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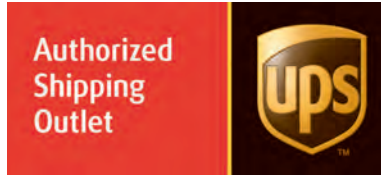
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Sittin' on the Porch with...

George Pittman, Sr.

Pittman is pictured sitting on the porch of The Cottage, property owned by Troy and Gretchen Avera, of Avera-Clark House, built in 1825.

Story by Heather Ainsley *Staff Writer*

Lifetime Florida resident, George Pittman, Sr., is well known and well loved in his community. It would seem that this man has seen it all and done it all, and at the tender young age of 95-years-old, that might just be true! Born on the first of August in 1926, Pittman has nearly a century of memories, experiences and achievements under his belt.

Pittman was born in Jacob City, in Jackson County, Fla., which is located near Marianna.

"I grew up as a farm boy," said Pittman. "I did a lot of work on the farm. In elementary school, I was a member of 4-H and got financial contributions for the best record of any 4H member. I had the best record keeping out of all the members. I was good in school, I behaved and always got good marks. Of course, back then, by the time I was in eighth grade, there weren't many options to continue school, as schools were still segregated. In 1941, I began attendance at a boarding school. It was the only black school in the whole county."

Pittman graduated in 1945 and enlisted in the military right out of high school. "I joined the United States Air Force on July 5, 1945, and served for 60 months and 19

days." On Dec. 4, 1950, Pittman returned home at last.

After his service, Pittman went back to school, attending Florida University, where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture. He was not interested in stopping there, however; in 1956, Pittman received his master's degree in Education Administration.

While he was furthering his education, Pittman moved to Jefferson County and noticed there was a real need for an adult education program. At the time, Jefferson County didn't have any education resources available for adults. Pittman helped establish an adult education program in Jefferson County, encouraging over 100 military war veterans to return to school, most of whom left the program with their General Education Diploma (GED). For eight years after the start of the program, Pittman served the community as an administrator and teacher, helping countless adult students achieve completion of their high school degree.

In 1958, Pittman became the assistant principal at Howard Academy. Howard Academy was the first official school for African-American students in Jefferson County and is located in Monticello. Before this building's construction, local African

American students gathered at a community church in order to receive their education. While the original building is no longer in service as a school, Howard Academy is now a historic landmark in Monticello that holds significance as an important milestone in Jefferson County history.

Pittman served as assistant principal for eight years before accepting a promotion to principal, a role he kept for eight more years until the integration of the schools in 1970.

From there, Pittman returned to his origins, transferring back to the adult school, where he continued to dedicate his time and efforts into helping students receive their GED. During his work at the adult school, Pittman helped write grants to fund local outreach efforts that would provide the community with educational programs in five political precincts. In addition to his work in the educational avenues of his career, he has also served on several community boards and organizations, including serving as assistant coordinator for the Monticello Police Department, serving as a member of the Jefferson County Voter's League, which he helped establish, and serving as secretary for the Jefferson Senior Citizen Board.

"I've been a member of just about everything!" Pittman said.

His statement seems to be more than true. In addition to his long resume of achievements and involvements in education and the community, from which he officially retired in 1993, Pittman is heavily involved in his local church, Memorial Missionary Baptist Church (MMBC), where he is currently the oldest living member of the congregation. Pittman has been an active participant in his church since 1954 and has served as deacon, Sunday school superintendent and Sunday school teacher for 25 years, as well as a financial officer for the church for the last 13 years.

Pittman was chosen in 2019 to be flown to Washington, D.C., for an honorary trip for retired military veterans that was sponsored by Honor Flight Tallahassee. During this trip, chosen veterans were taken to visit various monuments that are raised in honor of their service. "Oh, it was fantastic!" Pittman said. "That was the best trip I've ever had!"

Pittman has also received numerous certifications of appreciation, including an honorary plaque for his work in the Jefferson County Literacy Program. He has continued to serve in the American Legion, Post 234, in which he has been involved for the last 50 years as an advocate, civil officer, Division Commander for Third Division, 11th District and historian.



Pittman was married to his wife, the late Julia Pittman, for 54 years. Together, they had three children: Rev. Gregory Pittman, George Pittman, Jr. and Kimberly Moore.

These days, George Pittman enjoys staying involved in various groups, organizations and outreaches in the community. He chooses to say active, both mentally and physically, walking over two miles each day at the local recreation park. Accompanying him on his morning walks are his friends, Jeannie Harley, Peggie Seabrooks, Mary and Charles Hadley, Ruby Bradley, Sandra Sanders and Carra Noble.

Just by looking, you might never guess the true age behind Pittman's sharp wit

and agile mind, nor might you guess just how full he has packed those 95 years with such incredible achievements and overall amazing outreach for his community. It would seem that Pittman has somehow managed to fit several lifetimes worth of accomplishments into his 95 years of life, something we all hope to do. In spite of his age, Pittman is still going strong and continues to live as an inspiration to everyone he meets. His words for today's youth speak for themselves: "Stay in school, go to the church of your choice, pray regularly, read your Bible and treat your fellow man right." Beyond that, the rest is history. ■

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*Florida
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Citrus*

A taste of sunshine



Story by Heather Ainsley

Staff Writer

It all began with an idea; an idea for a family farm, that is. After 48 years working in the farm equipment business, Kim and Angela Jones dreamed of producing a crop that would allow their children and grandchildren to experience first-hand the joy of the outdoors and that rewarding feeling of watching their hard work bloom into delicious, fresh products. But, what product and from what crop? The family considered a wide variety of options; blackberries, blueberries, olives, pecans... the options seemed endless! The crop the family always seemed to find their way back to, however, was citrus, a decided favorite amongst the children.

In 2014, the first trees were planted - a grove of satsumas and from there, the business grew, as more acres and citrus varieties were added each year. Currently, the Jones' have red navel oranges, shiranui, hamlins, lemons and will be welcoming a new set of around 2,000 variety mandarin trees to their farm next April. But, their shining stars out of all that citrus would, of course, have to be the family's four varieties of satsumas.

Satsumas are a variety of mandarin oranges, related to tangerines and clementines. They are a popular favorite of citrus lovers, as they are known to be the juiciest of the family and have a balanced sweetness to their citrus flavor that makes them delicious on their own, as well as a

perfect addition to any savory or sweet dish or dessert. You may have had a satsuma without realizing it, as they are the most common variety used in canned mandarin oranges, but there is something special to be said about fresh fruit. Fresh satsumas are hard to beat, with their thick and easy to peel rind, seedless segments, and sweet, tangy juice.

At the heart of the Jones' products is satsuma juice. In 2016, the family, full to the brim with citrus, built a packing shed so they could share their delicious fruit with others. The Joneses grow satsumas on their farm, pack the fruit that achieves the highest visual standard and juice the rest. For packing, the family focuses on

fruit that passes both ripeness and physical factors. For any of their fruit to be packed and sold as a whole fruit, they must pass an inspection and be both ripe and uniform.

The only fruit that is packed and shipped whole must be free of obvious imperfections that would affect quality, such as color and size must also be uniform, with no obvious blemishes or damage. Any oblong, discolored or inconsistently shaped odd-balls, referred to as "No. 2 satsumas," go straight to the juicer. This creates a uniformity to their products when distributing, as well as puts "good use to good juice." No. 2 satsumas have the same great taste, but due to size, shape and coloring, they are not as marketable as





whole fruit. This works out perfectly for the Jones family, though, as there is much to be done with juice.

The Joneses prefer a process of juicing that uses something called a pinpoint extractor, which prevents too much oil from the citrus peel from being present in the juicing process. The oil from citrus peel leaves a bitter, unpleasant flavor that can be detected in the juice, leading to inferior flavor profiles. By using the pinpoint extractor method, they are able to ensure that only the flavor of the juice makes it into the bottle, preserving the pure, sweet taste their customers crave.

Their prized citrus juice is accurately referred to as “liquid fruit” by the Jones family, as it tastes just like the fresh fruit. They add nothing and take nothing away, so you can always be certain that the juice you drink comes directly from the fruit, with no preservatives, sugar or other ingredients added to it.

“Everything inside the peel goes into the bottle!” Kim Jones stated proudly. “We leave it exactly as it is, and add nothing extra and that’s why it tastes so good.”

This “liquid fruit” is used to create a variety of culinary citrus products, such as satsuma juice, jellies and syrup, but the uses don’t stop there. The juice is also an important ingredient in non culinary citrus products, including satsuma soap, lotions and sugar scrubs. Their variety of products changes as supplies last, but available products can be found at local shops, farmers markets, their packing facility and online. The current stores, shops and stands that carry Florida Georgia Citrus products are Oh Happy Days, Tallahassee Farmers Market, Jefferson County Farmers Market, Tupelos, Scoops and Waffles and Red Hills, in Tallahassee. Last year, the company sold and shipped over two million pounds of citrus, about 25 percent coming from the family farm. This year the company is hoping to expand their reach and provide communities outside their current market with the best citrus, juices, syrups and more.

The harvest season for most citrus varieties begins in November and lasts through January. The Joneses provide

updates on their website with news from the groves, updating customers and interested parties on new information and happenings on their farm. June’s update suggested a good outlook for this year’s crop and the Joneses are eager to begin the harvest when the time is right. “It isn’t time yet for the harvest season, but at this stage in the game, it looks better than it ever has! We have a beautiful crop this year,” said Jones.

