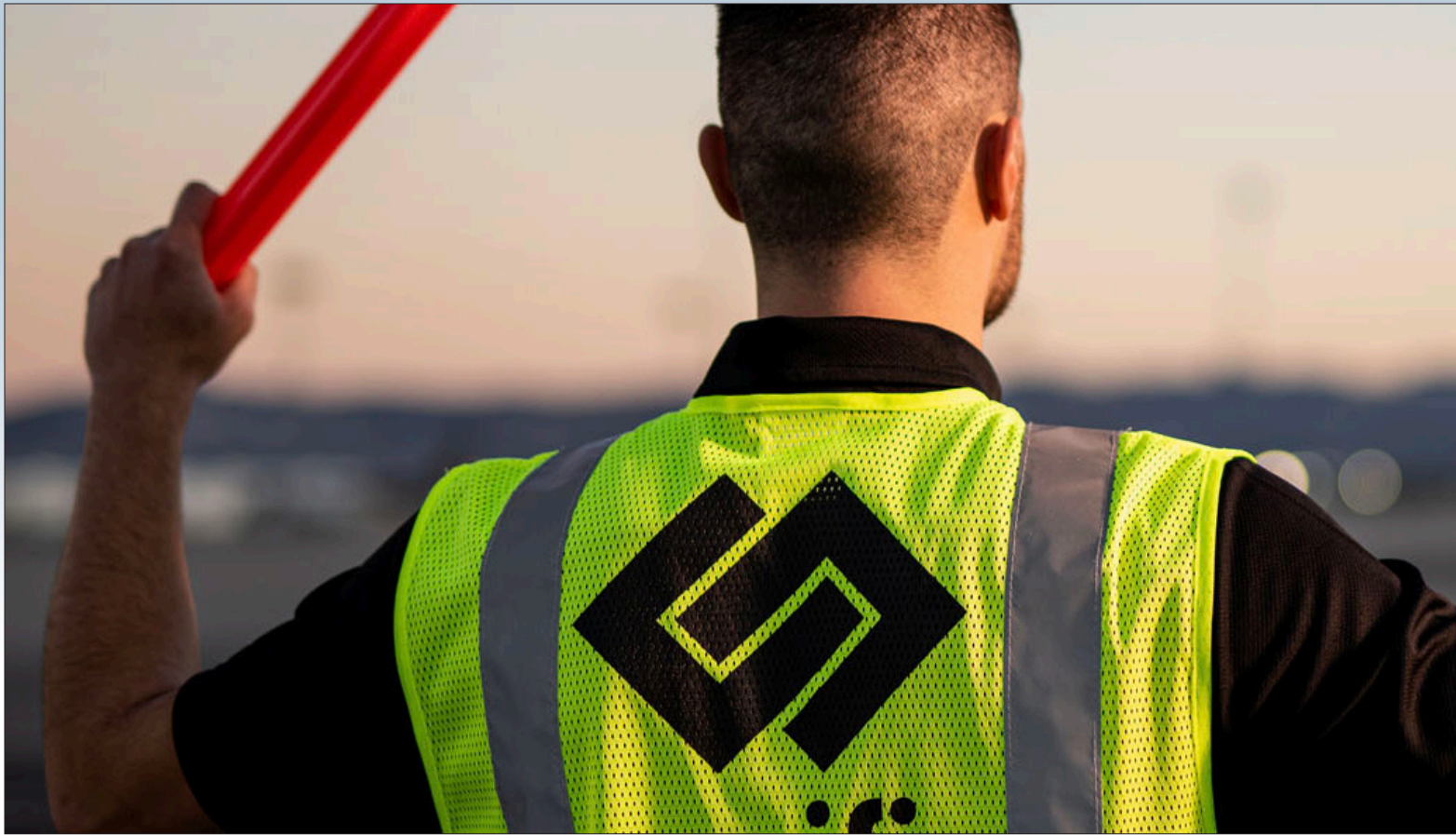
This growth has been made possible by the high-quality service and dedication of the frontline teams who show up for their customers every day. These are frontline teams who feel heard, appreciated and valued by their leadership – teams who show up for their customers because their leadership shows up for them.

**As demonstrated by his ever-increasing list of professional accomplishments, Frank has a natural ability to grow successful companies – a talent strengthened by his humble origins**

And taking care of these team members has always been a top focus for Frank, which is why it's no surprise that many have worked for him across multiple companies and moved up through the ranks. Treated with dignity and respect, frontline employees remain dedicated to Frank and his vision.

Furthermore, Frank, through his parent company, the Argenbright Group, has focused on growing alongside large customers who have taken them around the world — brands like Delta Air Lines, FedEx, United Airlines and Southern Company. These customers have also remained loyal to Frank, spanning large contracts across the U.S. and around the world for anywhere between 20 to 40 years. His relentless customer



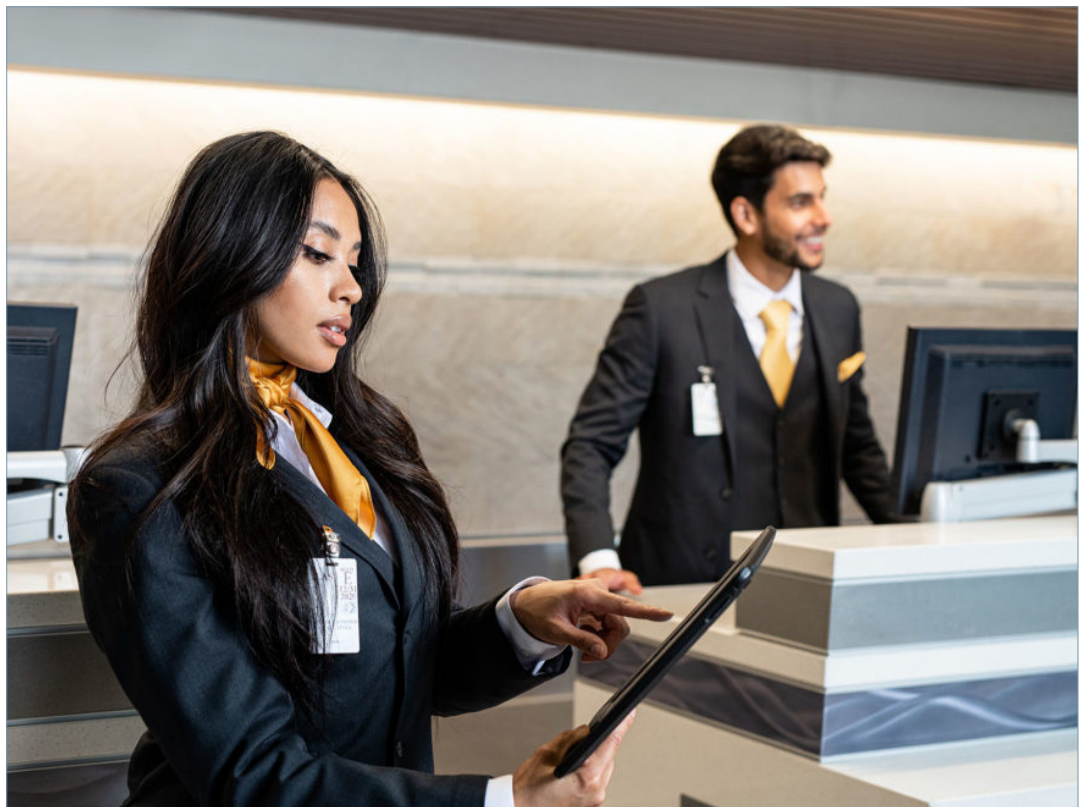


focus and proactive approach to understanding and being responsive to their needs has set Frank and his team apart in a very competitive landscape.

**Growth through persistence**

Managing to stay connected with frontline employees while leading large corporations through multi-million-dollar revenue years is not a task for the faint-hearted. Frank has led human capital-intensive services and businesses based in North America and Europe, enhancing their growth through mergers and acquisitions with tremendous success (acquiring 50+ companies through the course of his career).

Over the past 43 years, Frank has started, scaled and exited three companies, each of which were leading organizations within their respective industries. AHL Services was close to a billion-dollar company with more than 50,000 employees, operating in security and aviation services across North America and



Europe. Frank then went on to build AirServ in 2002. With 30,000 employees, AirServ quickly became the leading

provider of facility services for aviation, transportation and commercial markets throughout the U.S. and Europe. The

company's revenue climbed to \$350+ million between 2001 and 2012, primarily driven by organic growth. ABM Industries



acquired AirServ in November 2012. Frank's next venture, SecurAmerica — a commercial security provider in the U.S. — grew to approximately a half billion dollars in revenue, with 30,500 employees before Frank sold the company to AUS in January of 2021.

Today, three companies sit within the Argenbright Holdings group. Unifi, founded in 2008, is one of the top providers of aviation services, delivering expertise and first-rate customer service to an expansive network of over 200 airports. Velociti Services, founded in 2021, is a facilities services company specializing in integrated facility management. The newest addition, Amberstone, is already a cutting-edge supplier of intelligent, electronic security and manned service solutions in the UK and Europe.

As the Argenbright Group continues to grow, Frank navigates the complexities of managing large mergers

and acquisitions with ease. His small-town roots and experiences established a deep, strong foundation that Frank builds on every day. Every voice and pair of hands play a role in his decisions, for it was the voices and hands of his community that got him where he is today.

