

The Front Porch

Spring
2021

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And the Talks are Long*

The Suwannee Valley Nursing Center

Staying true to its roots

Jonquay Andrews is
Fueled by Compassion

Angel Ketring
Angel of the Beatitudes

**Monticello
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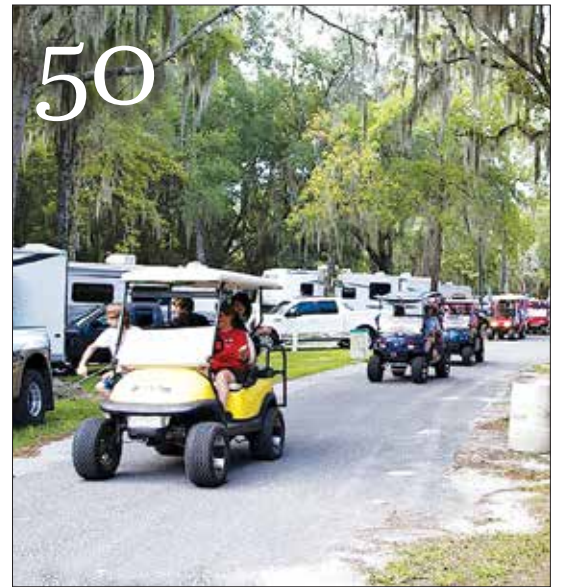
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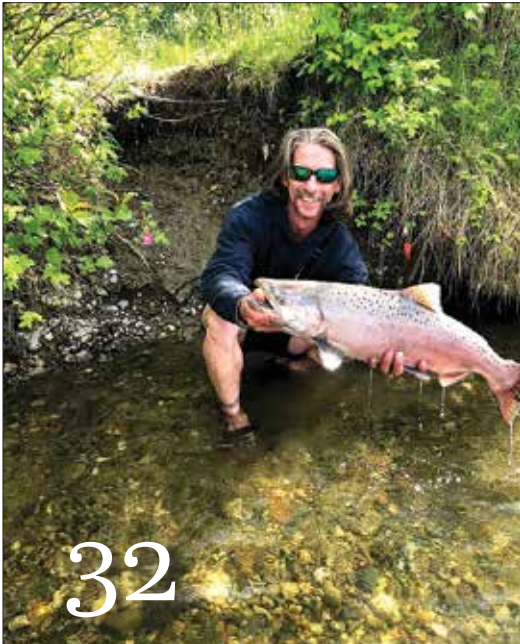




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Meet Our Staff



EMERALD GREENE PARSONS was born and raised in Madison County and grew up in the newspaper business. As a child, she was taught every capacity of the newspaper business, from making prints in the darkroom to typesetting, selling advertising and running the press. She is now the owner of *Greene Publishing, Inc.*, *ECB Publishing, Inc.* and *C&E Publishing* and, together, the three companies publish the *Madison County Carrier*, *Madison Enterprise-Recorder*, *Monticello News*, *Jefferson County Journal*, *Riverbend News*, and *The Front Porch* magazine. All five newspapers are Florida Press Association award winning newspapers and Emerald, herself, has won numerous awards for her personal editorial column and photography ability.



CHELTSIE HOLBROOK was born and raised in Madison County where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration while minoring in Human Resources. Her passion for the news media outlet developed when she was a little girl while working at her family's newspaper business. After 28 years of learning the ins and outs of the business, she now sits as the General Manager of *Greene Publishing, Inc.*, *ECB Publishing, Inc.* and *C&E Publishing, Inc.* Cheltsie has won numerous Florida Press Association awards for her graphic design and photography skills.



AMBER ALBRITTON has been the Bookkeeper for *Greene Publishing, Inc.* for the past two years. She was raised in Madison County and graduated from Madison County High School. Amber has one daughter, Hannah. In her free time she enjoys spending time with her family and close friends, shopping, reading, writing and swimming.



SHANE MATHEWS is Colorado-born and South Florida-raised. Growing up, he was always into the arts. His interest developed into a successful career as an award-winning oil painter, photographer, graphic designer and engineer. Shane is currently the lead designer for the *Riverbend News* at *C&E Publishing, Inc.* He also owns and operates a photography studio and an engineering business. When he's not working, he enjoys spending time with his four plus children and wife of 15 years.



RICK PATRICK has deep family roots in the North Florida area. He was raised in Perry, Fla. and graduated from Taylor County High School. He studied communications as an undergraduate at Florida State University and holds a BFA in Theatre Arts from Valdosta State University. Rick traveled for one year with the internationally acclaimed music group "Up With People." His anticipated weekly columns have won awards from the Florida Press Association and are a favorite among our readers. He still enjoys participating in theatre productions and is currently working on producing a one-man show based on the writings of Mark Twain.



JUSTICE BARRINGTON is the advertising specialist for *ECB Publishing, Inc.*, a position she filled in August of 2018. Justice is a born-and-raised North Floridian, having live throughout the Big Bend area for the majority of her adolescent and adult life. Currently, Justice reside in Tallahassee where she balances her work life while also being a full-time auntie of her four nephews. In her spare time, she supports the culture of local arts through open mic poetry night in Tallahassee venues, small businesses and loves Saturdays for Adult league softball.



JEANETTE DUNN is a native of San Francisco, Calif. The daughter of Angelo Roccasalva, a Italian immigrant who arrived on Ellis Island in 1939, Dunn was raised to be resilient. This same resiliency has been her driving force. In fact, she unabashedly began a new career at the age of 62, when she joined the *Greene Publishing, Inc.* team 14 years ago as an advertising specialist. Jeanette has one daughter, Kim Spear, of Alexandria, Va. She loves spending time with family, friends and colleagues; and enjoys a good book regularly. Jeanette likes the small town environment of Madison, where the people remind her of a Sicilian village: community-minded, patriotic and everybody knows your name.