Once all the trees are full of fruit and ready to be harvested, that is the time for Florida Georgia Citrus to shine and the first step to any harvest is picking. It sounds simple enough, but picking the fruit of over 3,000 trees is no small task! They hire a team of 15 to 30 trusted workers to go out into the fields and hand-clip each fruit from the trees. Clipping the citrus from the tree is the proper method for harvest. Simply pulling the fruit off the branches by hand may result in damaged peels or torn and broken branches, which is something any responsible citrus farmer should strive to avoid. Damage to the fruit’s protective peel results in a loss of product quality and damage to trees results in increased risk of disease or hardship on the plant, which can result in a loss of the crop. The pickers are always careful not to damage the trees during harvest time, simply clipping the fruit free with the appropriate tools. Excess stems can be removed later in the processing line. While picking, workers pay close attention to the consistency of quality of the fruit. Only fruit with good color, shape and health are picked to go to sale. Once picked, the





fruit makes its way to a processing line. The line washes the fruit and sanitizes it before waxing and drying. The fruit is then separated into boxes to fill orders before being shipped out to happy, waiting customers.

The family farm, named Bethel Oaks Farm, is partner to the family's packing facility, Florida Georgia Citrus and with soon-to-be over 5,000 citrus trees next year, the best way to manage it all is with teamwork. Working together as a family certainly brings the Joneses closer together, and the cooperation they share with family is also extended to fellow citrus growers. "We love everything about farming citrus, but we especially love being able to share our success and our failures, with other citrus farmers," Kim shared. "We buy other growers' fruit and pack it for them, and we try to help them stay out of trouble by learning from our mistakes." By working together and sharing quality farming practices, the Jones family can ensure that the highest quality of fruit, in the largest quantities, possible, make it to their consumers. It is this sort of community-driven attitude that truly does benefit everyone.

Aside from that, Kim Jones expresses his satisfaction in watching his grandchildren and children participate in the family business. In a business as big as this one it is "all hands on deck," and he loves seeing his grandchildren enjoy being a part of it all. "One of the best parts of farming citrus is that it brings the family

together. The three grandkids enjoy the work during the harvest and it falls perfectly in line with everyone being around for Thanksgiving and Christmas. While kids are usually away during the year with their own jobs, they come and help out in the off-season, mowing, checking the trees and overall maintaining the groves," Jones said. "Even beyond family, being able to provide the community with jobs is a great feeling."

Not many of us put much thought into our juice when we pour it into our glass each morning to enjoy with breakfast. We don't consider the hard work, dedication and togetherness that come from a family owned farm or from a support network of local growers. We don't ponder the rigorous process that each fruit must endure to make

it to our table as we sip and enjoy the sweet tang of liquid sunshine as it complements our eggs and bacon. If we did consider the painstaking efforts of local farms to provide us with the highest quality products at the best prices possible, we might bring a little of that thoughtfulness from our glasses to our day and remember the importance of helping others, and giving nothing but our best. It is a community of collective growers and packers that brings such fresh, delicious citrus to our communities. Communities supporting communities, local product for local people. From sunshine to your table, Florida Georgia Citrus is here for you. ■





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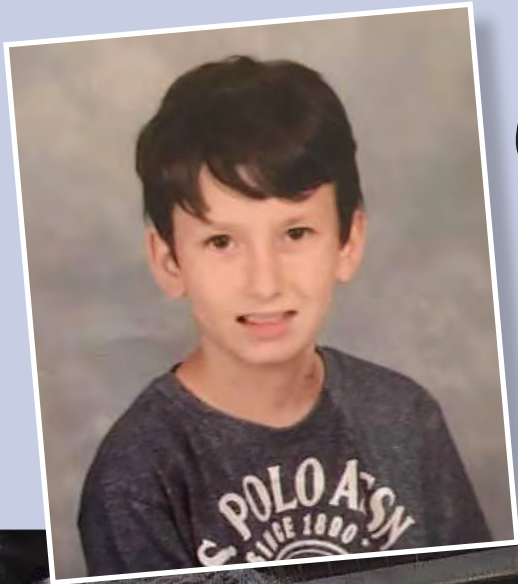
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Aiden Rice

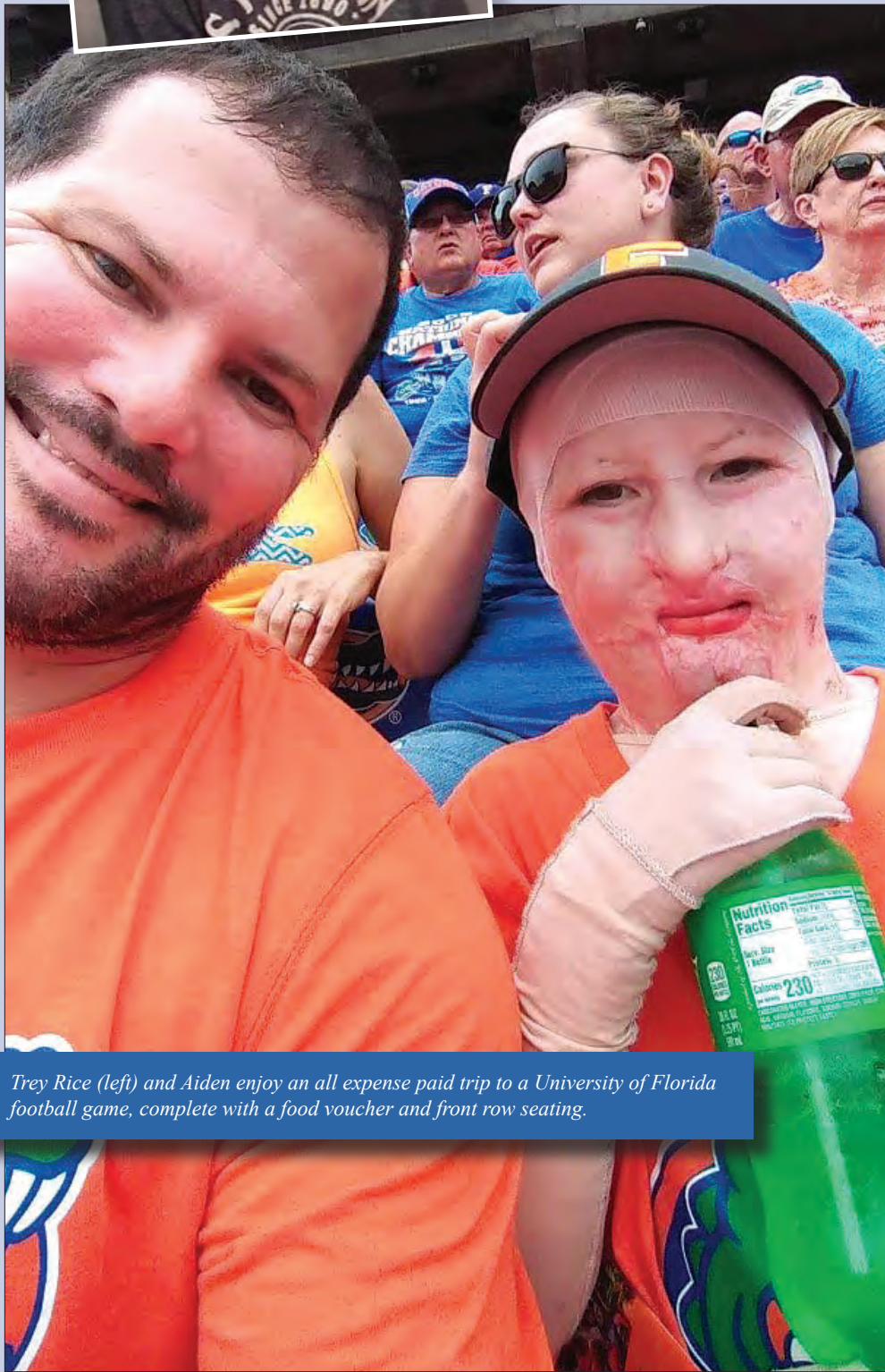
Continues to triumph over tragedy

Photography courtesy of Sarah Rice and Laurie Rice
Story by Mickey Starling
Staff Writer

On March 19, 2019, 11-year-old Taylor County resident Aiden Rice was playing at a nearby friend's home when their afternoon of fun turned deadly. Aiden's friend was building a fire, when he decided to give the blaze a boost by throwing a cup of gasoline on it. Aiden was unaware of what his friend was doing and, before he knew it, the fire exploded, sending a ball of flames that quickly engulfed him.

Aiden's mother quickly took him to the nearby hospital. Although he was conscious at the time, within 30 minutes, he was fighting for his life. Soon, a ShandsCair helicopter arrived and medical technicians were forced to perform a cricothyrotomy, which is an emergency procedure used when a tracheotomy is not possible. Aiden's airways were rapidly swelling shut. He was soon flown to Shands Hospital in Gainesville.

Aiden was sent to emergency surgery so that he could have a tracheotomy. Furthermore, due to swelling and fluid buildup caused by his severe burns, Aiden had to have the majority of his body cut open to release the swelling and fluids that were now trapped within him. Aiden's parents, Trey and Sarah Rice, were told by doctors there was a good chance his arms would have to be amputated and that he might not even wake up. Fortunately, Aiden did wake up and one of the first things he did was wave his arms. "We were ecstatic,"



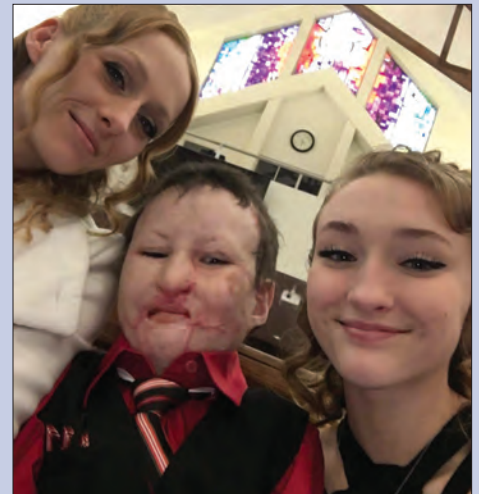
Trey Rice (left) and Aiden enjoy an all expense paid trip to a University of Florida football game, complete with a food voucher and front row seating.