#### **An everyman for the people**

At this stage of his career, Frank Argenbright still has a tremendous passion for business and for his employees — and that keeps him energized and eager. As he seeks out new and innovative ideas, Frank remains fully committed to showing up for every employee and customer. With his eyes firmly set on the future, he holds fast to the people, places and situations that made him into who he is, for his vision is to create a difference in the lives of frontline employees and help them to realize their American Dream! ■

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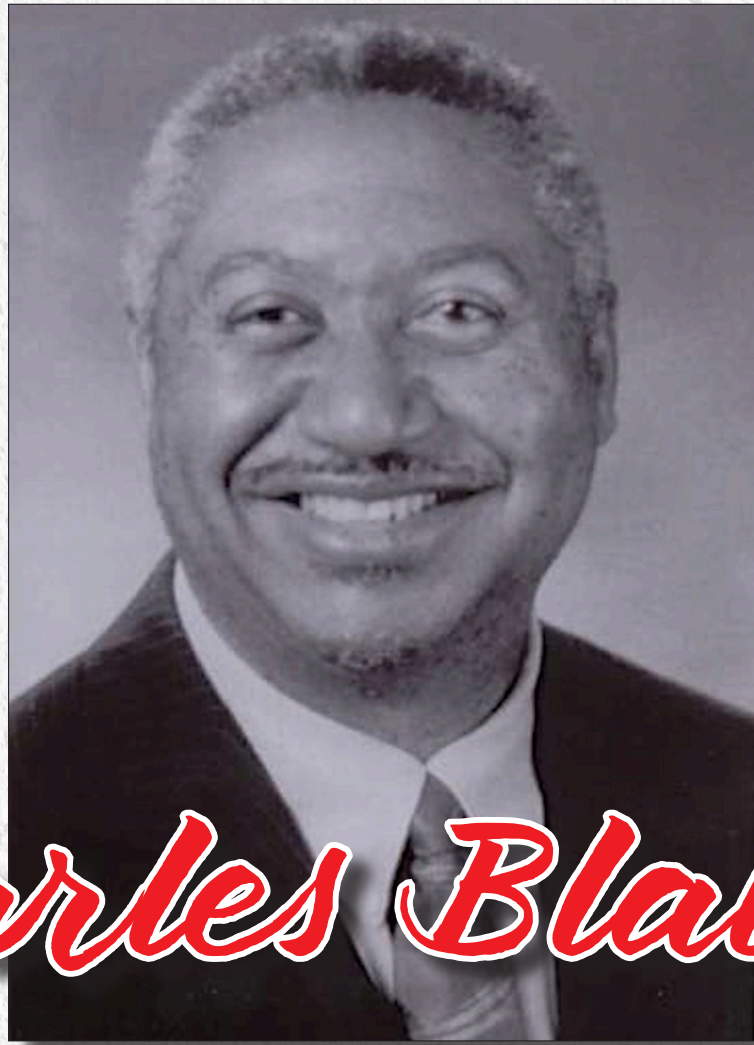
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# Charles Blalock

## Story by Lee Trawick

*Photographs Courtesy of Charles Blalock*

The 1989 hit movie "Lean on Me" may not have been about Charles Blalock, but the character of Principal Joe Clark, played by Morgan Freeman, and Blalock mirror one another. There is no statue erected in his honor, perhaps because of the question of where it would be placed, Hamilton County or Suwannee County? Blalock has spent his career in education, and while he has not been in a classroom since 1987, nor has been involved with the educational system since 2004, his impact on his students as well as his colleagues still echoes throughout school hallways today.

Charles Blalock grew up as a two-sport star athlete. While he played various other sports, he excelled in both basketball and baseball. His love for these sports, and his dedication, earned him a basketball and baseball scholarship to Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas. However, after his junior year of college,

Blalock began making his way back home. He enrolled at Florida A&M University (FAMU) in Tallahassee, Fla. Upon graduating from FAMU in 1963, Blalock interned in St. Petersburg at 16<sup>th</sup> Street Junior High School. Following that, he taught at the J.R.E. Lee School in Jasper for five years. In 1968, Blalock took a position at Ely High School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where he taught for two years before returning to Hamilton County.

Once back in Hamilton County, Blalock began to carve a reputation he never intended to create for himself. He returned in time for possibly the most pivotal times in Hamilton County's history, the integration of schools. Blalock recalls the only controversial issue was not the integration of students but the renaming of the school mascot. The Hamilton County School mascot was the Rebels, while the J.R.E. Lee mascot was the Scorpions. While there were strong, loud opinions on both sides, the only thing the two schools could agree on was

that neither the Rebels nor the Scorpions would be on the short list of names for the new school. Somehow, Rebels made the list of proposed mascots to be voted on. The students from J.R.E. Lee felt lied to and betrayed. They walked out of the auditorium in protest and decided to go take back their school. With the integration of schools, J.R.E. Lee was to become the Hamilton County Middle School. Blalock understood the volatility of the situation and went to the old J.R.E. Lee to talk with the kids. He explained that he understood their frustration, and he expressed his concern that, with the volatile tension in the air, their demonstration can be seen as hostile and only escalate the situation. Blalock quickly built a reputation for seeing the bigger picture while standing his ground.

Blalock was then hired as the principal of the Jasper Elementary School in 1971, after being the Hamilton County Middle School counselor for two years. While his reputation began to expand



*In September of 2022, Blalock (center) was honored by having the Suwannee High School football field at Paul Langford Stadium named Charles Blalock Field.*

outside of Hamilton County, he became a very attractive prospect for other schools in likeminded positions. It wouldn't be long before Frankie Stankunis, of the Suwannee County School System lured Blalock over. Blalock accepted a position as principal of the East Elementary School, within the Suwannee County School System. Blalock was following two previous principals who had lasted only four months before resigning. They resigned because East Elementary School was created by combining two previous elementary schools into one. Therefore, the two previous principals hired for the position were grossly overwhelmed and believed it was in the best interest of everyone to bow out graciously. This was a concept Blalock never took too kindly to. Blalock laughs when thinking back to his first Christmas as the principal at East Elementary. As he gathered his staff to wish them all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, all the teachers and staff were expecting what they had grown accustomed to, and that was for another principal to resign. Little did they know that quitting or backing down was not part of Blalock's character.

"They asked me, as I wished them Merry Christmas, if I had anything to tell them. I replied, 'I just did.' They continued to ask, 'Do you have anything else to tell us?' I didn't know what they were asking so I had to ask. Then they all told me that the last two principals had resigned at Christmas, and they had been bracing themselves for the same thing from me," Blalock said. "I just laughed, and told them I'm not going anywhere and I would see them after the Christmas break."

The teachers and staff soon found out firsthand that Blalock would neither

quit nor back down to anyone. When Blalock was informed about how he was expected to run the day-to-day operations at East Elementary School, he was quick to inform those wanting him to run the school differently that he would not. He was there for the students, and he was there to look after his staff.

"I was hired to do a job, and if they wanted to do the job they could have it, but as long as I was the principal, I was going to run that school the way I saw fit," Blalock said proudly.

The powers above him removed him from his position and reassigned him within the district, where he was given a job with no job title.

Blalock's outlook on school and education was simple: "There is only one important person in this building and that's the students. Without students we wouldn't have nothing. They are our future," Blalock said when referring to an educator's job.

While many people offer words of wisdom, Blalock lived them. His personal convictions resonated with not only the teachers and staff but also parents of East Elementary School, as well as parents throughout Suwannee County. Word quickly spread throughout Suwannee County about how Blalock would fight for his students and his staff with such beliefs and dedication that he was willing to stare down powers from above, sacrificing his own reputation for the greater good of his students and staff.

The powers that were may have won the battle by having him removed from his principal position, but they ultimately sealed their own fate when he was encouraged to run for Suwannee County School Superintendent.

In 1987, Blalock was not oblivious to the history of Suwannee County voting and wholeheartedly understood that no black man had ever won a county-wide election. But his focus remained solely on the students and how he could best influence and better their futures. Therefore, Blalock threw his hat into the political ring for Suwannee County Schools Superintendent, with only 15 percent of the registered voters being a minority. Blalock recalls standing in town where the voting results were posted.

"There I was, standing in a crowd of white people when the results came in. I was hugging these white women and shaking everyone's hands and thanking everyone who voted for me. When a black friend of mine came up to me and pulled on my arm and told me, 'Hey, congratulations and all but you can't be seen hugging these white women and celebrating in downtown Live Oak. It's not safe.' He tried to get me to go back with him," Blalock said. "But before I could leave, a white woman had grabbed my arm and told me I had to go with them for something. They took me to the football field house, where they had the whole room decorated. I couldn't believe it. I asked them, 'You all knew I would win?' They replied to me, 'Mr. Blalock, we have all been working so hard for you, and we couldn't be happier that you won.' That meant more to me than I even realized back then."

Blalock became the first black man in Suwannee County to win a county-wide election. He took office in January of 1988 and went on to serve two terms, until he retired in 1996. His distinguished and brilliant career in the classroom at Suwannee High School and later in

administration had an impact not only for the students of Suwannee County but through what he built during his time.

Blalock used to find it baffling when he would travel outside of Suwannee County and people would go out of their way to meet him or shake his hand. He never understood the obsession people had with him; after all, he was a school superintendent, not a famous athlete or the creator of a medical breakthrough. He was an educator and thought nothing more of himself than that.

It wasn't until later that he found out about some of the history prior to his arrival to Suwannee County and the reputation the county had throughout Florida, in such places such as Orlando or Tampa and even further south. Upon hearing these things and how people viewed Suwannee County, he quietly wanted to change that reputation and prove to everyone that that was not the Suwannee County he lived in.