MARK ESTEFAN was born in Cairo, Egypt and graduated from the applied arts college in 2002. After working for nearly 11 years in the advertising field, he decided to follow his dream by moving to the USA in 2013. His soul is still bursting with excitement as he discovers a new world with a versatile culture. To live the versatility even further, Mark joined our diverse team in October 2020 as a graphic designer.



INA THOMPSON was born in Tallahassee, Fla. but grew up in South Alabama and North Florida. She graduated from Hamilton County High School in Jasper, Fla. and attended North Florida Junior College. She then moved to Atlanta, Ga. and later graduated from Georgia State University with a bachelor's degree in visual arts. She worked in the art retail business and was a buyer for a wholesale art distributor. She moved to Madison in 2007, living in the family home of her grandparents. In 2009, she purchased a business in Madison, The Mail Room. In 2012, she was elected as the City Commissioner for District 2. She has been an officer and volunteer with several organizations since being back in Madison.



DANNY FEDERICO was born and raised in Tallahassee, Fla. Growing up, Federico developed an interest in the language arts, which blossomed after receiving awards from multiple school essay contests. Having graduated from Tallahassee Community College with an Associate of Arts degree, Federico is now actively pursuing a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and a minor in Journalism from the University of Central Florida. Federico now resides in Branford, Fla., enjoying reading, writing screenplays and short stories and spending time with family.



CONCEPCION LEDEZMA was born in Hialeah, Fla., to Panamanian parents and moved around the country multiple times as a child due to his father's occupation as a jockey in horse racing. He graduated from the University of Kentucky, earning a B.A. in journalism, along with a French minor. He was a full-time sportswriter for two South Florida daily newspapers before becoming a Florida public school teacher; he's currently a Language Arts teacher at Hamilton County High School. He also freelanced as a sportswriter since the 1990's, primarily for the Miami Herald, Sun-Sentinel and The Pelican (weekly) before moving to North Florida in 2015. He has since freelanced for the Gainesville Sun and the Jacksonville Times-Union.



ALEXANDERIA "ALEX" MINER is the Ad Designer at *Greene Publishing, Inc.* She completed four years of NJROTC (Navy Jr. ROTC) training before graduating from Escambia High School in 2015, in hopes to join the Navy. In 2017 she moved to Valdosta, Ga. where her husband was later stationed. There she went on to attend Wiregrass Georgia Technical College to pursue a career in Dental Assisting. In 2020, she graduated as a Board Certified Dental Assistant with certifications in dental radiology, coronal polishing and EFDA (expanded functions of a dental assistant). She plans to attend Valdosta State University in the fall of 2021 to continue her Bachelors of Biology and later plans to enroll in dental school in hopes to become a Pediatric Dentist. In her free time she likes to spend time with her husband of six years, shopping with friends and anything to make her nieces and nephews happy.



LEE TRAWICK was born and raised in Mayo, where he graduated from Lafayette High School, class of 1997. Upon graduation, he enrolled at North Florida Junior College, where he played baseball for the North Florida Sentinels. He spent one season with the Cincinnati Reds organization, before joining the United States Army. After returning home from the Army, he moved to New York City, where he found a love for writing. He is now a two-time published author of "Retribution" and "Shattered Days". Trawick now resides in Lake City with his wife, Lorin Trawick, and their two children. He is a reporter for *C&E Publishing, Inc.*



MICKY STARLING is a Madison native and has been a reporter for *Greene Publishing, Inc.* since 2017. Mickey is a Florida Press Association award winner for feature Profile Story and has enjoyed writing since his days as editor of his high school and college newspapers. Mickey loves using humor to bring his stories to life and to pass on valuable life lessons. Before returning to journalism, Mickey spent over 20 years as a youth pastor.



TAYLOR ARNOLD was raised in the small town of Hosford, Fla. She later moved to Live Oak, Fla., where she attended Riveroak Technical College and graduated from cosmetology school. Arnold is currently the ad representative for the *Riverbend News*. She enjoys getting out and meeting new people in her community and looks forward to working with people everyday.

Contributors



JOHN WILLOUGHBY



MERRY ANN FRISBY

The production of **THE FRONT PORCH** would not be possible without the talented writers, editors, graphic artists, and photographers who contribute to each issue. We thank you and are proud to provide a publication to display your work. We are also thankful for the sponsors and readers who have supported this magazine through advertisements and subscriptions.



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Please note: If you are a subscriber to the *Madison County Carrier*, *Madison Enterprise-Recorder*, *Jefferson County Journal*, *Monticello News* or *Riverbend News* you will automatically receive the magazine each quarter.

Life needs more front porches

Front porches are important!

Front porches are where we sometimes sit and let our minds fill with creative thoughts, deep, productive thoughts or just drift mindlessly from thought to thought. Front porches are also where we sit to relax or where we take time to catch up on life with our loved ones or with friends we haven't seen in many years.

Front porches once served a cultural purpose. It was where families gathered to socialize. It was where neighbors chatted. It was where folks worked their problems out, laughed and joked, and shared the news of the local community.

For many years, front porches have been the gathering place where people share their lives with each other. Front porches are a deep tradition of the American South, and we thank you, our readers, for letting us be your front porch every quarter. We are honored that you choose us to sit with, relax with and read about your family and friends from this North Florida region that we all call home!

In every issue of our magazine, we focus on family, friends and local businesses. These three things genuinely make living in a small town – THE BEST place to live! It is fascinating and interesting to see how family and friends, in our hometowns, spend their time together and support each other. It is awe-inspiring to see how our small, mom-and-pop, hometown businesses thrive in our towns and all the interesting products sold here, locally.

As always, this edition of The Front Porch magazine features a notable resident as our "Front Porch spotlight." In this volume, we pay tribute to our White Springs friend and neighbor, Johnny Bullard.



Bullard, a native of White Springs, shares his childhood stories and lessons learned from his father.