This photo celebrates Aiden's progress after spending 52 days in the Shriners' Burn Hospital in Galveston, Texas.



Aiden Rice is a determined young man who continues to overcome the many obstacles he has faced since being badly burned in 2019.



Sarah Rice (left) is pictured with Aiden and his older sister, Kirsten, while attending church.

said Sarah.

To aid in his recovery, Aiden was then placed into a medically induced coma. Two days later, he was transferred to the Shriners' Burn Hospital in Galveston, Texas. Trey made the trip with his son and Sarah was able to arrive just a few days later. What followed was a four month ordeal for Aiden and his family. Numerous surgeries were required, along with skin transplants and repeated excruciating cleanings to remove dead skin. The process was difficult for his parents to watch. "The initial cleanings were heart wrenching," said Sarah. "Our emotions just shut off. You kind of want to attack the nurse, at first, because of all of the pain they are inflicting. I finally adjusted to the process and realized he was going to be okay." Much of Aiden's body was used to take good skin available for transplanting onto his numerous areas of damage. Due to the extensive nature of his wounds, some cadaver skin also had to be used.

One of Aiden's bright spots came when he was able to leave the hospital in time for his 12th birthday, on July 12. He was craving quesadillas and he made quite a feast of them when his big day arrived. The journey to recovery is far from over for this determined young man. He hasn't required surgery in about a year, because he regularly stretches to keep his skin from hardening. Due to the extensive amount

Aiden is blessed to be surrounded by a family that has encouraged and educated him to stay on top of his recovery routine, and he is full of his own desire to overcome his predicament.

of scar tissue on his body, hardening can become permanent, causing limbs and joints to become paralyzed. Many burn victims have faced amputations because of this.

Aiden is blessed to be surrounded by a family that has encouraged and educated him to stay on top of his recovery routine and he is full of his own desire to overcome his predicament.

He often uses his Wii and virtual reality games to keep himself active and well stretched.

Aiden was finally able to return to Taylor County Middle School this year, where he is in the seventh grade. He is working hard to take the needed tests to advance to the eighth grade.

His next big hurdle will be neck surgery to allow for the inevitable growth spurts coming his way. The operation will seek to loosen skin

by cutting the scar tissue open and stapling in new tissue. There is always a chance the tissue won't stick, but it has, most of the time, for Aiden.

He is not one to dwell on the difficult obstacles in his path. On more than a few occasions, Aiden has reminded everyone, "I'm going to beat this." His plans for the future include a career in real estate or the gaming industry.

Given his determination and positive attitude, there is little doubt he will succeed at whatever he sets his mind to. ■



Aiden Rice proudly displays a certificate of bravery that was given to him by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He also enjoyed the \$100 that came with it.



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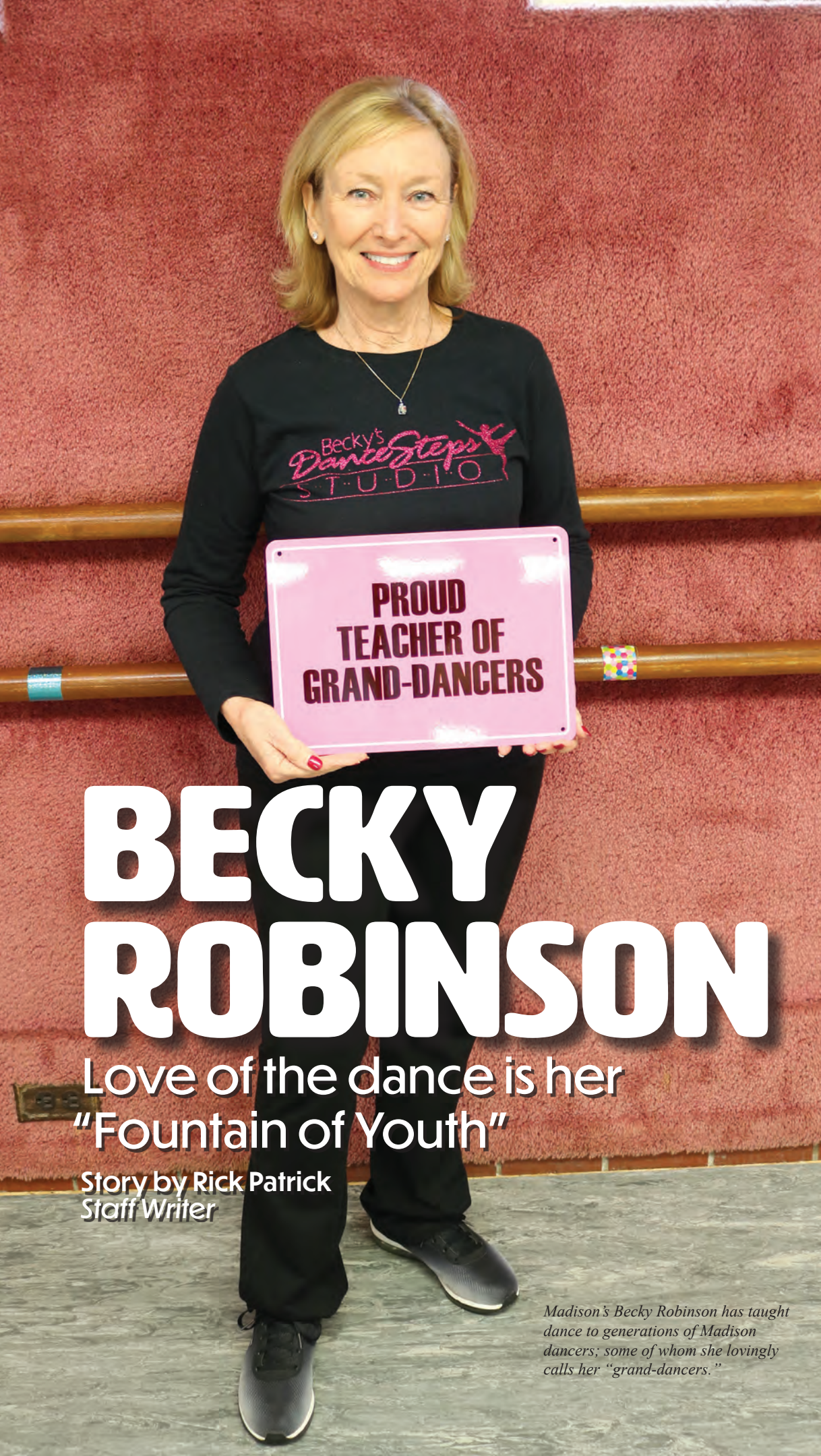
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BECKY ROBINSON

Love of the dance is her
"Fountain of Youth"

Story by Rick Patrick
Staff Writer

Madison's Becky Robinson has taught dance to generations of Madison dancers; some of whom she lovingly calls her "grand-dancers."

Somewhere in the corner of Becky Robinson's back yard, there is rumored to be something for which Spanish explorer Ponce de León spent a great deal of time searching for, the legendary "Fountain of Youth." Robinson simply laughs at this possibility and responds, "No, it's just plain water at my place." Robinson, who owns Becky's Dance Steps Studio and has been teaching dance in Madison for over 40 years, does admit to finding a sort of "Fountain of Youth." "I do try to take care of myself, physically," said Robinson. "I also think spending so much time with young people helps keep me young." During her time teaching dance, she has had the opportunity to teach daughters and even granddaughters of former students. She lovingly calls them her "grand-dancers."

Even before she opened her studio in Madison shortly after graduating from Florida State University in 1976, she was sharing her love of dance with others. When she was 14-years-old, her father, the late L.D. Robinson, helped to convert the family garage into a makeshift dance studio and she began teaching dance to children in the neighborhood. She taught dance from her "home studio" throughout her high school years.

After graduating from high school, Robinson knew she wanted to continue with her love of dance, but her father convinced her to peruse a degree in education. Robinson obtained her degree in elementary education with a minor in dance. "As it turned out, that was a good course of action," said Robinson. "I was able to incorporate what I learned studying education into my work in the dance studio." After coming home to Madison with her degree, Robinson began teaching at Madison Academy, while teaching in her new dance studio in the evenings. "After two

years of that, I realized I wasn't 'superwoman' and so I decided to concentrate on the dance studio full time." During those early years, Robinson operated out of the old American Legion building. She later moved into the location where her studio has been since 1981, on Base Street, near downtown Madison. "This has been my 'home away from home' since then," said Robinson. Robinson also shared her expertise by choreographing many musical theatre productions at North Florida Junior College. Robinson recalls many fond memories working with the late Gwen Faulkner when she directed several large productions such as *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *Brigadoon*, *The Music Man*, *Camelot* and more.

In operating her business, Robinson has found a balance between the "business" side of running a dance studio and the "artistic" side. She has often relied on the advice her father, who had a successful Ford Dealership in Madison for many years, gave her. "Daddy always told me to 'surround myself with good people,' so I did. The studio has always been a 'family affair.' Mom was my office manager," said Robinson. Robinson has also had the good fortune of being able to use many former students as teachers as they have gotten older. In the course of teaching

generations of dancers, Robinson has worn "many hats." Among those has been: nurse, mentor, psychologist, counselor and others.