When he took office in January of 1988, the Suwannee High School football team was just coming off their first ever State Championship under third-year head coach, Mike Pittman. Blalock was excited to see his students and school excel and create a different reputation for Suwannee County. Still, he knew one state championship would not change the image of Suwannee County. Therefore, he threw the school system's full support behind the athletic program as well as various programs throughout the system. During his time, Suwannee High School erected what is known as Paul Langford Stadium and went on to win three more consecutive football State Championships under the direction of Coach Pittman. There are countless banners hanging around Suwannee High School of different championships – district, regional and a total of 10 State Championships: three football State Championships, two wrestling State Championships under the direction of head coach David Laxton as well as six Brain Bowl State Championships.

Blalock's time as Superintendent was not spent focused solely on athletics. His ultimate focus was on his students and preparing them for life after high school. Therefore, he called on the old middle school building, what is today commonly known throughout Suwannee County as the Douglas Center. There, he began an alternative school program. He also launched a culinary arts program there, as well as an adult education program and a place for troubled students.



Blalock understood kids will be kids, and sometimes they don't make the best decisions; however, they should not be punished or judged for life because of them. At the same time, they must be held accountable for their actions: therefore, being sent to finish out their school year at the Douglas Center was always considered a means of punishment. He implemented a program to help better fund the middle school for Suwannee County. For Blalock, it was all about the students as he never wavered from his idea that the most important people in the school system are the students themselves.

Blalock's impact was not limited to Suwannee County. Because of his reputation over the years as a man of high character and great morals and values, he was asked to serve on many different boards throughout Florida. He served on the Board of Directors for Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) for 12 years as well as the Southern College Association, where he reviewed college curriculum and facilities to make sure the students were getting the very best education available.

Blalock retired in 1996 with a full, accomplished resume; however, his career was not complete. He would once again be called up to run for office, this time for Hamilton County Schools Superintendent. Again, he would be up against the history of a county's reputation and, like before, he would become the first black county-wide elected official to take office in Hamilton County in 2000. He would only serve four years before he would finally call it a career. But while at Hamilton County, he gathered the funds and grant money to purchase 72 acres and secure funds for a \$52 million school to be built on it. They built a new football stadium on the 72 acres.

Hamilton County Schools launched a college preparatory program and building with an agreement with North Florida Community College that they would provide the professors to the students who qualified for such a program by maintaining a 3.0 grade point average. Many students during that time graduated high school with their Associates in Arts (A.A) Degree, something Blalock remains proud of today.

Many years after his retirement, Blalock was inducted into the Suwannee High School Athletic Hall of Fame in October of 2021. He is the only non-athlete inducted into this Hall of Fame. He was inducted for the impact and opportunities he helped provide for countless of student athletes throughout his career.

In September of 2022, Blalock was paid one last gesture of homage for his footprints on Suwannee High School, as the Suwannee High School football field at Paul Langford Stadium will forever be known as Charles Blalock Field, to honor him for his efforts and vision to bring forth such a field and stadium for the Suwannee Bulldogs.

Standing with Blalock throughout his career was his late wife of 58 years, Pauline, and their three children, Carla, Traci and Charles III (Chuck) Blalock. He is quick to point out that a young man he considers his fourth son, Thaddues Bullard, also joined the family. Blalock is proud of his children and most importantly proud of his wife, who sat down beside him on a school bus in St. Augustine, Fla., after accepting a challenge by her basketball coach that the girls could ride the bus with the team if they won the high school State Championship.

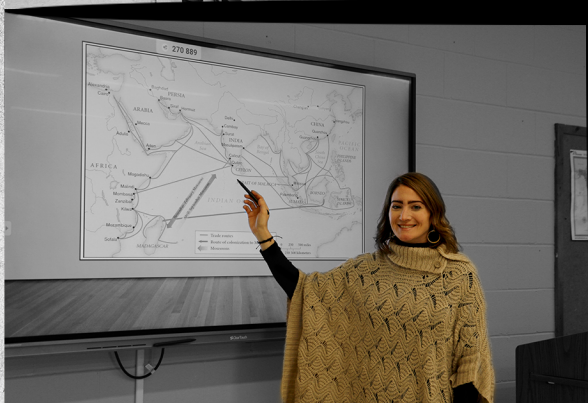
"I saw her get on the bus, and I had never seen a more beautiful woman in all my life. I told her to sit right here [beside him], and she never left my side," Blalock recalls.

After returning from Texas to FAMU, the two reunited and were inseparable until her passing on July 29, 2022.

Today, Blalock is humbled by the notoriety he has received over the years; however, to those who know him, learned under him or worked along side of him, they are not surprised at all. Looking back over his career, his greatest accomplishment is the fact that to this day, former students of Suwannee High School remember the strong relationships he built and can immediately recognize his voice when they hear it. ■

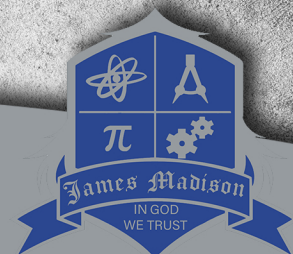
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*Chucha Barber and Josh McLawhorn at the debut of the teaser for "Unfiltered" at the Governor's Club in Tallahassee*

**Story by Lazaro Aleman**

*Photographs Courtesy of Chucha Barber*

When not partnering on projects with television networks or working on special assignments, Jefferson County soon-to-be resident and television producer Chucha Barber focuses on her own productions – two of which currently are a feature-length documentary and a semi-fictional film.

Barber, whose award-winning television programs and educational videos have been aired on ABC, CBS, NBC, Univision and Telemundo stations, and whose career spans nearly 30 years, is also the founder of a Tallahassee-based television production company and a Jefferson County property owner.

We meet for coffee at the Cow Haus in Monticello, conveniently located midway between her Aucilla-area property and Tallahassee office.

Barber, whose passion and convictions are readily evident, tells me that she's been working most recently with ABC's 20/20 on coverage of the several individuals charged in the 2014 murder of FSU law professor

Dan Markel.

"Two episodes have already been aired, but the case continues to unfold," she says, adding that the deceased's brother-in-law is the latest arrested in connection with the murder-for-hire case.

As field producer for 20/20, Barber's assignment entails covering court proceedings, transmitting newly released evidence, conducting interviews and doing whatever else needs doing.

"I'm their boots on the ground in Tallahassee," she says of her job with the television news show, which is based in New York City.

Her preference, however, and what she mostly does, is work on her own videos and documentaries as an independent producer. She describes this role as requiring everything from generating ideas for new videos, television shows and films, to scriptwriting, fundraising, organizing schedules, hiring crews and shooting on location.

"What typically happens is that I become enthralled with learning about

something or wanting to tell a story, and I find kindred spirits who will support my effort," is how Barber explains the process.

What she doesn't do is edit, operate cameras, handle the keyboard or deal with the other technological aspects of the productions. These tasks she leaves to the professionals who work with her and possess the expertise.

"I'm not fond of technology," says Barber, who graduated with a degree in communications from the University of Miami in 1975. "I'm not interested in learning a whole new aspect of film and television production. I do, however, have a voice in the productions. And I like to believe that I have a hands-on role when it comes to their direction."

Barber decided early that she preferred being behind the camera rather than in front of it. She didn't like how she looked on camera, she says. In fact, radio was her first love, which she did for a while after getting her degree.

She got into television productions by happenstance when she went to work



*Chucha Barber filming for  
"Unfiltered" in Panacea, Fla.*

for the Miami Museum of Science and produced a documentary about dinosaurs to promote the museum's first-ever exhibition of giant robotic dinosaurs. Her documentary, titled "Dig Those Dinos," won an Emmy Award.

This success induced her to continue doing television productions, of which she has now done more than 25, several of them award-winning.

How she, her husband Russ, and

their two sons, Russ and Ryan, ended up in North Florida in 1998 had more to do with Miami's crime situation than with any personal desire. After their house was twice burglarized in a short period, the Barbers decided that enough was enough and relocated to Tallahassee. Not long after arriving, she secured a job as director of the Mary Brogan Museum, a post that she held for 14 years. It was during this time that she also launched her company, Chucha Barber

Productions.

"At this stage in my life, most of what I work on are things that I really care about," Barber says, offering as examples her two latest endeavors.

The foremost, which is nearing completion after four years, is her first feature documentary. Although intended for theaters, Barber concedes that the production may well end up being streamed on television. Titled "Unfiltered: The Truth about Oysters," the film aims to sound an alarm and hopefully avert a potential catastrophic collapse of the oyster reefs. Barber has, in fact, a little of the evangelist's fervor when she talks about the perils facing the reefs, immersed in the story and the urgency of its telling as she is.

Oyster reefs, she will tell you, not only create important habitats and safe nurseries for hundreds of commercially valuable fish and other species, but they also protect against storm surge, prevent coastal erosion and protect estuary waters. Not to mention that oysters act as natural filters to clean the surrounding water, serve as a source of food for people, and their harvests provide economic benefits to coastal communities.

When Barber began the project, her focus was largely on Apalachicola Bay, convinced as she then was that the problem primarily stemmed from human pressure due to development, overharvesting and not enough freshwater. She has since revised her assessment, based on her research, and has come to understand that the causes are multiple and the problem worldwide.

Her aim in making the film, Barber says, is twofold. One is to convey the direness and magnitude of the problem, in terms of its potential ecological and economic impacts. The other is to convey that corrective action is still possible. The situation, she says, can still be reversed, if the popular and political will is exercised.

"The good news is that of the many environmental problems that we face, this one can be fixed," she says. "It's not too late right now."

Barber generously credits the many people involved in the film endeavor. Among these are photographers Richard Bickel and Clyde Butcher, whose evocative black-and-white photography of oyster fishermen and Florida landscapes, respectively, grace the film. She also praises partners Josh McLawhorn and wife Gaby Rodeiro, of Level Up Digital Media, whose contributions include editing, creating animation and operating the cameras.