After rocking awhile with Johnny, we invite you to step inside and take a tour of the Suwannee Valley Nursing Center, this quarter's cover-feature-story. Administrator Danny Williamson would love to share with you the history of the Suwannee Valley Nursing Center and tell you about the wing expansion and newly enclosed courtyard.

Then, please sit and visit with your friends who live in and around your six hometown counties. There is so much to learn about what is happening around you ...

- Jonquay Andrews, at 17-years-old, has found his niche in the funeral home business.
- The Last Real Heroes/The Last Real-Life Cowboys. In Lafayette County age is just a number and laughter is the best medicine for these men in the Southern Seniors Roping Association.
- Jim Glaser's love of craftsmanship and the want to create things brought about a wonderful world of woodworking.
- Angel Ketring was killed

in a tragic car accident at the young age of 15. Yet, her name and memory live on. Her loving, generous nature and love for animals are forever memorialized in "Angel's Dog Park," located in Perry, Fl.

- Travis Sander always longed to live a life in the "bush." A few years ago, that dream came true when he moved to Alaska to survive by living off the land.
- Serenity Castanon has stepped into the wondrous world of entrepreneurs by starting her own internet business called "Serenity's Scents" Meet this stunning 10-year-old and her world of making car fresheners.
- Jefferson Farmers Market – the small, home-town business that is large in the variety of fresh local and regional vegetables and fruits. This commodity has been in Jefferson County for nearly thirty-one years.
- The Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park and Campground – one of the most loved

festival music and camping parks in the world. The scenery, music, festivals, camping, fishing, kayaking and canoeing are all just within reach of everyone in our North Florida area.

- The Mystic Shrine - The history of the Marzuq and Morocco fez. The Shriners is a fraternity based on fun, fellowship and the Masonic principles of brotherly love. The Shriners are a brotherhood of men committed to family, engaged in ongoing personal growth, and dedicated to providing care for children and families in need.

So, friends, thank you for joining us on our front porch. Thank you for pulling up a chair, socializing with us and letting us bring you more front porch moments; for learning who your neighbor is, like he was your next-of-kin, makes life so much better.

Please, sit back, sip on some sweet tea and sit a spell. We would love to share our stories with you!



Emerald Greene Parsons, Publisher

Sittin' on the porch with...

Johnny Bullard



Story by Mickey Starling
Staff Writer

Photography by Shane Mathews

White Springs native Johnny Bullard has plenty to reflect upon as he enjoys a restful evening, rocking gently on his front porch. He is well known for his many years of teaching and serving as a principal in Hamilton, Suwannee and Columbia Counties. Bullard is currently the Hamilton County School Board chairman, and he is employed at the White Springs Public Library. Bullard is also an accomplished writer, having published several books with themes that celebrate southern living.

One of Bullard's favorite memories involve his days as principal at South Hamilton Elementary School. "The community worked together with our teachers and staff to bring that school up from a low 'D' school to an 'A' school," said Bullard, still brimming with joy over that accomplishment.

Though he has traveled extensively, Bullard loves nothing more than his small-town roots. "I've always been a small-town boy, and I still am," said Bullard. "I grew up in a tight-knit community. We may fall out with each other, but when trouble hits, we pick each other up as well. I still enjoy many life-long friendships here."

Bullard stayed close to home during

his college years, attending Valdosta State College. "I was more like a permanent resident at Valdosta State," jokes Bullard, who earned four degrees from the institution.

One of the values that Bullard has treasured during his long career is having a good attitude. "I learned from my father to keep a sense of humor about things," reflects Bullard. "Life has its ups and downs. Humor helps you to look at things positively." Bullard peppers every conversation with plenty of southern charm and wit, making sure that those in his company enjoy their visit.

Another valuable asset that Bullard reflects upon is his work ethic, which he also gained from his father. "I grew up working in tobacco fields, said Bullard. "It helped me to grow up working hard." Thinking of those long, hot days working with the sticky leaves reminded Bullard of one of the few letters his father sent him. "It was written on a brown paper bag," remembered Bullard. "He wrote, 'When you think of giving up, think about this.' Included in the letter was a dried tobacco leaf and a twenty dollar bill. Both have served Bullard well, reminding him that hard work pays off eventually.

After a lengthy tenure in the educational field, children are always at



the heart of his concerns for the future, and he has great advice for teachers. "Children may not always remember what you taught them, but they will always remember how you made them feel," advised Bullard.

Modern technology is something Bullard both appreciates and fears where the younger generation is concerned. "Young people have a lot at their finger tips," said Bullard. "But, they need to learn to listen to those around them and value their stories. Your roots are important because they ground you."

Bullard's roots are genuinely southern, as he continues to value a rich legacy of faith, family and friends as only a small-town boy can. ■

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SUWANNEE VALLEY NURSING CENTER STAYS TRUE TO ITS ROOTS

Story by Lee Trawick

Staff Writer

Photography by Shane Mathews

Suwannee Valley Nursing Center (SVNC) would like to take you on a tour through their facility. Join *The Front Porch* as we sit down with Nursing Home Administrator Danny Williamson, as he talks with us, not only about the history of SVNC, but also the direction they are going.

SVNC was established in 1969, with the purpose of serving the community of Hamilton County and those that needed more personable assistance. SVNC is locally funded by the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners, Hamilton County Hospital Board, Hamilton County Development Authority, as well as a fourth local donor who would like to remain anonymous. SVNC is a community-driven organization with no federal funding, therefore all of the money that comes into the center is used to provide better care for

the residents. With no stockholders looming over SVNC, Williamson only answers to a board of directors, which is made up of members of the community.