The past year has been an especially challenging one for Robinson, as it has for anyone associated with the arts. "It's been a challenging year, but we pivot," said Robinson. "You can be absorbed by negativity or you can press on." Robinson has decided to press on this year by planning her 46th annual dance recital in May. The show will feature a music theme and will include a variety of musical styles. Robinson is still working on a performance venue for the recital, so an exact date has yet to be announced. Robinson's annual dance recital is an event many look forward to every year. In addition to the big dance recital, Robinson's dancers will perform at many community events during the year, such as Down Home Days. Robinson's studio also has a competitive dance troupe that has received regional and national recognition.

For more information about Becky's Dance Steps Studio, please call (850) 973-4828. You may also visit the studio website online at www.beckysdancesteps.com. ■



"I love my job because I get to be a kid!" - Becky Robinson



Becky Robinson (right) with one of her "dancers turned instructors," Allie Wilkerson (left).



Becky Robinson still takes the stage occasionally during her dance recitals.



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Taylor McGrew standing next to the monument erected in his name "McGrews Rock."

The Legacy of

TAYLOR MCGREW

Story by Lee Trawick, *Staff Writer*

Taylor McGrew was born September 4, 1954, in Silas, Ala. He moved to Lafayette County when he was five-years-old with his mother and father. McGrew went on to grow up in Mayo and graduated from Lafayette High School (LHS). Although to most, that may sound like an easy transition, it was the late 60s and

Mayo was supposed to be above the hatred, although his memories of choosing to be chased by dogs because the other option was to be shot at, because a man did not want black boys walking on the sidewalk. McGrew and his friend eventually found another path to the store, a longer path but safer. But the terror didn't stop there for McGrew.



LADY HORNETS '00
DISTRICT CHAMPIONS
SWEET SIXTEEN
Paris Edwards
Lauren Hunt
Latricia Jones
Jessica Lewis
Teri Lyons
Navey McCray
Head Coach
Jeremy Blarbenough

LADY HORNETS '01
DISTRICT CHAMPIONS
SWEET SIXTEEN
Marissa Murphy
Tiffany Sellers
Angie Thomas
Theresa Villa
Arlisa Yamamoto
Head Coach
Jeremy Blarbenough

LADY HORNETS '02
DISTRICT CHAMPIONS
SWEET SIXTEEN
Stacy Lewis
Teri Lyons
Marissa Murphy
Lainie Field
Chandra Shine
Fiona Smith
Angie Thomas
Head Coach
Jeremy Blarbenough

LADY HORNETS '03
DISTRICT CHAMPIONS
SWEET SIXTEEN
Mary Alcorn
Shirley Craig
Katie Fulkerson
Shelba Gray
Kayla Hunt
Hollie Lane
Stacy Lewis
Head Coach
Jeremy Blarbenough

LADY HORNETS '04
DISTRICT CHAMPIONS
SWEET SIXTEEN
Teri Lyons
Stacy Lewis
Mary Alcorn
Shirley Craig
Katie Fulkerson
Shelba Gray
Kayla Hunt
Hollie Lane
Head Coach
Jeremy Blarbenough

LADY HORNETS '05
DISTRICT CHAMPIONS
SWEET SIXTEEN
Liz Price
Shirley Craig
Chandra Shine
Katie Fulkerson
Fiona Smith
Angie Thomas
Head Coach
Jeremy Blarbenough

LADY HORNETS '06
DISTRICT CHAMPIONS
SWEET SIXTEEN
Teri Lyons
Stacy Lewis
Mary Alcorn
Shirley Craig
Katie Fulkerson
Shelba Gray
Kayla Hunt
Hollie Lane
Head Coach
Jeremy Blarbenough

19-4

9-1

22-6

23-5

20-8

20-8

EXIT



Later in high school, he remembers being in his home and hearing shotguns blast over his house and vehicles quickly speeding off over a school disagreement he wasn't even a part of. McGrew likes to remember his childhood as happy; he does not like to think of those times and rarely talks about them. Not because they bring back fear, but because he doesn't want those times to be the narrative of his life. McGrew has a strong belief that people are good. However, sometimes people make bad decisions, and that should not define their life. McGrew graduated from Lafayette High School in 1972, before graduating from North Florida Community College in 1974 then from Florida State University in 1976.

McGrew then returned to Mayo with



a college degree, his wife Patricia, their two-year-old daughter, Alesha, and their son Reggie on the way. McGrew was told he had a job in the Lafayette County School system, so he passed on a job opportunity he was looking forward to in Cobb County, Ga. to return home, only to find out the position he had been promised was handed to someone else, McGrew was quickly discouraged but laughed when he tells of Patricia's reaction, "You better go back to that school and make them give you something. We have mouths to feed. I don't care if you are upset or not. You need that job." McGrew did as he was told and returned to the school and accepted a physical education aide position for \$2.89 an hour. He also took over as the Lafayette junior varsity football head coach, where he was forced off the field and told he could not be the football coach. Again he returned home upset, and this time he had made his mind up he would not be going back to LHS. Again he was met by Patricia, who explained to him, "Oh yes, you are going back to that school unless you know another way we can feed these kids. Go back to that school and tell them you are coaching football, and that is what you are going to do. Don't come back home without that job." Although his mind was made up when he left the school, miraculously, he had a change of heart, with a bit of persuasion and returned to the school and talked things over with the principal and found himself back on the football field.

From that point forward, McGrew cemented his name at LHS as Coach McGrew for the next 45 years. McGrew began his coaching career in 1976, with no assistants from the school staff. His assistant that first year were his ninth-grade quarterbacks, Riley O'steen and Dean Lead. However unorthodox as they may have seemed, it was just the beginning of what the Florida High School Athletic Association would

call a Hall-of-Fame career. For the next two seasons as the junior varsity head coach, McGrew led his teams to undefeated seasons in 1977 and 1978. McGrew quickly gave praise to the players themselves. "They were the most talented group of kids LHS has ever seen. That's the same group that would later go on to win the 1981 State Championship," McGrew said. "We didn't even practice punting. We knew we were going to score every time."

McGrew became a varsity assistant as those players moved on to varsity. McGrew was an assistant on the coaching staff of that 1981 State championship team and did not remember punting as they got to varsity either. "If you go back and look at the stats from those games, they are out of this world stats for both offense and defense. But to understand how big that team was, our starters hardly played the second half of those games because we were beating teams so bad." McGrew recalls stories from that team. As hard as it is to single out one player from that team, "I remember one game, Joseph Edwards came to me in the first quarter and begged me not to put him back in. I asked why? Joseph replied, 'Because, this is embarrassing, coach. They close their eyes when I run at them. I've played enough, let somebody else play.'" When asked what kind of game he was having, McGrew remembers, "Edwards had three carries for over 100 yards and three touchdowns in the first quarter of that game. It was like that every game for him," McGrew said. "On the other side of the ball, Bruce Branch was not only a mean linebacker but a great leader for that team. I don't know what that team would have been without Bruce. There were a lot of stars on that team besides the obvious ones." As a senior, Branch presented McGrew with a plaque that read, "We came all the way together." McGrew cherishes that plaque to this day. Branch was part of the first team he ever coached on junior varsity, and they won the state championship together. But their relationship did not end there, as Branch and McGrew became life-long friends.

McGrew later became the Lafayette Varsity head coach in 1985, where he became the winningest head coach to lead the Hornets on the field, with 69 wins over a 10-year career spanning from 1985-1995. Joey Pearson would later break that record in 2007. McGrew coached two more undefeated regular season teams in 1992 and 1993. McGrew refers to the '92 and '93 teams as two of his best teams while being the varsity head coach. McGrew's memories of youngsters - such as when Ryan and Chan Perry would tell him, 'we want to play for you when we get older,' are memories as

cherished, if not more, than all the accolades and awards.

McGrew will always be known to everyone in Lafayette County as Coach McGrew, but his legacy doesn't stop there. McGrew has built a reputation throughout the community as a father and uncle figure to many. Everyone who has come through LHS program has a special memory with coach McGrew.

Coaches who have come after him know they will always coach in the shadows of McGrew, as he set the standard of excellence both on and off the field. While Pearson later passed McGrew in wins while the Lafayette Hornets, Pearson contributed much of his winning ways to watching McGrew and playing under him. The standard that McGrew set was much more than his wins and losses on the football field. He reached thousands who have never set foot on his field.

Throughout McGrew's career, he has been ridiculed and praised but never waived as the man he was raised to be. If he was ever upset, he knew where to go and Patricia was there. By knowing she was by his side, she could make all of his emotions fade away, and he could continue as the man everyone knows him to be. McGrew and his wife Patricia watched from their home as their children went on to have illustrious careers themselves. Alesha went on to achieve a master's degree in mental health counseling. Reggie went on to play at the University of Florida before being drafted by the San Francisco 49ers in the first round and is currently one of the Florida Gators football team's strength and conditioning coaches. Their youngest daughter, Whitney, has graduated from law school and has established herself as a very well-respected attorney. McGrew's wife, Patricia, passed away in 2008, leaving behind her children, many grandchildren and her husband.

McGrew's career consisted of being the Lafayette junior varsity football coach from 1976 through 1978, an assistant on



Lafayette's varsity football team from 1978 through 1984. He then became the varsity head coach from 1985 through 1995. He also coached varsity basketball and, in his early years, coached girl's softball. In 1985, he became the athletic director as well. Today, McGrew has returned to the same school that at one time did not want him and now can't imagine the last 45 years without him. He now serves as a school board member for the Lafayette County School District. Outside of LHS, McGrew has also contributed as Mayo's mayor.