Once the film is completed, Barber says the next step will be to premiere it at film festivals or stream it on Netflix, Hulu or Apple TV. Either of these processes is costly and time-consuming. This is why



she's currently in fund-raising mode to acquire the necessary money to advertise, market and promote the film. She cites, for example, the premiering of a film at the Sundance Film Festival, which costs can add up quickly in terms of entry fees, travel and lodging, and other expenses.

"It's not cheap," Barber says.

When not concentrating on "Unfiltered," Barber focuses on her second major project, tentatively titled "90 Miles," the distance in nautical miles between Cuba and Key West. "90 Miles" tells the story of her late father, George Southworth, the *Miami Herald's* first Latin America editor and once a cohort of the late Fidel Castro, Cuba's colorful revolutionary leader and longtime premier/dictator.

Unlike "Unfiltered," which she is producing to convey an urgent message, Barber says "90 Miles" is partly fictionalized and intended to be a moneymaker, as well as tell her father's story.

The way Barber relates it, upon her mother's death, she found in the latter's closet a string-tied grapefruit shipping box containing 485 front-page stories written by her father about the Cuban Revolution, Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuban Missile Crisis and other historical events.

Contained in the box also were an armband supposedly worn by Castro during his 26th of July Movement days, a 26th of July pennant, handwritten notes from her father and flyers from one of Castro's pre-revolution fundraisers in New York, among other memorabilia.

More importantly, Barber says, she found documentation suggesting that her father may have been involved in intelligence gathering for the U.S. government.

"And so I believe that my father was a CIA agent placed at the *Miami Herald* to befriend Fidel and gather intelligence," she says.

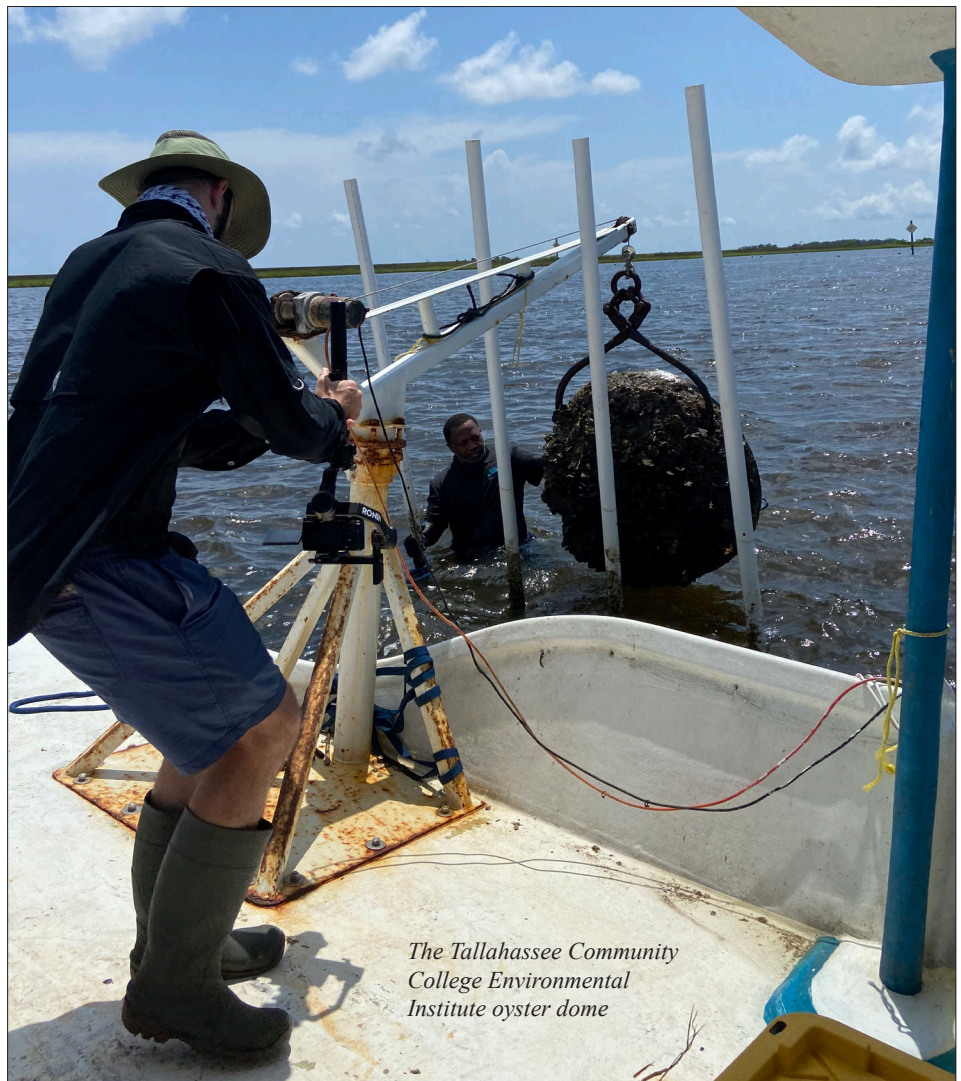
An Indiana native, her father spent four years in the Office of Naval Intelligence, served in WWII and lived in several Latin American countries before relocating to Miami, where he eventually became the paper's first Latin America editor, in part because he spoke Spanish.

"One day, this young Cuban cowboy named Fidel Castro who didn't really speak English came to the paper," Barber relates. "So the managing editor at the *Herald* said to my father, 'George, there's some guy here says he's going to overthrow [Cuban dictator Fulgencio] Batista. I think you should talk to him.'"

This was around 1952, and so began a relationship between Southworth and Castro that lasted until 1962, when Castro told her father never to return to Cuba.



*Chucha Barber with Dr. Sandra Brooke at the Florida State University Coastal and Marine Lab*



*The Tallahassee Community College Environmental Institute oyster dome*



George Southworth at his news desk at the Miami Herald.



George Southworth interviewed Alberto Lleras Camargo, the 20th President of Colombia and the first Secretary General of the Organization of American States.

"I think the reason that my father got a phone call from Fidel saying he could never go back to Cuba was that his cover was blown," Barber says.

"As I sit here with you today," she adds, "I believe with all my heart that there were many journalists in the 50s and the Cold War who were used to gather intelligence. And my father was one."

Determined to get at the truth of her father's CIA involvement, Barber sought information from the agency to no avail. She even tried to get confirmation from the aging Castro while visiting Cuba as part of a museum excursion when she was director of the Brogan Museum.

Following much ado and correspondences with Cuban officials after returning to Tallahassee, Barber was



George Southworth is standing behind Fidel, wearing sunglasses (top left); interviewing former Cuban President Carlos Prio (bottom left); interviewing Eloy Guitierrez Menoyo, who was the leader of El Segundo Frente (top right); and on the phone in a Cuban hotel (bottom right).

finally able to get Castro's consent to do the interview, only to have the U.S. Treasury quash the enterprise by not granting her a visa to return to Cuba.

Barber has already written the film's pilot, which screen script she is currently tweaking to emphasize her father's role and potentially make the film more marketable.

Her dream is for actor Leonardo DiCaprio to play her father's part and actor Jordi Vilasuso to play the young Castro. A Cuban-American actor featured most recently in *The Young and the Restless*, Vilasuso stays in contact with Barber and has given her feedback on the screen script, as well as put her in touch with important people in the film industry.

"I like to say that we'll finish

"Unfiltered" probably this October and then there will be several months of film festivals and events to promote the project," Barber says. "And I would say that in the beginning of 2023, '90 Miles' will be everything that I live and breathe."

At this stage in her life, Barber says, she's content to have discovered her purpose and to have the time and means to pursue it.

"We all go through life trying to figure what's our purpose," Barber says. "What's our reason for being? It took me almost a life to fully understand that I'm a storyteller. When I started my company, I became something of a storyteller for corporations and clients. But these are not the stories of significance that I choose to tell now." ■