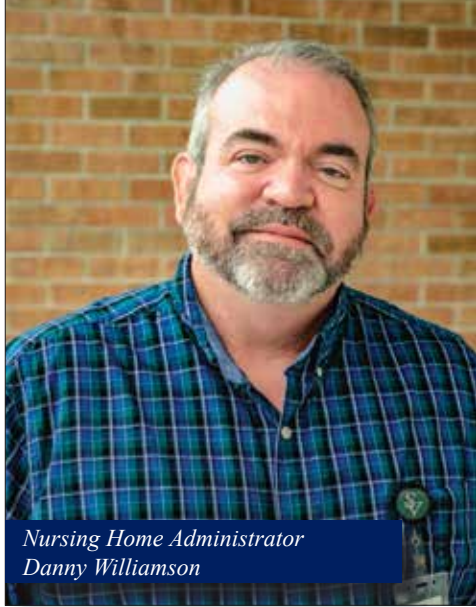
When the doors opened in 1969, Avaneck Reckner was the first Nursing Home Administrator. She remained in this position until the young man she groomed was ready to step into her shoes, continuing the legacy of consistency and the level of care she, along with the residents of Hamilton County, envisioned when breaking ground.

That young man was Williamson, who attended Lake City Community College (now Florida Gateway College), where he earned his Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) certificate in 1995. As an LPN, Williamson began working at Hamilton County Memorial Hospital full-time, as well as part-time at SVNC. While working in the hospital, Williamson focused on acute care, something he looks back at and feels helped prepare him for his time at SVNC.

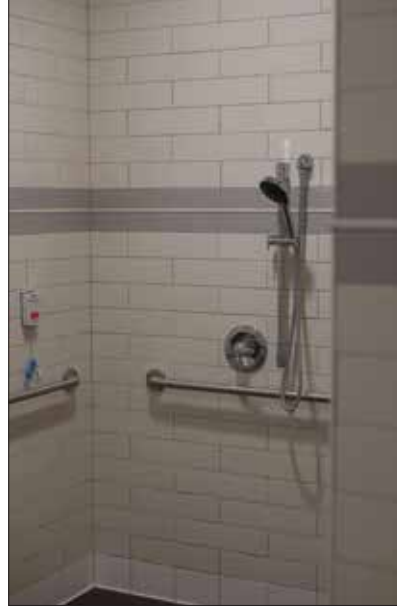
With Reckner's help, Williamson went back to school, where he earned his bachelor's degree in Healthcare Administration from Saint Leo University in 2002. During his time working at SVNC, Williamson held positions from the ground floor to where he is today, working hands-on with patients as an LPN along the way, before briefly working as a registered nurse, until he moved up to the position of Director of Nursing and finally reached the position of Nursing Home Administrator.

When Williamson reflects on his career, his love for SVNC residents shines through, as he declares his most enjoyable time was when he was able to be hands-on with the residents and on the floor with the other nurses, enjoying the family atmosphere set by, not only the faculty, but the residents as well.

Williamson also enjoyed his time as the Director of Nursing. Although he wasn't able to be as hands-on as he once was, he



*Nursing Home Administrator
Danny Williamson*



took pride in knowing he would be able to reach more residents in a broader spectrum and trusted the nurses would continue to show the same compassion and care he once showed while on the floor. Williamson does not shy away from what he has learned over the years. He has grown to be grateful for those before him, as well as those he works with today. Upon becoming the Nursing Home Administrator, Williamson has embraced the challenges set before him each day, as he must deal with present and unforeseen challenges on a daily basis. When he speaks of his residents, Williamson has a smile that comes over him, as he is honored in ensuring his residents are getting the best care available, from top to bottom. From the bedsheets his residents sleep on to the meals prepared by the team, Williamson oversees each SVNC resident with conviction and compassion.

He is equally as excited and grateful for the consistency the staff at SVNC has displayed over the years. As he names a few employees that are the epitome of what the nursing center promotes, he points out there are many among the team who have

been with SVNC for 20 to 40 years, working hard to ensure the residents are taken care of. When talking to Williamson about the comfort level his team provides for the residents, he says he is also proud of how his team was able to completely shelter their residents from the Coronavirus outbreak, a task which was proven to be difficult around the world. Williamson is deeply grateful to his team and proud to say they have had zero positive COVID tests from their residents, again showing how dedicated and meticulous his team is when it comes to the level of care for their residents.

Williamson was eager to take *The Front Porch* on a tour of SVNC's newest project involving their wing expansion and new enclosed courtyard. Six to seven years ago, Williamson admits they did not have enough private rooms for the residents. This, he said, is when the expansion plan began. The nursing center started with a charge to raise money to help facilitate the building expansion project. This took only between five and six years before they were able to move on to 18 months of planning. Then, on Jan. 4, 2019, the center was able to break

ground on their expansion plan.

As the project has slowly come to life and continues to take form, Williamson is excited about what makes this new wing special to Hamilton County and the residents of SVNC. As he took us through the new wing, he pointed out the chair rail has been locally crafted. The new residence room number plates are inspired by the Victorian era and the visiting area has been laid out with a glassed fireplace encased by stone, with a wood floor facing the courtyard, allowing sunlight to shine through and illuminate the sitting room. The new wing will allow for an additional 17 rooms, 14 semi rooms and three private suites. The current rooms will all become private rooms, allowing for a total of 30 private rooms, five of which are private suites which include their own bathrooms. With the new wing comes the inclusion of two oversized showers to allow those who need assistance the luxury of comfort.

The courtyard has been created and designed to allow residents to go outside unassisted so they can feel the sun or watch the birds on their own, allowing them



independence, while still being protected by the nursing center.

When designing the remodeling efforts of SVNC, Williamson and his team have come up with a very unique way to bring Hamilton County to the residents. Even the residents that are not from Hamilton County, but are from the surrounding areas, will have a sense of familiarity as SVNC will have pictures which have been taken of the years and history of Hamilton County. Even the wings are being renamed after the different areas of Hamilton County, such as Jasper, White Springs and Jennings. This, Williamson said, is just a way to pay homage to Hamilton County and its residents for their support over the years in helping to maintain the best care for their loved ones.