On Oct. 5, 2007, a monument was erected in his honor, "McGrew's Rock." The inscription on the memorial reads, "Respect all, Fear none." This is one of the millions of influences current head football coach Marcus Edwards takes to heart when reflecting on the impact his Uncle Taylor has had on his life. While McGrew has not coached football in 26 seasons, his presence is still on the football field today and will be for years to come. McGrew's accolades would not end there as the FHSAA inducted McGrew into the Hall-of-Fame in 2012.

Often he is asked, "Who is the greatest football player you ever saw?" McGrew smiles. "Joseph Edwards is the greatest high school football player I have seen; there are many great ones over the years. But Joseph could do things on a football field people can't even dream of." McGrew said. Herbert Perry is the greatest athlete I've ever seen; people take him for granted. You could put him on a badminton court for the first time, and he would be great. The tragedy is he was so great, no one can comprehend how great he was."

McGrew continues his legacy today by being the man he was raised to be. His constant humility and passion for those in his community and, most importantly, his love for his family, are what he hopes is his legacy. ■



With the knowledge of football players to come through LHS over the years, people have often wondered who would he name as his all-time Lafayette Hornets? Coach McGrew acknowledges there have been many great players that have come through the LHS program over the years so to narrow it down to one team is very hard. Coach knows that many Hornet greats are left off this list, but Coach McGrew has named that team:

Offense:

Quarterback: Kerwin Bell
Runningback: Joseph Edwards and Kenny Folsom
Offensive Line: Derrick Poe, Julio Castillo, Garrett McCray, Joey Pearson and Darren Poe
Tightend: Mark Osteen
Wide Reciever: Ben Travis and Jamaal Reid
Punt/Kick Returner: Marcus Edwards
Punter/Kicker: Herbert Perry

Defense:

Defensive Line: Harold Williams, Reggie McGrew, Troy Pearson and Jerry Thomas
Linebackers: Bruce Branch, Kyle Johnson, Aaron Gresham and Matt Pearson
DefensiveBacks: David Olgesby, Riley O'steen and Elige Lee

Love that

When Shannon Carroll and her husband
they had no idea what life would

Story by Heather Ains



Redeems

usband Brian were married in 2004,
ould bring them, or how quickly.

r Ainsley, *Staff Writer*





Their first few years of marriage seemed ordinary, a blissful marriage with ordinary ups and downs. The two seemed to complete one another; Shannon being the strict, organized perfectionist, and Brian the goofy, free-spirited one, always laid back.

As with many marriages, the Carroll's quickly found themselves in debt with car payments, mortgage payments, credit cards and other loans. They felt stifled and stuck, and dreamed of finding some way to get out from under all that debt and find a way to live completely debt free. Brian began working overtime, and Shannon worked two or three jobs at a time. After a couple of years, they were able to pay off over \$50,000 in debt, until all that remained was the mortgage on their home.

In 2008, Brian gave his life to Christ, and in 2009, Shannon followed suit. It was in that year that Shannon felt a pull on her heart. She began to think about family. More specifically, about adopting an orphaned child. Unsure of where to begin, the couple decided to leave their family planning up to God.

Together, she and her husband visited a local children's home, which housed several children who had not been placed in foster care. The visit concreted the drive in them to adopt, and in 2010, they signed up with their local agency to begin the process of becoming foster parents. At the same time, Shannon ceased taking contraceptives, and together, the couple prayed that God would give them a child, either by natural birth or foster care, they didn't care which.

They were ready to love their child. They signed up as potential adoptive parents for any child who would come into their home as they entered into the foster care process. This included race, nationality, behavioral concerns, mental or physical disabilities, abuse or neglect history and more.

In 2011, after extensive effort, no pregnancy, and lots of emotions, the pair was finally licensed as foster parents. After all that waiting, the rest seemed to snowball into God's will.

The couple had agreed that they would welcome two foster children into their home. However, as brand new foster parents, the Carrolls were brought the case of three siblings almost immediately, and they could not bear to turn them away or split them up. It was in June of 2011 that Shannon and Brian welcomed Anthony (9), Mirabel (7) and Risa (4) into their family as fosters.

From there, things began to happen quickly. That September, the family was asked about a six-week-old baby girl, Magdalene, who needed placement with a family. She had been in the foster care system since birth, and the decision to welcome her into their foster family was a quick one for Shannon and Brian. With the welcoming of this new arrival, however, the couple had to change their licensing from a foster family of up to three children, to a family of up to five children, in order to take in the baby girl.

They were almost immediately brought yet another case involving a young child in December, 2011, and, remembering their

promise to not turn away a child brought to them as long as they could handle it, they maxed out their foster license again as they welcomed 10-month-old Titus, who had been struggling to thrive in the system for seven months.

In just six short months, the Carrolls had gone from being a childless couple to being a home with five children. While they never regretted their decision to welcome the kids to their family, Shannon admitted there were difficulties in the start. "I truly thought [in the beginning] I wouldn't ever have children. Well, maybe two, max, when I was older," Shannon stated. They had felt ever since visiting the children's home for the first time that this was God's plan for them. Even so, knowing it was God's plan did not take away the difficulties in the beginning. "We knew foster care was God's plan for us, and we were willing to follow that path, but we did not know how difficult and challenging it would be. We are human, and realized through this journey how weak and frail we were," Shannon shared. "I cried in secret for weeks after our first arrival of three children... It wasn't the children per se, just the overwhelming life change, and the constant, ongoing needs to be met as a new parent."

The Carrolls relied on support from friends and the church they attended for fortification early on, especially as the children's cases progressed and behavior problems began to arise. Shannon reports that in the first year of fostering children, she was yelled at, lied to, stolen from, called names and hit. She had frequent visits with the school principal to discuss behavior issues. On top of that, she had two young babies who needed constant care.

"The greatest part?" Shannon divulged, "It all taught me to rely heavily on God's strength and pray without ceasing. My faith has tremendously increased through that year of storms. I begged God to give me a love like Jesus, to truly love and sacrifice myself for these children, despite their behavior. God proved to be faithful time and time again. He strengthened me and healed my hurting children."

It is incredibly common for foster children to lash out at foster parents, or even adoptive parents. They have often experienced years of emotional upheaval and lack the ability to discuss their emotions and the traumas they have had to endure. Often, foster children will subconsciously "test" their new guardians, and without even understanding why they act out, express dysfunctional and sometimes aggressive behaviors. It comes with the territory of accepting children into your home that have come from difficult places. The Carrolls accepted children who had been re-homed in



the foster care system and were determined not to send away children due to difficulties. They knew it was best to allow the children to work through their trauma in a safe and loving environment.

A few years later, in February of 2014, the Carroll family felt the call again, and welcomed Samuel into their home. Samuel had been abandoned in China when he was six months old, and had been adopted at the age of four by an American family. Unfortunately, the adoption did not stick, and Samuel was placed for adoption a second time. The Carrolls knew he had found a place with them, this time for good.

A year later, a 10-year-old named Britteny came into the picture. Over the last eight years, she had been placed into several different foster homes and hospitals, none of which seemed able to handle her extensive list of special needs and diagnoses. True to their commitment to God's plan, the Carrolls accepted her into their home, and concern over her special needs quickly turned to joy as they got to know her.

With a full house, and full hearts all around, the Carrolls decided to make the arrangement permanent. As the children came up for adoption, Shannon and Brian began adoption processes. In May of 2012, Anthony and his two sisters were adopted. Titus was adopted in June of 2012. Magdalene was adopted in October of 2012. Samuel was adopted in May of 2014, and Britteny was adopted in September, 2015.

In addition to a full house of giggling children to occupy their time, Brian and Shannon have their hands joyously full with

taking care of their farm, where they have over 100 animals. Having always had a love and talent for animal husbandry, Shannon took her many years of experience in animal care home with her. She is the founder and owner/operator of Redemptive Love Farm in Monticello, Fla. While Brian is at work, she and the kids spend many hours training, caring for and spending time with the animals. While the animal count on the farm can change daily, they almost always have around 100 animals that require love, attention and care.

While they do take in rescue animals, they are not a sanctuary or an animal shelter. In their efforts to become completely debt free, they ditched their mortgaged house in the suburbs and began living in rural Monticello. Once they had the land, the farm quickly followed. It began with sympathy cases, an injured chicken, a starving horse or llama, an orphaned kitten, etc. Shannon's love for animals resulted in many foster animals being brought through their home, as they were rehabilitated and re-homed to new families once they were strong enough. Some animals came to stay, and of course, the children loved the company of the animals.

Shannon and Brian saw an amazing transformation as the children worked with the animals on the farm. They quickly realized that the foster animals were helping their children process their trauma in a way they never would be able to. The unconditional love, support and acceptance that came from caring for these helpless, abused, neglected or unwanted animals helped the

children as an outlet for their own pain. "The neat thing is that when our kids, who had experience so many bad things in their lives, and so many people who had let them down, helped care for these helpless animals, we saw something happen. We saw compassion and empathy replace their sadness and anger. We saw them form bonds and experience joy!" Shannon said, "Our farm may have happened by chance, but it was certainly meant to be!"

Through their connection to the animals on the farm, the children were able to find their voices. Emotions that were difficult for them to understand, process and label in their own lives were easy to identify in the animals. Shannon realized that this connection between child and animal could help bring an open door into communicating about what emotions each child may not be able to name or comprehend while they struggled with it. "When the puppy is crying and howling the first few nights in your home, the child can label that the puppy is sad. We can develop conversation that relates to their own hidden emotions," Shannon said. She used this concept to help open up narratives with her children, like, "I bet you felt like this puppy when you first came here. You felt sad, right?" and slowly transitioning them to more complex ones, like, "This puppy is sad because he misses his mommy dog. I bet you feel sad when you miss your mommy." Giving the child a companion that can relate firsthand to their difficult emotions, as well as a connection to the animals plight, can help bridge the gap between what feels "too big" to speak of,

and start healthy conversations about grief, loss, and trauma.