MERRY

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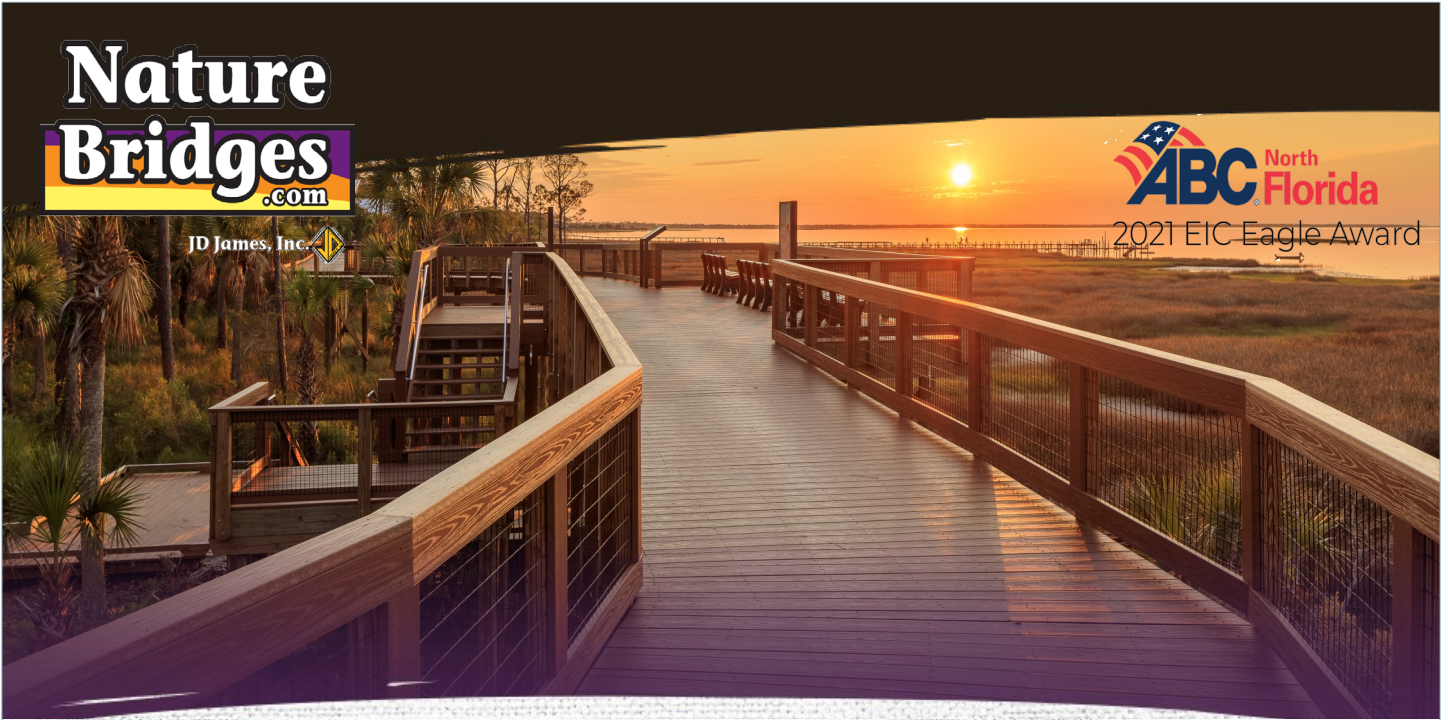
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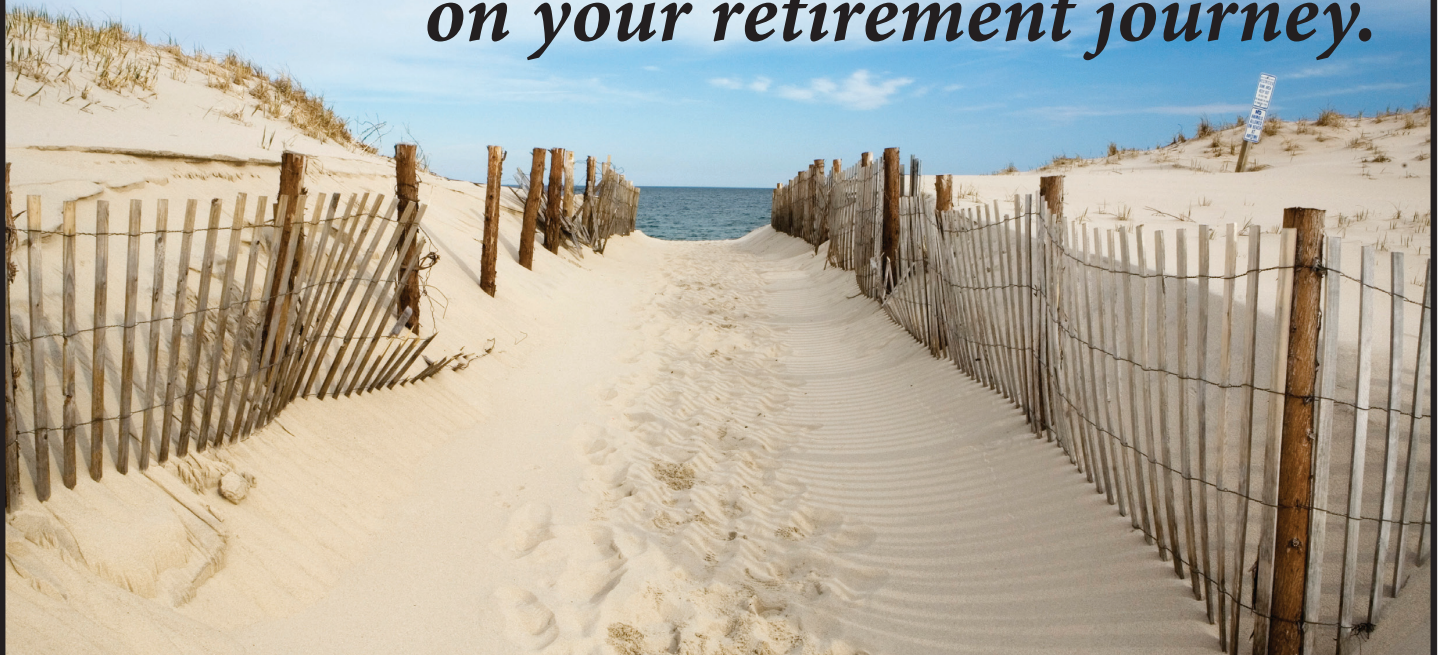
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**EARNEST  
JONES**

*Photo by Christian Peterson*

**THE  
POWER OF  
POSITIVITY**



*The Lafayette Volunteer Fire Department, which Jones helped create. / Photo Courtesy of Marty Thompkins*

**Story by Grace McAlister**

Born August 26, 1953, Earnest Jones has lived in Lafayette County his entire life. Over the last 69 years, he has been a witness to many significant changes in the county, including the restoration of the historic Lafayette Clocktower, the schools transforming from D schools to A schools, and the implementation of the volunteer fire department, in which he played an integral role.

The Lafayette High School graduate entered the military right after graduation; at the time, his family could not afford college and Jones wanted to serve his country. So, after attending Fort Gordon Technical Institute, he was stationed in Fairbanks, Alaska, as an E4 Specialist. This was one of the most challenging times in Jones' life.

"It was not easy being a Florida boy in Alaska," he said.

Without the support of his community, faith in the Lord, and the power of having an optimistic outlook on life, this period in Jones's life would have been significantly more difficult.

In 1977, after leaving the service, Jones began a career at what was once known as the North Florida Telephone Company, which has since changed its name to Kinetic. Jones has served on the Lafayette County Board of County Commissioners since 1992 and was the first black commissioner in Lafayette County. The first achievements by black people in diverse fields have historically marked footholds as it has often led to more widespread cultural change. At this time, he says there is a strong possibility of running again.

In his spare time, Jones enjoys helping others and meeting

new people. He has three children, Lashawna Middleton, Latricia Cambell and Earnest Jones Jr. He says the things which define him the most are his relationship with the Lord, his family and his career. Jones is proud to be able to work with the people.

As a commissioner, Jones's main goals included paving roads in Lafayette County that were in great need of it and starting a fire department to better ensure the safety of his community, both achieved while he was in office. During Jones' first campaign, he says there were not any particularly difficult challenges. He recalls that he received massive positive feedback from the community, and he is eternally grateful for the support he received. Jones chose to run for county commissioner because there was a lot of change he wanted to make in the community. He is extremely thankful to everyone who has helped him through his campaigns over the years, especially his family. Throughout his first campaign, he was very optimistic, and he has maintained his optimism throughout every campaign he has had since then. Jones advises the community to remain hopeful and see the best even in difficult situations. For those who plan to run for any political office, he emphasizes that one should not slander their opponent and that it is unwise to build one's campaign off criticizing another. These ideas seem to have worked well for Jones, as he is not only the longest running county commissioner in Lafayette County, he is the second longest running county commissioner in the state. ■

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# PIVOT POINTS



*#13 Swann played half-back and linebacker at Jefferson High School with #40 Virgil Davis. / Photos Courtesy of Earl Swann*

### Story by Laura Young

A hardscrabble kid.  
A talented athlete.  
A fair sergeant.  
A hard worker.  
A go-getter.

Earl Swann came into this world in 1945 in Meridian, Miss. Life was hard, and Swann began at a very early age to figure out how to survive poverty and instability at home. In his formative years, he was shifted to seven different elementary schools — Atlanta, San Antonio, Clearwater, Albany (Ga.), Gainesville, Tallahassee, Monticello. When his mother, Mary Kate Sauls, passed away from smoke and alcohol-related diseases while his father was in prison, Swann found himself on his own at the age of 12. Somehow, he was able to see all this as a good thing.

“The best thing that can happen to a child is to be born into poverty,” says Swann. “It makes you stronger.”

Leaving home in the eighth grade was to be the first of many critical pivot points in Swann’s life. He credits Steven Walker, a juvenile officer and coach at his school, with getting him settled with his grandmother, Mollie Yon, in Monticello, and he got involved in sports, with football, basketball, baseball and car racing central to his somewhat wild high school years. Swann spent many weekends at the racetrack in Thomasville, Ga., with an older crowd that he admired. One winning racer, Harvey Jones, became a hero to Swann.

An old school friend, John Cooper, recalls how much he and Swann both loved playing basketball and took any chance they could to shoot hoops.

“He had some rough edges because of his upbringing,” says Cooper, “but he has done very well for himself.” They still meet up from time to time nowadays, and even though they are both in their late 70s, Cooper says, “I still see the boy I went to elementary school with and the boy I went to junior high with.”

They graduated from Jefferson High School together in 1963. At that time, Swann took a look at his options and, seeing “nothing better to spend the next four years doing,” he took himself off to college, another critical pivot point for him. In 1965, Swann graduated from nearby North Florida Junior College and then went on to Livingston University (now the University of West Alabama), where he played baseball and earned degrees in Physical Education and Social Studies.

“People don’t realize how hard it is to put yourself through college without parents,” says Swann’s longtime friend, Herman Walker. “Earl has stayed focused on what he wanted to do and has done

remarkably well.”

With his education, Swann was able to begin a teaching career in the tiny town of Grand Ridge, Fla., in Jackson County. The next year he taught in Madison, Fla., and the next year he was drafted into the U.S. Army.

While serving in the military, Swann rose to the rank of sergeant and was a squad leader during a year spent in combat in Vietnam.