While skilled nursing is a very expensive level of care, that hasn't stopped SVNC from providing the best level of care possible. As Medicaid and Medicare have changed their ways of dispersing payments for residents over the years, SVNC has steadily ensured their residents do not have to take on those types of worries and continues to provide a personable, familiar, hands-on type of care.

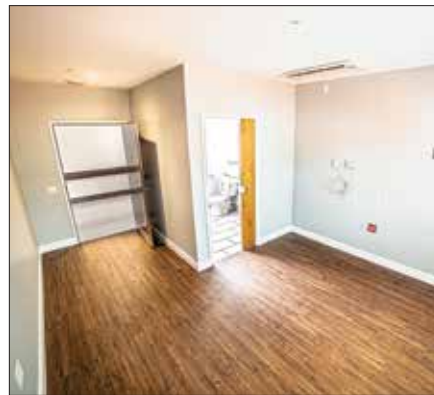
SVNC takes pride in the ability to look ahead and addressing certain encounters or situations that may arise, along with



Nursing Director Rachel Rogers pictured outside in the sitting area.

pride in the community and how invested and interested they have remained over the years. One example comes after a recent hurricane crisis, which put everyone in the nursing home community throughout Florida in a panic. This hurricane caused deaths in south Florida that could have been prevented if they had not lost power. Because of this, the government stepped in and made it a law that all nursing homes must have a generator on the premises in case of emergencies. This new law caused worry, panic and unexpected lack of funding for most nursing homes. However, SVNC has had a generator on the premises for several years before the crisis, making sure their residents did not have to worry about a lack of power. Now, they have included a second generator that will not just run a large room, or even the entire facility for a short while, but SVNC can be entirely self-sufficient for up to seven days at full operational status.

Williamson and his team don't just read the SVNC mission statement, which is, "At Suwannee Valley Nursing Center, we strive to treat our residents, their families and our staff with the highest level of dignity and respect by promoting an environment of continuous improvement and service to excellence," they live it every day. ■





Fueled by compassion for families:

Talented Jasper teen finds his niche at funeral home

Story by Concepcion Ledezma
Staff Writer

Photography by Shane Mathews

Most teenagers aren't exactly dying -- pardon the pun -- to be employed at a funeral home.

However, 17-year-old Jonquay Andrews seems to savor every moment he is there.

His grandmother and co-guardian, Ada Dean Curry, summed it all up: "Ever since he was four, he'd rather be at the funeral home than at home."

In the decade or so he's been associated with Eric A. Brown & Son Funeral Home in Jasper, Andrews' fervor for the funeral business has not diminished. He was employed there from age 14, he said.

"Yes, my grandmother is right about me always wanting to be at the funeral home," the Hamilton County High School 11th-grader said. "I've always been fascinated by how things work,



and the work that's involved with dead bodies. "Besides, I learn a lot at the funeral job," he said. "If I stayed home, I'd be doing nothing."

Andrews, who has gained notoriety at the school for his unconventional occupation, admits he's gotten used to getting the expected reactions from his peers.

"Some would say, 'Eww. . . that's disgusting'... stuff like that," Andrews said. "But I just tell them that there's nothing to it. To me, it's a passion."

Among his duties at Brown & Son are dressing the bodies, helping move the casket, taking phone calls, and greeting mourners. His relationship with his boss and mentor, Eric Brown, is more than just one between employer and employee.

"He's been like a father to me," Andrews said. "I learned a lot from him, and not just about funeral business."

Their connection started even before Andrews

started attending elementary school.

"My heart went out to him around the time he lost his mother (Breanna Curry, about a decade ago)," Brown said. "I have a son (Eric, Jr.) the same age he is, so he could come over to our house (in Valdosta) to stay with us. They were brought up like brothers."

As Andrews grew into the business, Brown frequently would give him guidance beyond the workplace.

In fact, Brown has assumed the father-figure role with the limited contact Andrew has with his biological father; he often preaches to his protégé about how important it is to conduct yourself respectably even outside the walls of the funeral home.

"Oh, that's very important," Brown said. "You have to have a certain dignity, a certain characteristic and standards. When you're dealing with the community, you're in the public eyesight. The most important thing for him to have is his relationship with Christ and with the church."

His own son, Eric, Jr., is also an employee/trainee in the business, but "he's more into the music part of it, but he does plan to earn his license to run a funeral home," Brown said.

Incidentally, Andrews also has musical gifts; he plays the drum and bass guitar. After high school, he plans to study mortuary art in Jacksonville.

His funeral prowess for a young man came with a small price. His talent also includes athletics, mostly football and basketball, sports he's been playing since recreational league. By all accounts, he developed respectable skills as a defensive end and guard at Hamilton County High before giving them up last year. He has said he may leave the door open to play football his senior year this fall.

At work, he has become a sort of jack of all trades.

"He does all aspects of the job very well," Brown said. "He's grown to be very dependable. Whatever that's needed to be done, I can count on him to do it."

The 49-year-old Brown, a Valdosta native and resident, has climbed through the ranks in the business. He mastered the trade under Charles T. Hall, at Ivey Funeral Home in Live Oak, during his stint there from 1995-2007. During that time, he also became more acquainted with the clientele in Jasper.

Brown, who went on to launch his funeral home, located at 1221 SW 3rd St. in Jasper, says that Andrew has the same go-getter spirit that he had as a youngster.

"When I was around the 6th grade, I started washing the cars, sweeping and doing little chores," Brown recalled of his time at Ralph Harrington Funeral Home as a pre-teen in Valdosta.

While going to the funeral home has become a part of Andrew's everyday life, work isn't always a routine.



He acknowledges that while there are deaths that are expected -- for instance, as a result of terminal illness and/or elderly -- there are occasional deaths that affect him emotionally.

One such instance was the recent murder of 39-year-old Jasper resident Christopher Rayford, Jr., who was the victim of gunshot wounds on Feb. 29. Andrews was among the workers on duty during the funeral proceedings at the Friendship burial site, in rural Jasper.