Shannon also believes that the vast variety of animal species has helped with teaching the children about love without boundaries. As many of her children are different races, Shannon feels it is important to allow the children to learn how to love through animals. "We don't say, 'you, little bunny, are white, and I only love spotted bunnies, so therefore I cannot love you.' We love them fully, regardless of their color. Loving a cross-species pet can show that love shows no segregation." Shannon said, "We can show that just as their love can grow for a different species pet, our love can grow for them regardless of their background, heritage or racial differences."

Together, the family heals, both inwardly and outwardly, animal species and human alike. On the farm, they enjoy the company of camels, llamas, alpacas, horses, ponies, donkeys, cows, goats, sheep, pigs, turkey, chickens, ducks, geese, peafowl, guinea-fowl, rabbits, cats, dogs, tortoises, and a parrot. When they aren't working together on the farm, they are enjoying it as a family. They like to go horseback riding (with ponies for the smaller kids), and riding along the family trails on horseback is a definite favorite with the children. They also have an ever-growing garden that they are proud to say has no hormones, pesticides or GMO

products in it. The garden, along with animal products from their farm like milk, eggs and meat provides the family with healthy farm-raised sustenance. Not everything is farm-related though; the family also relishes family movie and game nights, just like most families.

Much of their story happened many years ago, so where is everyone now?

Anthony, 19, and is currently working toward certification to become an Emergency Medical Responder and Volunteer Firefighter. He is a "jack of all trades" and currently works at a few local farms, helping with everything from construction and tree work to shearing alpacas and llamas. His favorite animal on the farm is Sarge, the farm guard dog.

Mirabel, 18, and has her heart set on being a dolphin trainer. She is currently enrolled in classes to achieve her dream of being accepted into the Dolphin Research Center and Training Institute in Key West, Fla. Her favorite animals on the farm are the goats and her cockatoo, CoCo.

Brittney, 17, enjoys golf cart rides around the farm. In spite of a developmental age of two years old, and many medical needs and conditions, including Cerebral Palsy, she doesn't let that take away her joy of life. She likes to play with blocks and babydolls.

Samuel, 15, enjoys reading, origami,

and studying aeronautics. When he grows up, he dreams of being a pilot or an engineer. His favorite animals on the farm are the ducks.

Risa, 15, loves to train and ride horses. She has already won a couple of awards and ribbons in local competitions, and hopes to have a career working with horses when she grows up. Her favorite animal on the farm is her horse, Bingo.

Titus is now 10 and loves to read and play soccer. He enjoys Pokemon games as well, and has a passion for cooking and helping in the kitchen. When he grows up, he wants to be a chef. His favorite animal on the farm is Cinderella, the resident "unicorn."

Last but certainly not least, Magdalene, also 10, loves exploring her surroundings and playing with her brother and best friend, Titus. She loves zebras and is determined to have a zebra farm and become a zebra trainer when she grows up. Her favorite animals on the farm are the bunnies.

Through their efforts, the farm and the family are showing the world about the redemptive qualities of unconditional love. The 12 acres that the family calls home is a source of fresh farmed food, fun in the sun, animal companions and, above all, the redeeming love of God. They are all loving life and thriving on their Redemptive Love Farm. ■

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How three seconds can change a life: The story of Ethan Land

Story by Devyn LeBlanc
Staff Writer

Twenty-four year old Ethan Land is a lifelong resident of Hamilton County, where he graduated from Hamilton County High School. Land was athletically involved in football, baseball, and soccer. In 2015, Land played at the high school state level for football and baseball. Alongside athletics, he was a part of the Future Farmers of America (FFA). Land was also a good student and has never met a stranger. He has always been in good spirits and sees the world with such optimism and positivity.

In 2018, Land found himself in a life-changing situation. He was on his way home from a cousin's wedding at 2 a.m., after a long and hard work week. He dozed off at the wheel for a brief moment and

flipped his truck, totaling it. Despite such a horrific accident, he didn't have a single scratch on his body; however, he sustained a neck injury that led to paralysis from the neck down. He was transported from the scene to Shands Hospital, in Gainesville. At first, not a single neurosurgeon was willing to operate on Land. They each said that there was nothing to be done other than put him in a halo brace. To Land's luck, the nurse caring for him had gone to high school with him and she wasn't going to take "no" for an answer. She took it upon herself to find the best neurosurgeon in the hospital, briefly explained Land's case and asked him to take a look. After an examination and careful consideration, this neurosurgeon decided to operate on Land and give him

a second chance at a life lived with mobility.

After surgery, Land went on to stay at Shands Hospital for four days during his recovery. A woman in the downstairs waiting room heard Land's story and spoke to his parents about her son, who was also facing a spinal cord injury, and was able to give them some more information to help guide him on his journey.

Land was referred to Shepherd Center Rehabilitation in Atlanta, Ga., where he stayed for two months. An organization, called Angel Flight, provided Land with a personal jet ride to Shepherd's from Shand's, so that he did not have to lie in an ambulance for a five-hour drive. Land shared that Shepherd's had provided him with an electric wheelchair, of which he was not a fan. He

would much rather use his arms and push himself around. With this in mind, Land worked hard each day to build up his strength and learn how to use his arms again. By the end of those two months, he was out of the electric wheelchair and into a manual one. Land was then discharged from inpatient to outpatient therapy, where he participated in the day-program for one month. During that month, he learned how to transition out of a wheelchair, get dressed, clean and cook.

Upon arrival to his home with his parents, the community came together to help make his home accessible. The local hardware store donated lumber and the community raised money, as well as helped build the ramps needed for his home.

Land was then referred to Brooks Rehabilitation Hospital

in Jacksonville, Fla., where he sought treatment three days a week for one year to continue working on regaining his strength. After a year of hard work at Brooks, Land was eager to get back to work.

Land felt he was a burden because he wasn't working and providing. He was ready to become independent again. He reached out to the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to help him get back on track to where he wanted to be. Through this agency, he was able to receive a modified truck so he would be able to drive again. He found a job at Corbitt Brothers' Farms, where he is currently head of the shipping department.

Ethan Land recently married Ashley Land in June of 2021. Ethan reached out to Ashley six years after he graduated high school, and they began to talk off and on for about three months. One week prior to the injury, they settled into their relationship and things became a bit more serious. Ashley visited Ethan on his second day in the hospital and visited him three weeks after admission into Shepherd's. Ethan shared that Ashley didn't quite know what to say, so he brushed her cheek with his hand and that's when he knew that she was his forever.

Ethan had come home for Christmas, and he and Ashley had been up all night talking and laughing and he realized that an emotional connection will always trump anything that is physical. About a year and a half into their relationship, Ethan proposed to Ashley, and she was more than delighted to say "yes". They married in Georgia, and honeymooned in Charleston, S.C.

Ethan shared that his wife has supported him the whole way through, and the community and family expect no less from him now than they did before the accident, which has helped push him through his journey to recovery. "My life would not be as good as it is if it weren't for that wreck," said Ethan.



Ethan has future plans to create his own non-profit organization to give others with spinal cord injuries the support they need. Ethan is also looking into joining various groups in the community as a way to give back. "This injury has opened my eyes to all that life has to offer," said Ethan. He also has a YouTube page and a podcast, where he educates others on spinal cord injuries and shares what he has learned throughout his journey.

Ethan shares his many thanks for everyone in the community, his friends and family, and the Lord. "What people in the community have done for me has not gone unnoticed." ■



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"At the end of the game, I just told him [Zac] I loved him and that I was so proud to be his dad and to call him my son." Coach Mike Coe to Zac after the state championship game on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2019. It would be Zac's final high school game as a player.

Mike and Zac Coe:

Madison's father and son coaching duo

**Photography by Emerald Greene Parsons,
Gina Rutherford and Chelsie Holbrook
Story by Rick Patrick**
Staff Writer

When young Zac Coe was in the ninth grade at Madison County High School, he decided he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and coach football. "I tried to talk him out of it," laughs the older Mike Coe, Head Football Coach and Athletic Director at Madison County High School (MCHS). Fortunately, Zac seems to have inherited his father's strong will, which some may call stubbornness, and was not dissuaded. Now, the father and son pair can be seen on the sidelines under the Friday Night Lights of Boot Hill Stadium, although Zac spends much of his time during games observing from the coach's area of the press box. Mike has helped establish one of the most successful football programs in

North Florida at MCHS, with several state titles, including a run of three straight state championships from 2017-2019.

Despite his joking protestations toward Zac, Mike has a great love for coaching and for the young athletes with whom he works. "It's one of the most rewarding professions you can undertake," said Mike. "I don't mean in terms of money, because you're not going to get rich, but in terms of the positive impact you can have on lives." That sense of mentorship of young athletes is at the core of Mike's coaching philosophy, especially when it comes to his team of assistant coaches. "When I sit down to interview a coach to be an assistant, I don't ask them about Xs and Os," Mike has said. "I want to know how they are going to help boys become good husbands, good fathers and good men." During his near 30-year career, Mike has had his share of

ups and downs in terms of coaching young men. He has had numerous players play for major college programs and a handful of players in the National Football League (NFL), such as Chris Thompson, running back for the Washington Redskins and more recently the Jacksonville Jaguars. But, that is not how Mike measures his success. "We don't talk about the NFL much around here. We really don't talk about college much," says Mike. Mike considers those players who come through his program and go on to be upstanding citizens to be as much of a success as any professional athlete. "I can't tell you the number of truck drivers, mechanics, welders and such who have played for us and have become good husbands and good fathers. That's what I'm proud of. That's when you feel like you've made a difference." There are times when a youngster may "fall through the cracks" and



The Coe family after the Cowboys won their third state championship in a row. Pictured, from left to right, are: Braydon Coe, Mike Coe, Alexa Coe, Zac Coe and Amanda Coe holding Madison Coe.

get into trouble. On the rare occasion when that happens, Mike's love for the young man doesn't diminish. "One thing I've learned is to celebrate the little victories."