An Army buddy of his, Mike Watkins, bonded quickly with Swann in these circumstances and has maintained the friendship to this day. The ties between Watkins and Swann deepened when they were among only a few to survive an attack on their base.

“We were taking rockets in the Charley 2 Firebase after being in the field for a couple of weeks,” recalls Watkins, adding that Swann led him to the perimeter during the attack when others moved from the mess hall to a bunker.

“Ten minutes later that bunker was hit. Thirty-two boys were killed. We had to dig

them out, including [our good friend] Ozier. Nearly the whole squad was among them. I credit Earl for saving my life with his smart thinking.”

Watkins says Swann was a very fair sergeant as well as the kind of leader who got him to stop smoking cigarettes and set an example by never touching a drop of alcohol.

When his tour in Vietnam ended in 1971, Swann went back to teaching, this time in Jefferson County. George Pittman, who was his principal at Howard Academy Middle School, recalls that at that time Swann was a real go-getter and very strict with his students. Swann taught PE and coached. A colleague, Jim Norton, who taught math and coached basketball with Swann, considers him one of his dearest friends.

“I could call Earl at any time. If you needed something, he’s not going to ask questions,” says Norton, adding that Swann always had his back and was straight up with him. “If Earl tells you something, you can



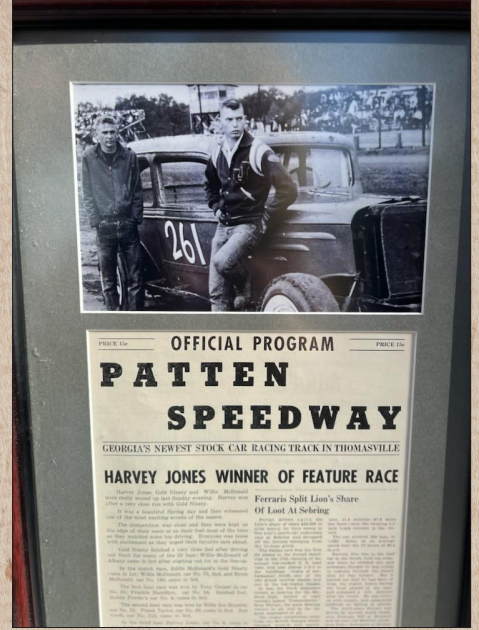
*Earl Swann today*



Swann (left) became involved in a number of sports at the age of 12, including baseball.



Swann (standing), a squad sergeant in the Army, became good friends in Vietnam with Ozier Pruitt (left) and Mike Watkins (right).



Swann (left) raced his 1935 Chevy #261 at the Patten Speedway in Thomasville, shown here with his friend, Tommy Stover.

bank on it."

Norton notes that he became the first black softball official in Monticello, an opportunity that he credits Swann for bringing about.

Soon, however, another pivot point

presented itself to Swann. He tells how one day as he was sitting in the library reading the *Tallahassee Democrat*, he came across an article about a bail bondsman in Lake City who was making \$47,000 a year. Because his salary as a teacher was just

\$17,000, the prospect piqued his interest. After talking with then Chief Deputy Nelson Blount of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office about how the bail bond business worked, he abruptly quit teaching and switched to this very different line of work.

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"In life you have to know when to pivot," says Swann.

The go-getter in him now turned his powerful focus in this new direction.

"I slept in my office for over 20 years," says Swann of his dedication to being a bail bondsman. "I had a bed, t.v. and tub and answered the phone every time it rang. If you are in jail, you want someone to answer the phone."

Even before cell phones were invented, Swann was known to carry around the old box-style satellite telephones so that he never missed an opportunity to write a bail bond agreement. His business grew and grew, and eventually he established the Swann Insurance Agency with his wife in Monticello and began buying properties with his profits.

Ron Cichon, another Monticello businessman and property owner, recalls how he, Swann and other local entrepreneurs would gather at a downtown buffet many a morning and hold forth on whatever the news of the day was. Their views on the topics were usually very far apart, sometimes intolerably so. Still, Cichon acknowledges Swann's business success and notes that whatever Swann put his mind to, he worked hard to achieve.

As Swann's wealth accumulated, he began to look for ways to expand. He moved to Perry, Fla., opened another insurance office there and began to buy up nearby real estate.

"My goal was to buy everything around the [Taylor County] courthouse," he says of this pivot point in his life.

Indeed, records show that Swann, in addition to the 11 properties he owns in Jefferson County, now owns 19 parcels in Taylor County.

It's been a gradual process. His friend, Herman Walker, comments that Swann never had a big windfall but was always "steady in the boat." Walker adds, "He wanted to be somebody, to accomplish something. He made no foolish decisions and stayed out of trouble."

It's often so that the same outlook and approach that can bring a person considerable success can also have a troublesome side. For Swann, his extremes have generated deep, long-lasting bonds and financial wealth while at the same time have contributed to relationship dynamics that resulted in divorce, estrangement and instances of rebuke.

Retired banker Gary Wright recalls times that the way Swann expressed himself could really upset people around him, even as Wright points with admiration to Swann's work ethic.

"He and I haven't always agreed on everything," says Wright, "but we agree on

love of country and the value of hard work. Earl's personal background is admirable in many ways. He is a self-made man with no one to jump-start him along the way."

In addition to building up his own businesses, he helped others get started as well. One person he helped was Mike Harrison of Crawfordville.

"Earl got me started in the [bail bond] business and trained me," says Harrison. "You are not going to outwork him, and that is the best compliment you can give a guy. He has been a legend in the business and helped me many times."

Swann has two daughters, Mary Kate and Leslie, and Leslie worked for her dad at Swann Insurance for more than 20 years. Like others, she recognizes how hard her dad has worked, noting also that they've had their relationship differences over the years. Last year, he sold the Perry agency

to her, and she expresses gratitude for that. She wants to continue its success so that she can one day offer to pass it on to her own daughter as well.

Also in 2021, Swann sold his Monticello agency to JoAnn Barker, who had worked for him there for 30 years. Barker says that she feels like Swann raised her. He encouraged her when she started out doing filing part-time in the agency and became a mentor who guided her to go to college, get her license, buy a home and envision what she could accomplish in life.

Thus, 2021 has been the latest pivot point for Swann.

"You build a monster, and you can't really get away from it," he has reflected, but by selling his insurance companies, he just may be starting to pivot away from the monster.

Retired? Not really, because Swann



*This 1920s-era home, one of Swann's recent purchases, is being renovated into a bed-and-breakfast establishment. / Photo by Laura Young*

# Walker's Landmark

## 2022 Holiday Menu

### Pies- All pies are \$16.00

World Famous Pecan Pie  
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 Strawberry Pie  
 Cherry Pie  
 Blueberry Pie  
 Chocolate Pie  
 Lemon Meringue Pie  
 Pumpkin Pie  
 Sweet Potato Pie



### Cobblers each 9x13 \$25.00

Peach Cobbler  
 Blueberry Cobbler  
 Apple Cobbler  
 Strawberry Cobbler

### Cakes. 2 layers \$25.00

German Chocolate  
 Red Velvet  
 Carrot Cake  
 Yellow Cake w/ Chocolate  
 Oreo Cake  
 Lemon Cake  
 Pumpkin Cake  
 Pineapple Upside Down

### Holiday Sides 9x13

Old Fashion Dressing \$25.00  
 Sweet Potatoes \$25.00  
 Green Bean Casserole \$25.00  
 Mac N Cheese \$35.00  
 Mashed Potatoes \$25.00  
 Potato Salad \$25.00  
 Macaroni Salad \$25.00  
 Cranberry Sauce \$10.00  
 Corn Casserole \$20.00  
 Cornbread \$15.00

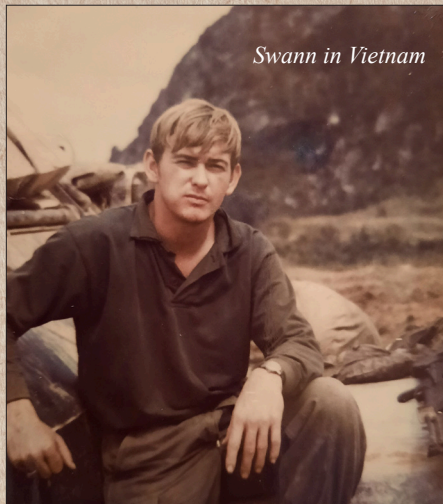
### Other Desserts

Oreo Truffles / dozen \$12.00  
 Pecan Clusters / dozen \$15.00  
 Brownies/9x13 \$25.00

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*Swann in Vietnam*

still wakes up each morning with all those properties to manage. He's busy renovating Perry's historic Greystone Manor and his most recent purchase, a large 1920s-era home, both of which he's thinking of operating as bed and breakfast establishments. Still, he's getting to the gym every other day, taking time to relax on the weekends, fixing up some good key lime pies and discovering

that he really enjoys being a grandfather.

Of his three grandkids, Leslie's daughter, Kendall, lives nearby. The time he spends with her has caused him to rethink some of his "starting rough makes you tough" philosophy. He remembers his own youth, selling newspapers in the street for five cents a copy, setting toppled bowling pins back up for twelve cents a game, toiling in watermelon fields for ten dollars a day. He had thought that hardship would be good for his granddaughter as well but says, "When the plane landed and I saw her in a stroller and she smiled at me..." that philosophy basically went out the window.

It appears he's positioning himself for another big change, but it's hard to say what exactly that next pivot point for Earl Swann will be. ■

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# NOSE DOWN, TAIL UP

A Weimaraner dog is shown in profile, standing in a marshy area. The dog is facing right, looking towards a body of water. The ground is covered with tall, thin grasses and some small plants. The water is calm and reflects the surrounding greenery. The dog has a white collar with a pink tag.