"I was feeling sad," he admitted. "I kept thinking about how I would see him at his mother's house. They only lived a few houses away. I remember him being a nice guy, so it affected me, too."

More recently, Andrews had to face the death of his 61-year-old church pastor, Ronnie Paul of New Bethel Baptist Church, in Jasper. Brown & Son handled the proceedings on Saturday, April 10.

"You have to realize that we're still human," said Brown as he points to a picture on the wall of his late aunt Josephine Randolph, who died in 2019. "This lady here, this is really my aunt, my mom's oldest sister.

"She raised me along with her children," Brown continued, "so even though we do this, we are humans, too. It's a grieving process that you still go through... with (my aunt), I just had to sit back and let the staff do the work because it's so emotional. We're still dealing with that."

The work itself can be therapeutic, Andrews said.

"I look at it like this, I have a job to do," the teen said. "I think having to concentrate on doing my job helps me cope with something like this."

While Andrew has grown in all aspects of the job, he has earned enough of his boss's trust to be asked to travel to Atlanta in early March to help transport a body back to Jasper. It was the first time in his life he had been to the capital of Georgia.

"It was a great experience," Andrews said, "but at the same time I was shocked to see how some bodies at funeral homes were hanging off stretchers; they don't take care (dress) the bodies the way they do (at Brown & Son). It was a big difference between the way the city folks take care of the body and the way the country folks do it. It made me realize we do right with the people here."

Brown even took him to tour Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Service in Stonecrest, where Brown earned his degree in the field.

"We went to the elite funeral homes there, and took him to the funeral home that handled the funeral (MLK's widow) Coretta Scott King. I wanted for him to learn that the job was more than putting on a shirt and tie, that it's a business that requires a lot of work, mentally and physically."

So far, Andrews has shown he's up for the challenge. ■



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**JUNE
11**

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Bed Race | 6:30 pm

**JUNE
18**

Vendor Village | 4 - 9 pm
Kids Show | 7 pm
Street Dance | 7 - 9 pm

**JUNE
19**

Kiwanis 5K Run & Walk 8:15 am	Platform Events 11 am
Vendor Village 9 am - 4 pm	Kids Show 11:30 am
Antique Car Show 11 am	Watermelon Games 1:30 pm
Watermelon Parade 10 am	

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A man wearing a white cowboy hat, a red long-sleeved shirt, and blue jeans is riding a white horse. He is holding a yellow flag with the word "Wrangler" printed on it in his right hand. The horse is wearing a brown leather harness. They are in a fenced area with a metal fence in the foreground and a grassy field in the background.

Wrangler

*Photo courtesy of Daira Gamble
Pepe Tomeau Flag man*



LAST REAL HEROES

Story by Lee Trawick
Staff Writer

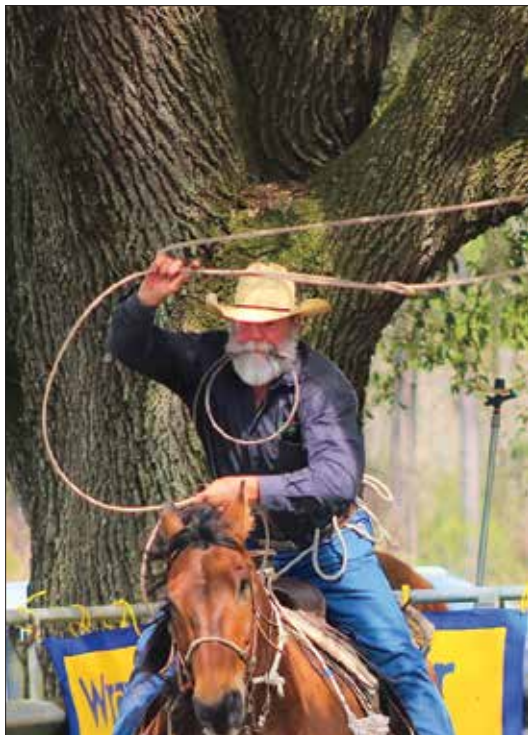
Tucked away on a small farm in Lafayette County, is a place where the last real heroes gather. They don't wear capes and they prefer to remain nameless. They come together to fellowship with each other and celebrate life with one another. These gentlemen have learned over time life is precious, as well as those in it. They say laughter is the best medicine, well these gentlemen, along with their families, have proved that statement to be true. They have proven age is just a number; nothing from their past can hold them down. From multiple knee and back surgeries to open-heart surgeries, they are the last bulletproof giants you will see in your time.

They are fathers, grandfathers and husbands, but to those watching them, they are heroes; not because of what they have accomplished in their life, but how they did it. They are not all millionaires. They are not on billboards, they have not won The Masters and they have never won a Super Bowl. But, what they have done is traveled millions of miles, made a lifetime of memories, gathered a hundred scars and a hundred more regrets. They've been vulnerable at times and they've been knocked down a few times. But, to their loved ones, the most important thing they have done is to have been there when it mattered most. They are heroes because they walked tall when you couldn't, they were the anchor in the storms, they were the hands-on your back when you couldn't go on. They were the light at life's darkest point. Then, when the storm settled or the darkness faded, they just tipped their hats and went on their way. There was no way to thank them when looking back, you were just in awe by the way they walked taller than most.

These men may walk a little slower today, due to the miles they've traveled or the scars you'll never know about. They may walk a little slumped over, but that's only because they have carried the weight of the world on their shoulders. It may take them a little longer to get where they are going, but that's only because they know it's not about where you're going, but the journey you take to get there and those who join them along the way. One thing is for sure, don't tell them they have scars, don't tell them they walk a little slower and especially don't tell them as they mount their horses. They put it all on the line each time they ride into the arena. They are still looking for that perfect run. It may not come as fast as it used to, but perfection is perfection. They still have a feel for their horses, they have enough rhythm to stay in sync with their horses; stride to time their throws and are still in good enough shape to run down the line and flank a calf and tie him up. Don't tell them anything, just tip your hat in return and hope one day you can be the man they have been their whole lives.