One can easily see a major "victory" for Mike is his son Zac, who primarily coaches for the Madison County Central School (MCCS) Broncos, along with another Mike Coe protege, Eric Bright, Jr. It's easy to see the pride in Mike's eyes when he speaks of his oldest son. "Zac has a genuine concern for people; that's going to help make him an excellent coach," said Mike. Zac graduated from MCHS as part of the Class of 2020. While playing football for the Cowboys, he was part of that three-year championship run. After his high school career was finished, he had an offer to play football at Valdosta State University. However, that football scholarship opportunity fell through and Zac decided he would go ahead and get a head start on his coaching career. Zac spent the 2020 football season coaching part-time with both MCCS and MCHS, while continuing to work at Ace Hardware. Just prior to the 2021-22 school year, Zac was hired at MCCS as a paraprofessional. "I spend my time between the alternative school (for students who have exhibited behavioral issues) and the Central School," said Zac. Being a young coach at one's Alma Mater brings its own set of challenges, at times. "The seniors now were young players on the team during my senior year. I sometimes have to remind them that during practice or during the games, I'm 'Coach Coe,'" said Zac with a slight chuckle. This was very apparent last season when Zac was in the

position of coaching his younger brother, Brayden. There were a couple of instances when "big brother" had to be "Coach Coe."

Mike sees definite advantages to having former players, and former coaches, coaching what is, in essence, a feeder program for the varsity program. "When the younger players get here [to MCHS], they will already have an idea of how we do things and the expectations we'll have because Eric [Bright] and Zac have both been through our program," said Mike. Very similar to the high school program,

the program at MCCS is being built on a foundation of developing young men of character. "We keep an eye on both grades and conduct in the classroom," said Zac.

After the Cowboys won their third consecutive state championship in December of 2019, Mike uttered these prophetic words, "I have a sneaking suspicion it will not be the last time he [Zac] is on the sidelines with me, it just may be he is in coaching gear and not pads and a helmet."

Zac is sure to be a very successful coach at whatever level he chooses. Not because he learned Xs and Os from his dad; but because he learned how to be a man from his dad. ■





“NO ONE WILL EVER OUTWORK ME”

MEET ANTONIO WHITE

A hardworking Suwannee graduate attending West Point

Story by Danny Federico

Staff Writer

Everyone is told, at some point in their lives, that they're destined for greatness or that they will achieve more than they ever thought they could. This is still true, but many people don't realize achieving a dream comes with numerous obstacles, causing the dreamer to jump through countless hoops and scale endless walls in order to achieve their goals. Twenty-year-old Antonio White, a 2020 graduate of Suwannee High School (SHS), has first-hand experience with these trials and tribulations.

White was born in September 2001, in Jacksonville, to Lavaughn Simmons and Anthony White. He grew up in Orlando, with his sister, Sienna White (21), and two brothers, Jamal Simmons (16), and Anthony White (24).

In March 2018, White moved to Live Oak and began attending SHS in his sophomore year. While attending Winter Park High School in Orlando, White was a student in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. When he moved to the north central area of Florida, White decided he wanted to continue taking upper-level classes. While no local high schools had an IB Program, SHS did have the option for advanced placement (AP) courses.

"I actually ran for class president within the first two weeks, but I didn't get it," said White. "Then, in my junior year, I got a little bit more involved in everything. I made the basketball team, played football, joined the weightlifting team, ran track, joined Key Club, Leo Club, Interact Club, National Achievers Society and then, in my senior year, I was the Student Government Association President."

In addition, White was the student

ambassador for SHS, which required him to attend Suwannee County School Board meetings and, occasionally, provide his thoughts on situations going on within the county's schools. As part of the Suwannee Bulldogs varsity football team, White played as a wide receiver, running back and a



defensive tackle, where he racked up 170 total receiving yards over two years. While juggling academics and extracurriculars, White was also working 14 to 15 hours a week at Publix.

As stressful as his days were, White's search for transportation most days was even more hectic. White's father, a truck driver, was rarely home, so he would rely on his step-mother for transportation. Because she had to be at work in Lake City around 5 a.m., White often had to wake up at 3:30 a.m. in order to catch a ride with his step-mother. She would drop him off at the Busy Bee in Wellborn, and White would then have to wait a few hours until the bus arrived. At one point, his family and friends took it upon themselves to help him get to various areas along his daily route.

"It became a network of people helping me out," said White. "There was literally no incentive for them helping me."

Eventually, after having to find a way to school, practices and work, White ended up moving in with a friend and his family, who provided transportation for him and allowed him to stay with them for free. However, the situation didn't last long and began a cycle of having to not only find a mode of transportation, but also a place to live. In August 2019, before school started, White moved to the Florida Sheriff's Boys Ranch, located in Live Oak.

"It has such a negative connotation and I remember, when I got there, they were just, like, 'Hey man, we want you here' and that just made all the difference," said White. "I loved being there."

White went on to say he was up one night doing homework when one of the kids at the ranch approached him. The young man asked him why he was always doing



taking 10 classes, equalling 22 credit hours, tutoring over 50 hours in math, as well as playing Division 1 football. In the end, football took up too much time. He was told if he continued playing football, he would never make more than a 2.0 grade point average (GPA).

"Education saved my life," said White. "There was no plan B, so I had to leave so I could take care of my self. School came first, not football."

White ended the second semester with a 3.6 GPA, ranked 139 out of 1,252. Now, he is focusing all his energy into his Nuclear Engineering major, with a minor in Spanish, while also continuing to tutor on the side.

"What helped me get to where I am today is not looking at my situations for what they are," said White. "I have very high expectations for myself and, one thing I tell my little brother is if you try to get all C's, you're going to get a few D's. But, if you try to get all A's, you'll get a few B's. So, going into West Point, I told myself, 'I want an A-plus in every class' and I ended up getting a few B's...Every single day at West Point, I would tell myself, 'You're so much more capable than you think you are.'"

A bit of advice White would like to give to young people wanting to achieve their goals is: "Don't poison yourself with negativity." He also states that, when walking into the unknown, it's important to be confident in yourself and your abilities to get things done.

"Learning to not compare myself to other people was a challenge, as well," said White. "Now, I compare myself to me. I don't stress myself out over other people; I look at myself and ask myself, 'How can I become greater and then what can I do to help other people?'"

White would like to extend thanks to: Alicia and Dale Richard; Travis and Megan Henry; Michele and Rod Howard; Jim Lumbra; Suzanne Tillman and her family; Cindy Wiggins; Beverly Pardee; and all the faculty and staff at SHS for helping him with transportation and so much more.

Now, going into his second year at West Point, White has made it his goal to follow in the footsteps of two of his mentors at the academy, Evan Walker and Maxwell Myers. Walker is a Rhodes Scholar and will be getting her masters degree from Oxford University within the next two years. Myers is a Rotary Scholar and will be attending school at Kings College London, in England.

"They both shared with me ways to succeed and how to navigate cadet life and thrive," said White. "My goal is to earn a graduate scholarship like them when I graduate." ■

homework and White responded, stating he wanted to go to college and be successful.

"I told him 'if you want to be successful, you should probably do your homework, too' and he was like, 'that's not a bad idea,'" said White. "A lot of these kids don't have people telling them, 'Hey man, try hard. Do your best. It's okay if you fail, but you've got to get back up and keep going.'"

White stayed at the Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch up until his graduation in May of 2020. However, this is only the beginning of his story. Entering his senior year of high school, Beth Cocchiarella, the mother

of one of White's friends from Orlando, advised White to look into West Point, an academy with a 12 percent acceptance rate. Cocchiarella informed White about the school, telling him about its free education and how he'd be an Army Second Lieutenant once he graduates. White stated he was reluctant at first.

"It just wasn't something I really wanted to do," said White. "I was going to commit to play football at Yale. That's what I wanted."

However, White followed her advice and began the process of applying. Getting letters of recommendation from his teachers was an easy task, but the real challenge came with receiving a nomination from Congressman Neal Dunn. Then, on Feb. 28, 2020, White received a call from Dunn himself, informing White he had been appointed to the academy.

During his first-year at West Point, White had to undergo the academy's Cadet Basic Training, also known as "Beast Barracks," which White described as "basically learning how to be a cadet." He then went on to state how the first week and a half following his basic training were underwhelming. He began missing football and decided to talk to Jeff Monken, the head coach of the Army West Point team. After running around to get things together, White was able to take part in tryouts as a receiver, where he didn't drop a single pass. He was then recruited to the Army Black Knights as a receiver. In December 2020, the Black Knights won the Commander-In-Chief Trophy.

By his second semester, White was



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BRAWLEY NEVER LOOKED BACK

Story by Lee Trawick
Staff Writer

What is greatness versus success? Success is based on your interpretation, while greatness is bestowed. Greatness is achieved when your peers, and the world around you define your success. Service is an important quality of greatness. To be of real service in the world, a person must add something to other people's lives that cannot be bought. Do heroes create greatness or does greatness create heroes?

United States Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Pennie Brawley is a native of Lafayette County. She was born on Jan. 25, 1969, she was raised in Mayo and graduated from Lafayette High School in 1987. But the glimpses of her greatness began long before she ever donned the US Military uniform.