*Tracking and Recovery*





### Story by Heather Ainsley

Photographs Courtesy of Mike Alguire

The term "hunting ethics" refers to the set of moral standards that responsible huntsmen take on that help them to make moral choices when they find themselves in situations that arise while hunting. While there is no set rulebook for exactly which ethical practices are superior to follow, there are certainly common guidelines that many responsible hunters agree keep the sport fair, sustainable and ethically sound. Among these guidelines are

- familiarity and strict adherence to legal hunting rules and regulations for a hunter's specific location;
- possession of a proper license and tags for the season and animal that is being pursued;
- knowledge of when a season begins and ends; and
- effective use of hunting methods while in the field.

Part of that method is making clean, swift shots to end an animal's life humanely, and recovering a wounded animal quickly if a shot misses its aim.

One of the most frustrating moments for a hunter can occur when they land a carefully aimed shot (or think they do), and the animal takes off. If the shot hits its intended mark, the animal may not travel very far before the hunter can reach it. Occasionally, though, even a clean shot may not down its target, and an injured animal may flee for long distances, eventually becoming impossible to locate for even an able-bodied hunter with tracking experience. This outcome benefits nobody; the hunter will have lost a subject that they have spent many hours tracking down and, in some cases, may be dependent upon bringing home, and the animal is left to languish from its wounds, its wasted carcass consumed by scavengers in the woods. It is not an ideal situation.

According to Bryan Zabitski with [deeranddeerhunting.com](http://deeranddeerhunting.com), "A part of being an ethical and responsible hunter involves respecting the animal you are pursuing. As a hunter, you have made the decision to end an animal's life, and you owe it to the animal to make its expiration as quick, painless and certain as possible. You should make every effort to find and recover the animal that you have shot."

Zabitski also recommends being knowledgeable about the animal's anatomy, so it can be harvested without squandering the meat. Improper use of tools or inadequate understanding of

**LEFT:** On the opening day of archery season, a call brought Mike and his team to a wooded pond in South Georgia. The hunter, Christopher Cobb, stated that he had made a frontal shot at 15 yards before losing the deer in the woods. After being tracked for over a mile, the deer was successfully located, tangled in a briar patch on the edge of the pond.



Mike Alguire's main tracking dog, Ellie Mae, is also known as the Cheeseburger Queen.

an animal's anatomy can result in a hard-earned catch becoming spoiled or wasted by accident.

While that may sound simple enough, even an experienced hunter can occasionally lose a prize catch and, even after hours in the woods searching, may never recover it. They also may never know if the animal is capable of surviving its injuries or not. The disappointment that comes from losing a catch, as well as never having the closure of what the outcome of the hunt was, can run deep for a hopeful hunter. For those hunters who refuse to settle



Mike is the owner of a tracking service called Nose Down, Tail Up -Tracking and Recovery. He and his two dogs, Baylee and Shylo, specialize in the tracking and recovery of wounded game (primarily whitetail deer and exotics) for hunters in Jefferson County, Leon County, Wakulla County, Gadsden County and parts of South Georgia.



with the unknown, many consider hiring a professional tracker to help them locate and claim their fallen catch, or to locate and humanely end an unfinished hunt.

That's where Mike Alguire and his dogs come in.



*On many calls, Mike and his tracking dogs work in conjunction with other tracking teams. One of the tracking teams Mike frequently partners with includes tracker Lindsay Keifer and her husband Jeremy. Mike says it is always a great time, being able to track with fellow trackers and good friends.*



*Occasionally, an animal will not travel far after a fatal shot, but will leave no trace behind as it flees, making it virtually impossible for the hunter to recover without assistance. This black buck was tracked and recovered just over 150 yards from where he was shot.*



Mike is the owner of a tracking service called Nose Down, Tail Up – Tracking and Recovery. He specializes in the tracking and recovery of wounded game (primarily whitetail deer and exotics) for hunters in Jefferson County, Leon County, Wakulla County, Gadsden County and parts of South Georgia. He works closely with several other trackers all across the state of Florida, and they provide additional tracking services for hogs, wandering livestock, lost pets and even people. As a hunter himself, Alguire says he first got into tracking after losing a hunt subject of his own.

“Like all hunters, I have lost deer in the past just to find them with buzzards a few days later,” he said. “So I joined tracking pages, such as the Florida Bloodtrailing Network, and I started paying close

attention to how things were done. I got very intrigued by it."

Alguire says he began asking more experienced trackers questions, in an effort to learn all he could about tracking. He went to an animal shelter, adopted a dog that he felt would suit his lifestyle and began working with her. He and his new canine companion steadily learned how to track deer together, and it wasn't long before friends were calling with assistance requests.

"Word of mouth got around. It was like a snowball effect," said Alguire. "Before I knew it, I was tracking for the public, and here I am now, a few years later, with a very good and reputable reputation for tracking! We are putting smiles on a ton of hunter's faces every year."

He and his network of Florida trackers are highly dedicated to providing their clients with a quality service when they respond to a call, and they believe in their mission of helping as many people as possible. "There have been times that I've gotten as many as 17 calls in a single day," says Alguire, continuing to say that the average number of calls during hunting season is about four or five calls a day. His partnership with several other reputable trackers ensures that if he is unable to assist with recovery, due to location or availability conflicts, he can easily get hunters in contact with a tracker who can assist them.

"If someone needs a deer tracked," says Alguire, "and it is too far of a drive for me or if I'm lined up with tracks that day, I will be more than happy to get them in contact with a reputable tracker in their area. I have really good friends that are trackers all over the state who are able to help, so getting someone will not be an issue."

Alguire offers his service on a voluntary basis, and does not charge his clients who call him for assistance.

"Tips are appreciated to help with fuel expenses, but not asked for," he states. "Myself, along with other trackers, don't want a hunter to not call us to come out because they feel like they don't have the money."

For his tracking service, Alguire utilizes the assistance of his two tracking dogs; Baylee and Shylo, who are both female bloodhounds. Baylee is about three years old, and is United Blood Tracker (UBT) II certified in wounded game recovery. Her oldest solo track with recovery is 28 hours old after the shot and 2.4 miles long. Shylo is two years old, and is UBT I certified in wounded game recovery, with an oldest solo track with recovery of 26 hours old and 1.7 miles long. Together, the canine team has an oldest track with recovery of 37 hours old and about 3.5 miles long. The



*Both Shylo and Baylee are United Blood Tracker (UBT) certified canines.*

girls are known in the tracking and hunting community as "Team Biscuit Chasers," and "Team Red Dog."

"These girls have made a huge name for themselves in the hunting community," says Alguire proudly. "Baylee is my back-talker. She loves to be heard and will argue with you until the cows come home. Shylo is what we call the old soul. She is very calm and laid back, just like an old dog would be."

There have been many ups and downs in his experiences as a tracker, but Alguire says the hardest thing he's endured, through all of the hunts he has helped assist with, was losing his tracking partner.

"My lowest point was a couple of years ago, when my main tracking dog, Ellie Mae (AKA the Cheeseburger Queen, as most folks knew her by), was struck three times

by a rattlesnake while tracking a deer for a hunter in Perry, Fla."

Due to the rural location, the bites proved to be fatal for the dog, who passed away with her owner by her side.

"She took her last breath in the Palmetto flats, doing what she loved to do," says Alguire ruefully.

Safety is the most important thing in tracking for Alguire and his girls. "The majority of our tracks are at night, so not only do I have to make sure I am out of danger in the cover of darkness, but I have to make sure that the hunter and my dogs are clear of danger. As a tracker, it is my responsibility to not put us in a bad position, to where any of us are put in harm's way. Danger is always present when dealing with a wild animal, and being in the woods. When my tailgate drops to let

these dogs do what they love, there is a high chance of something bad happening. It's just a part of it, but I do everything I can to keep everyone involved safe."

Alguire's safety instructions during a hunt include ensuring that during a tracking session, the hunters present must return their firearms to their vehicles.

"It is a huge safety concern for me and my dogs," he says, "especially with my dogs being about the color of a deer. If we have to finish a deer off, I will not have my dogs shot in the process. I must be the only one who will have a firearm, no questions asked. Ninety-nine percent of hunters have no issue with this, but you always get that one percent that want to fight and argue the situation. If it comes to that, I will load my dogs back in the truck and leave. A deer is not worth myself or my dogs getting shot."

Part of his safety measures include being the bad guy when morally and legally necessary.

"I would say that the hardest thing about tracking is telling a hunter that just because I am a tracker that does not give me the right to cross fences or property lines. We have to follow the same rules and laws as the hunter."

Alguire has seen his fair share of hunters bending or breaking the rules or expecting him to do so.

"I've had folks get fighting-mad if I refuse to cross a property line," he says. "For some reason, some folks think that just because we are trackers we have the right to do as we please, and that is definitely not the case! As a tracker, I will get the same felony charge of trespassing just like the hunter would, so I always make sure to tell the hunter when they call me to get permission from neighbors before I get there, so just in case the deer does cross, we can do so as well, legally. Then there's the difficulty of telling a child, or an adult for that matter, that they either missed the shot or that their shot hit but wasn't fatal."

Alguire maintains fair and moral hunting practices on each and every one of his tracking jobs. His experiences have given him a wealth of skill and no small measure of interesting stories.

"As far as I know, as of right this moment, I am the only person that has been inside the Tallahassee International Airport to track a deer legally," says Alguire, who adds that the recovery was successful. "They had to keep a few planes in the air long enough for us to get the deer out of the area and clear the runway. There was a big joke in the tracking community about us being the only tracking team that is FFA approved!"