The Southern Seniors Roping Association 50 years of age and older, was formed several years ago by a host of men, including Dave Beardon, Jim Parker, Marty Trawick and others. It all began at Dave Beardon's roping arena before making its way to Trawick Farms, home of Marty Trawick, just a few years ago. While everyone is involved, it's tough to point out one name that runs everything. Maybe that's what makes part of this special, to see everyone come together for the simple





reason of fellowship.

There is no glory to be had and there's no fame at the end, just a handshake and congratulations from everyone. No one leaves disappointed, or upset, everyone pulls for one another as if they were on that fastest time. Although there is a little money on the table at each roping and buckles to be won at the season finals, no one is competing against one another, but rather against themselves. Everyone wants to win, but not because someone else messed up, but instead because they achieved that perfect run.

The rules of the day are simple, the calf runs out of the shoot, the calf roper must give the calf enough of a head start before chasing after him. There is a string pulled in front of the horse and attached to the calf, to ensure the calf gets an equal head start for each roper. This string is called a barrier, if the horse breaks the barrier before the calf pulls it, there is a time penalty added onto the roper's total time. Each roper is scored by their time. The time it takes for the calf to leave the shoot until the roper can chase and rope the calf, then get off their horse run to the end of the rope where the calf is and flank the calf, allowing them to tie the calves feet together before throwing their hands in the air and stopping the time. The fastest time over three rounds wins, along with the single fastest time wins.

Events take place every other Saturday, beginning at noon, as the trucks begin to file in one by one hauling their best horses, in hopes of just having fun. These men come from all walks of life, from Cuba to a little boy from Mathews, Ala. From school teachers to welders, to the guy who grew up on his daddy's farm who got to live out his dream, from a hobby in his barn making saddles. While they all come from different backgrounds, one thing rings true for all: they are the last heroes in more ways than one. They are the last of a dying breed, the last real-life cowboys. ■



Jim Glaser Sculpts Wooden Wonders

Story and Photography by Mickey Starling

Staff Writer

Northome, Minn. native, Jim Glaser, has been soaking up the peaceful serenity of Madison County since 2009. Glaser and his wife, Wanda Violet, are well known for promoting storytelling events in Madison. However, Jim's words aren't his only vehicle for creating art.

As a child, Glaser was fascinated with the intricate details involved in his father's work in tool dye manufacturing. "His attention to detail was inspiring to me," remembers Glaser. Years later, he found one of his initial inspirations for woodworking in a most unusual place. Glaser had enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and was serving in Vietnam when he dove into a bunker to escape enemy fire. In the midst of this turmoil, Glaser looked up and noticed a scarf joint in the 12 x 12 beam, with two

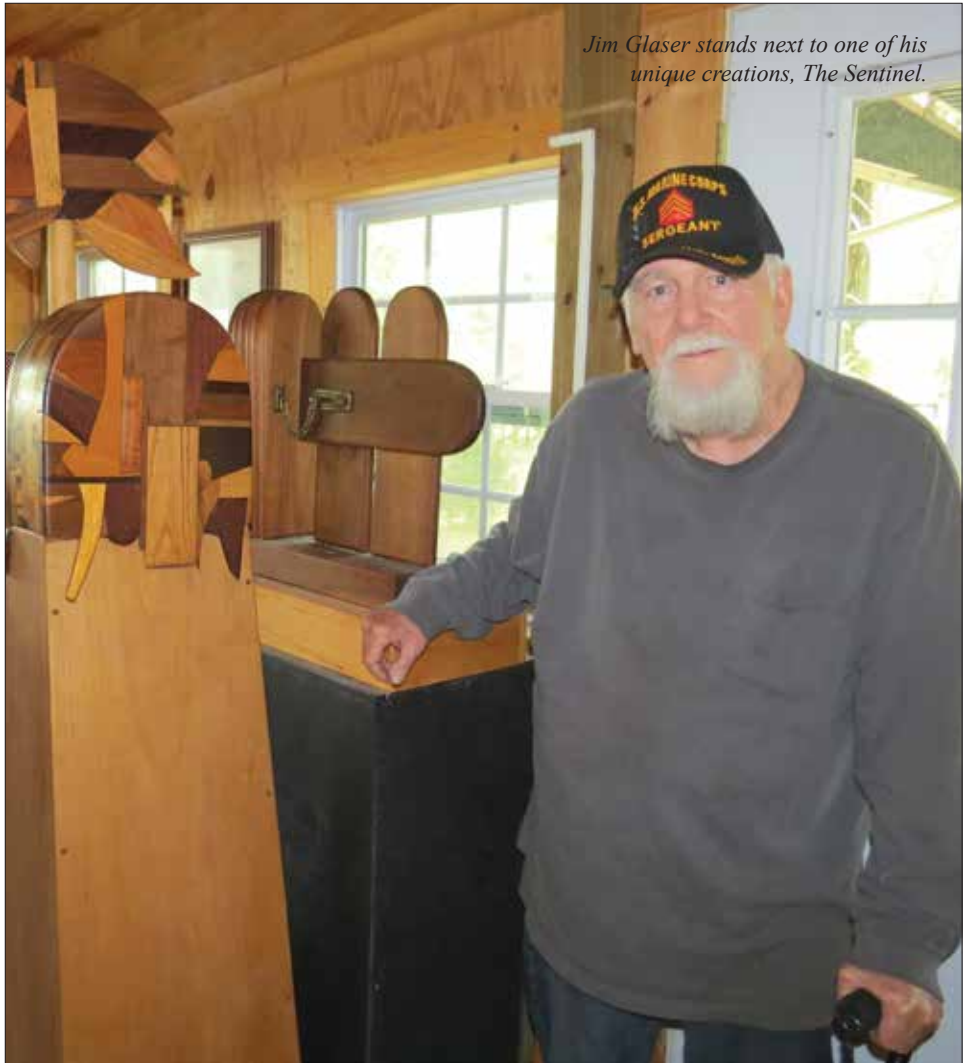
dowels through it that helped stabilize the bunker. "The craftsmanship got my attention," said Glaser.