When she was a little girl, she was the first girl who played little league baseball in Mayo. She did not play little league baseball as a novelty as the first girl. She played baseball because she was an athlete and was clearly one of the best in the league. Brawley made the All-Star team for Lafayette and went on to be in the starting line-up. Her coach, then the late Edward Perry, reflected on Brawley, "She was a baseball player, Pennie was the type of player and person who could do anything she wanted. She was an athlete." People could see the potential in Brawley from a very young age. But she was too busy back then having fun. It is a debate if Mayo got too small for her or if Brawley got too big for Mayo.

Brawley eventually left

Mayo and joined the United States Air Force. No one saw that coming from her. After high school, Brawley bounced around a bit in Mayo and found herself raising trouble with her



fast car, jumping Highway 27 under the red light just to tempt the cops to chase after her. Most of her days became a blur. She knew she wanted more and Mayo was not the type of place she could find what she was looking for.

Brawley joined the US Air Force in June of 1990 and left for Military Basic Training at Lackland Air Force Base (AFB) in Texas. From there, her greatness was just beginning. It seemed Brawley found exactly what she was looking for in the Military and flourished there. She has received numerous awards and decorations

including being selected as the SSgt. Henry E. "Red" Erwin Award Career enlisted Aviator of the Year in 2000. While she is a highly decorated Airman, she is humble about

Hope, Coronet Oak, Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Inherent Resolve.

She married her husband Chief Master Sergeant Scott Brawley in 2005, and since they have been married, they have sacrificed more than most could imagine. Our country and the rest of the world is indebted to them both and all of those around the world spreading democracy, and establishing opportunities to those less fortunate.

Brawley has over 8,000 hours in flight, including more than 1,400 combat hours. Over her 30 year career, she has achieved the highest rank of an enlisted non-commissioned officer, Chief Master Sergeant on April 1, 2020.

Brawley is currently the Superintendent of the 156th Airlift Squadron, Loadmaster Section in North Carolina Air National Guard, 145th Airlift Wing.

If she could give any advice to anyone it would be to "Chase your dreams, find your passion and go for it. Growing up in a small town it is hard to imagine the possibilities that someone could be a part of so much. But I followed the advice of my dad when he said I should join the Air Force. I did and haven't looked back."

Those who know her know the true meaning of greatness. She has impacted millions of lives for the better and as she looks back on her career one day, she too may understand the impact she has made on those who watched her grow up, and those who were impacted by her service. She is a true hero, and the very definition of greatness. ■

Pennie Sullivan Brawley is pictured in the back row far left.



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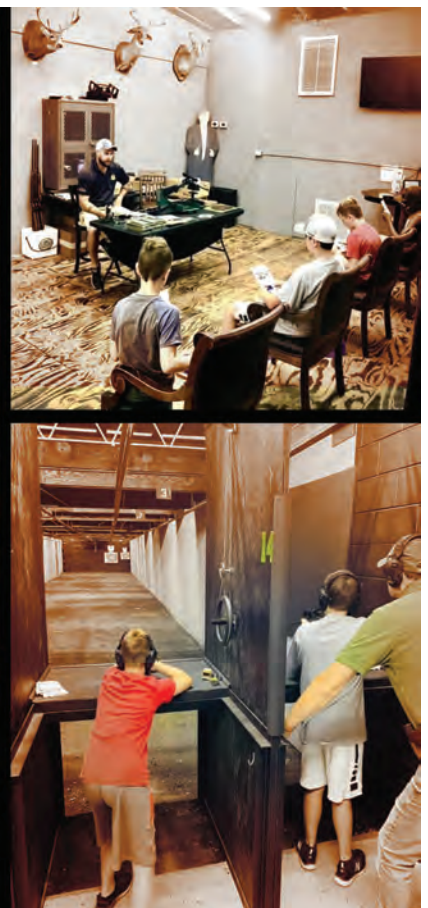
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Sadie Miller

Branford's rising
country star

Story by Danny Federico

Staff Writer

Thirteen-year-old Sadie Miller has a dream familiar to most youth; a dream of standing on a stage amongst bright lights and cheering fans, belting out messages people can relate to. However, this isn't just a dream, but a reality. While the stages aren't quite so big and the lights haven't reached retina-burning vibrance, Miller has had many opportunities to perform on local and national levels.

Miller, a lifelong resident of Branford, has had a passion for singing since she was only six-years-old. Her hobby began when she was in elementary school, participating in school talent shows and taking voice lessons at the age of eight. Since, Miller has performed at various locations, from local events, such as singing the National Anthem at Branford High School sporting events and at the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park. In June, she even had the opportunity to represent the Branford Future Farmers of America (FFA) Chapter at the 93rd Florida FFA State Convention and Expo in Orlando, where she sang "When Will I Be Loved" by Linda Ronstadt.

"That experience was very fun, because I had a lot of friends from our surrounding counties there and I was able to share the stage with the past and current State FFA officers, who were all super cool," said Miller. "I tend to be the singer/entertainer at FFA events. I've even had other chapters ask me to come perform at their banquets."

She has also recently performed at the FBI National Academy Associates (FBINAA), which took place from July 7 through July 10, in Orlando. There, Miller got to sing with Austin Edwards of "Broken Roots," a band that made it to the season 15 finals of America's Got Talent.

In addition to her already impressive resumé, Miller has performed at the Orange Blossom Opry in Weirsdale, Fla., as well as at the Silver Spurs Rodeo in Kissimmee, Fla. While her singing voice is her main instrument, she's also quite talented with the guitar. Miller stated she learned how to play the guitar in March of 2019 and now she pretty much takes it everywhere she goes.

"I just absolutely love music. Anytime I get to strum my guitar and sing is a blessing," said Miller. "There are so many perks to getting to perform in front of people, but my personal favorite is getting to meet and interact with the crowd; I love meeting people and making new friends. I know my talent is a blessing from God, so it's important to me to sing as often as I can."

When it comes to song choice, Miller stated classic country will always be her favorite, she was raised around bluegrass, so it's in her blood. She also stated she's been singing more current country in an attempt to open up more to the younger crowds. However, she also enjoys the stylings of Luke Combs, Midland, Miranda Lambert, Priscilla Block, Riley Green, Cody Johnson and Morgan Wallen.

Although she hasn't found the right "feel, sound and 'thing'" for her music, Miller stated she hoped to develop a style like that of Carrie Underwood, yet have the presence of Dolly Parton. Miller said she thinks Underwood and Parton are two great role models, as they keep God first in their careers. Looking to the future, Miller hopes to be able to continue pursuing her passion as a career.

"I hope to attend college in Nashville, Tenn., while pursuing a career in country music," said Miller. "But, if that's not God's plan for me, I would love to get a BA in diagnostic medical sonography so I can become an ultrasound technician."

For right now, though, Miller plans to continue performing the way she has been, all-the-while balancing her class schedule and volleyball schedule, where she plays on both the middle school and junior varsity teams. In addition, Miller plans to join the weightlifting team when the season comes around.



Photo courtesy of Signature Images Photography, Brian Lewis



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“Being a middle school girl pursuing this career is not an easy thing to do,” said Miller. In giving advice to young people who want to pursue a dream like hers, Miller stated it’s important to always keep your head up, work hard and know that

nothing comes easily. “This is definitely a unique path and not everyone is going to be supportive. You can’t let that affect you; stay focused. I have been blessed with amazing support from my family, friends and community.”

To support Miller in her endeavors and find out where she’ll be performing next, follow her on social media. She can be found on Facebook and YouTube under Sadie Lynn Miller and on Instagram and TikTok under SadieMillerMusic ■



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Surviving breast cancer is a family affair



Photography courtesy of Kathy Everett
Story by Mickey Starling

Staff Writer

In June of 2015, Taylor County resident Madeline Moore was diagnosed with stage 1 lobular ductal cancer in her breasts, which had spread to one lymph node. Moore was 82 at the time, and she was successfully treated at the Mayo Clinic, in Jacksonville, Fla.

The following June, Moore's daughter, Kathy Everett, received a diagnosis of stage 0 lobular ductal cancer that was noninvasive. "The most painful part of the process was the biopsy," said Everett. "It was rough, and I have a high pain tolerance." the day after her biopsy, Everett's doctor called to inform her that she had cancer in two milk ducts. Two weeks later, Everett also began treatment at the Mayo Clinic, in Jacksonville. It was determined that a lumpectomy was the best procedure for Everett. After she and her mother had genetic testing, both were relieved to find no genetic mutations that would cause disease. For Everett, that meant that her cancer was hormone-driven. For Everett's two daughters, it relieved them of any fears that they were at higher risk for getting breast cancer. Moore's cancer came about as a result of age and calcification.

In July of 2016, Everett's surgery was performed, and, a week

later, she returned to work as a third grade teacher at Taylor County Elementary School, in Perry. After healing for six weeks, Everett began seven and a half weeks of daily radiation treatments in Tallahassee. She was blessed to have different friends drive her to each appointment. Her husband, Don Everett, Jr., did the driving each Friday. "I tolerated the radiation really well," said Everett. "I attended an FSU football game on the same day of radiation on one occasion. Also, my radiation oncologist, Dr. Phillip Sharp, was absolutely wonderful."

Both Moore and Everett were put on Letrozole to help prevent their cancer from returning. They are still cancer free today. "We are a very proactive family where our health is concerned," said Everett. "I've had regular checkups since I was 40, and I believe the regular exams may have saved both of our lives. The medical field is making great strides in breast cancer research, and things are getting much better for patients."

Everett is doing so well that she is only required to see a recovery oncologist once a year for checkups. "I have been truly blessed, and I encourage everyone to maintain their yearly checkups," said Everett. "Women are especially bad about neglecting their health while they are taking care of everyone else." ■



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