Alguire averages around 100 tracks each year, and is heavily dedicated to helping hunters recover lost animals. Anyone wishing to contact Mike Alguire can do so via his public personal Facebook page, his private tracking page called Nose Down Tail Up Tracking and Recovery, or by giving him a call or text at (850) 567-7844. ■



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*AWPC Director Jenny Starling (left) and Client Services Director Cyndi Taylor await a client on a busy afternoon at the center.*



# A WOMEN'S PREGNANCY CENTER

## *Bringing Christ into Every Crisis*

### **Story and Photography by Mickey Starling**

Inside of a small, nondescript block building, big things are happening. For over twenty years, A Women's Pregnancy Center (AWPC), in Madison, has been providing hope to women and families during times of crisis. Sometimes a client comes in after discovering they are pregnant at a time their life seems to be falling apart. Others are

struggling to regain custody of their children or they fear that another child will be too much for them to care for.

Whatever the crisis, AWPC Director Jenny Starling and her team of compassionate and caring volunteers are ready to embrace their clients with a large array of tools and services to help them face whatever comes their way.

"Our job is to listen and help them see a broader perspective," said Starling. "We offer practical help and emotional and spiritual support that will continue through their baby's first year."

That support extends into just about every aspect of life, from providing free pregnancy tests, diapers, clothes, peer counseling, educational training



in pregnancy, childcare, breastfeeding, budgeting and more. AWPC also provides supplies to outside organizations when they need assistance helping families.

This year, AWPC has included Bible studies and encouragement groups for their clients.

"We have seen the ladies really grow in their relationship with the Lord," said Starling.

The proof of that has been seen as some ladies have navigated through numerous family issues while holding firmly to their new-found faith. The family atmosphere in the center is warm and inviting for all who enter, which helps to build the faith of those who are encountering the Lord for the first time. "My volunteers are the best of the best," said Starling. "They are excellent at loving our clients and letting them know how much we appreciate the opportunity to serve them. They exemplify what hearts of service should look like."

Besides the team of excellent volunteers, AWPC is blessed with a dedicated board of directors who make sure the center and staff have everything they need to effectively serve their clients. Churches and local organizations have also stepped up to provide for emergency needs that occasionally arise. The team

atmosphere in Madison's Christian community has made success at the center far easier to achieve, and more success is coming.

A new, portable ultrasound machine has recently been donated and will soon be in use. Though AWPC is not a medical facility, the ultrasound machine is used to help clients determine pregnancy. No medical advice, including the gender of babies, is discussed with clients. For many, just the sight of their child's heartbeat is enough to help them make positive and healthy decisions concerning their growing families. The portable unit also will allow AWPC to extend their services to rural areas and communities that don't offer services to families in crisis.

Even the donations coming into the center are laced with love, often with a personal touch. A favorite set of items are beautiful, hand-made baby blankets and hats that volunteers spend hours creating. The clients certainly felt the love this year, when a large supply of baby formula was made available, just in time to meet the shortage that was occurring on grocery shelves throughout the United States. When clients express needs that aren't available at the center, they are quickly connected to other organizations to get them the



*J.P. Moore (left) spends a moment with David Williams, who was the guest speaker at the 2022 banquet.*

resources they need.

Since AWPC is privately funded, they rely on the generosity of others to continue



*Gayle Ledford has been a faithful volunteer at the center for many years.*



*This year's well-attended banquet included many groups of supporters that have been faithful to the ministry for years. One table, pictured clockwise, from the front, are: Joyce Howard, Freddy Howard, Linda Tippette, Carol Flournoy, Covey Flournoy and Linds Poppell.*



*AWPC Director Jenny Starling shares a testimony during the annual Celebration of Life Banquet.*

investing in the lives of young families in Madison and surrounding communities. Each year, three fundraisers are held to ensure the success of the ministry's growing outreach. The primary fundraiser is a banquet that is held every fall, where supporters get updates and testimonies about what is being accomplished at the center, as well as hear the vision for where the organization would like to go next. In the spring, AWPC sponsors A Walk For Life, where supporters walk, or sometimes run, representing sponsors who donate to show their support for the ministry. Throughout the year, baby bottles are distributed and gathered from churches and individuals who collect change in the bottles to support the center. This year, the baby bottle fundraiser was a huge success, with more than \$16,000 donated.

While money is necessary to keep the ministry operating, the people who walk through the door continue to be the main focus.

"We want people to leave here knowing that we love the heck out of them and so does the Lord," said Starling. "They are always welcomed at our door, no matter what they are facing." ■



*The new, portable ultrasound machine will soon be very helpful in serving women in Madison and surrounding communities.*



*Carole Mothershed always has a beautiful smile on her face as she serves the clients at A Women's Pregnancy Center.*

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# What's Happenin'

This time of year is always packed with wonderful events to delight everyone and raise the spirits of even the "Scroogiest" among us. Here's a sampling of the events happening in and around our area.

## NOVEMBER

### NOVEMBER 5

**Advent Christian Village Autumn Fest**  
8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 10680 Dowling Park Dr. in Live Oak. Vendors, food, entertainment and fun for the entire family.

### NOVEMBER 5-6

**Hometown Holiday Show in Madison**  
Saturday 9 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sunday 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Hosted by Antiques and Uniques at Four Freedoms Park in downtown Madison. More information at (850) 253-2330.

### NOVEMBER 11

**Veterans Day in Monticello**  
Breakfast at the American Legion, 8-10 a.m. at 1065 S. Water St. Parade up Jefferson Street at 11 a.m. Chamber of Commerce BBQ and Chili Contests, Cornhole Games, Axe Throwing; 2-6 p.m. at 380 N. Cherry St. Veteran Banner Tribute on Courthouse Circle. More information at [www.monticellojeffersonfl.com](http://www.monticellojeffersonfl.com).

### NOVEMBER 11-12

**Veterans Discounts at Ragans Family Campground**  
1051 S.W. Old St Augustine Rd. in Madison, (850) 973-8269. 15 percent off for veterans.

### NOVEMBER 12

**The Magic of Christmas in Madison**  
Downtown, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

### Community Festival and Chili Cook-off in Branford

Music, food/drinks, games and great chili \$5 entry fee supports community service projects. Hosted by the Branford Rotary Club beginning at 10 a.m.

### NOVEMBER 18-19

**Cowboy/Cowgirl Weekend at Ragans Family Campground**  
1051 S.W. Old St Augustine Rd. in Madison, (850) 973-8269. Enjoy special activities with a Wild West theme.

### NOVEMBER 24

**Thanksgiving at Ragans Family Campground**  
1051 S.W. Old St Augustine Rd. in Madison, (850) 973-8269. Ragans provides the main dishes and guests bring the sides and desserts.

### Hanson Christmas Lights

On Colin Kelly Hwy., approximately five miles north of Madison. Weeknights 6-10 p.m. and 6-11 p.m. on weekends. Thousands of lights coordinated with sounds of the season, presented by the Roebuck Family. Begins on Thanksgiving and runs through New Year's Eve.

## **NOVEMBER 25-26** . . . . .

### **Old Tyme Farm Days in Live Oak**

Spirit of the Suwannee Park, 3076 95th Dr., Live Oak. Antique equipment and exhibits, syrup making, arts and crafts, sled pulls and more. More information at (386) 364-1683.

## **NOVEMBER 26** . . . . .

### **Downtown Christmas in Mayo**

10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Christmas parade, food vendors, arts/crafts and Santa! More information at (386) 209-2988.

## **DECEMBER**

## **DECEMBER 1-12** . . . . .

### **Twelve Days of Christmas**

Buy tickets online at [monticellojeffersonfl.com](http://monticellojeffersonfl.com). Daily drawings for gifts start December 1.

## **DECEMBER 1-3** . . . . .

### **Christmas in the Square in Live Oak**

Thursday: Tree lighting, Jingle Bell Run and movies under the stars on Thursday at Millennium Park  
Friday: Vendors, Santa Land, bounce houses, live music, fireworks and snow beginning at 4 p.m. Saturday: Vendors, food, entertainment, car show, agriculture exhibit and lighted Christmas Parade

## **DECEMBER 2** . . . . .

### **Downtown Christmas in Perry**

Lighted Christmas Parade at 6 p.m. at Courthouse Square, followed by strolling carolers, gingerbread house contest, storytelling and Santa.  
Open House at Perry News on Courthouse Square. More information at [www.taylorcountychamber.com](http://www.taylorcountychamber.com).

### **Mini Bethlehem in Monticello**

Walk through at 325 W. Walnut St. in Monticello. Nativity vignette with live animals at First United Methodist Church  
More information at (850) 997-5545.

## **DECEMBER 2** . . . . .

### **Christmas Around the World in Monticello**

Lighted Christmas Parade at 6 p.m. in historic downtown. Christmas market, entertainment, shopping, crafts and food vendors. More information at Experience Monticello on Facebook.

## **DECEMBER 2-3** . . . . .

### **Walk Thru Bethlehem in Perry**

Rosehead Park-Perry Train Depot  
More information at (850) 584-5366.

## **DECEMBER 3** . . . . .

### **Light Up Madison**

Parade, vendors, dance recital, entertainment and more. Sponsored by Madison Kiwanis Club. Downtown Madison.

## **DECEMBER 10** . . . . .

### **Christmas Celebration in Greenville**

Haffye Hayes Park on Hwy. 90. Parade at 10 a.m. with vendors, food, entertainment and more.

## **DECEMBER 24-25** . . . . .

### **Christmas Weekend at Ragans Family Campground**

1051 S.W. Old St Augustine Rd. in Madison, (850) 973-8269. "Snow," games of all kinds, blow-ups and more.



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