After leaving the Marines, Glaser attended college at the University of Minnesota, where he heard an inspiring speech from a World War II veteran who was now an artist. "I was a demolition specialist, but I want to create rather than destroy," said the veteran. Those words resonated with Glaser, who would later graduate from Arizona State University (ASU) with a degree in architectural space design. While at ASU, he was shown much-appreciated favor by two professors in the art department. They allowed Glaser to have keys to the art lab so that he could work whenever he desired. Though his hard work and attention to detail were certainly assets, it was the ability to observe his professors at work that benefitted him most.

In 1975, Glaser's love of woodworking

and design came together on a project he was given at Grand Mound, a state park in Minnesota. At the time, the area was open to the public and included a visitation center. Glaser was tasked with designing the interior of the center to look like a forest with a beaver's dam. The next year, he took on a project for Farm Credit Services that involved creating a 24-foot long mural of a dump truck and a front-end loader, all done in wood. That project took Glaser a year to complete.

Throughout his lengthy career, Glaser has lent his artistic talents to many projects. He has rebuilt boat houses along Island Lake, in Northern Minnesota and has created countless sculptures and murals. Crafting furniture is another favorite for Glaser, who has employed some unusual, but effective methods for pleasing his customers. Often, he has had customers bring him photos of tables they desired him



Jim Glaser stands next to one of his unique creations, The Sentinel.

to build. Many times, Glaser has declined to build according to the photos, but promised the customer that they could “take it or leave it” when they saw his finished project. “They always took it,” chuckled Glaser, whose creative eye often sees more possibilities than a photograph can convey.

For anyone interested in improving their woodworking skills, Glaser recommends the internet as a great starting point. “There is so much that can be learned from watching YouTube videos,” stated Glaser. “Of course, hands-on learning is always best.”

After 46 years of creative genius, Glaser is still making customers happy with his unique creations. If you would like to view some of Glaser’s work or contact him to build something special for you, visit his website, jamesglaserstudios.com. When it comes to high quality art and furniture unlike anything else, Jim Glaser’s hands may be just what you want on your next project. ■



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Angel Ketring

Taylor County's "Angel of the Beatitudes"

Story by Rick Patrick
Staff Writer

On May 23, 1997, a little girl came into the life of Ward and Emily Ketring. This little girl, given the name "Angel" by her older brother, would go on to live a life that was far too short; but in terms of impact, it was a life that continues to inspire others. Angel entered this world sooner than expected, which carried its own set of difficulties. But even those difficulties would later serve as a source of inspiration. As an eighth grade student, Angel would tell part of her own story in an essay. "I'm Angel Olivia Ketring, also known as AOK," wrote Angel. "I was born in Tallahassee Memorial Hospital. My due date was July 16 (the same day as my cousin). I was born early on May 23, 1997. I was born early because my mom had a tumor on her ovary. At that time, my grandpa was supposed to die anytime and my cousin was struggling from being premature and so was I. None of

us died – my grandpa, my cousin and I. Ever since, my life has been great."

Angel grew up as a fairly typical youngster, with some distinct exceptions. As a child, Angel had an uncanny gift of compassion for others; along with not only an ability to express that compassion and turn it into concrete action, but to be able to call others to do the same. When she was 11-years old, Angel's mom served as the chair for the local March of Dimes campaign in Taylor County. Emily asked her daughter, Angel, to help serve as co-chair. Having been a "premie" and benefitted from the programs of the March of Dimes, Angel enthusiastically agreed to take the role. Raising money for the March of Dimes was nothing new for Angel. At the age of three, she was the local youth ambassador for the March of Dimes. When she was 10, she had sold calendars to raise money for the organization. During a luncheon for the campaign, young Angel spoke to the

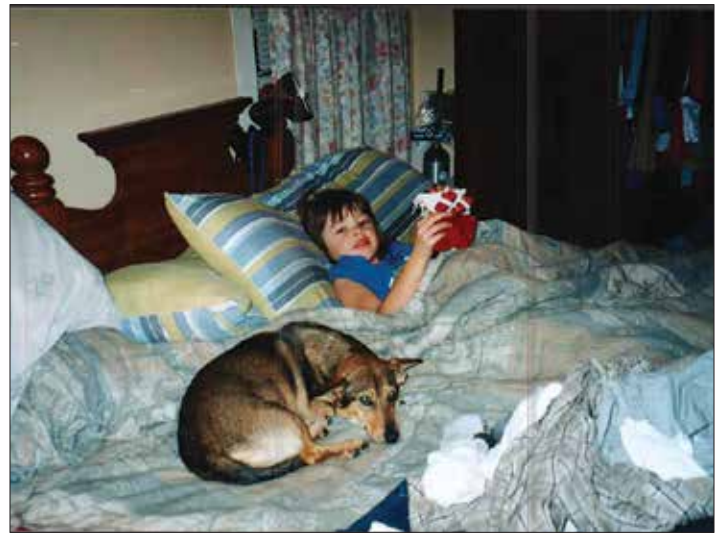
attendees and left them with a challenge, "Think about it this way, you can save a few dimes for yourself, or you can save a life."

Another event happened around the same time that Angel was helping with the March of Dimes. Angel's mom noticed that Angel was wearing the same two or three sets of school clothes every day. Knowing that she had provided Angel with more clothes to wear than that, Angel's mom, Emily, decided to investigate. Upon searching Angel's closet and asking a few pointed questions, Emily discovered that Angel had donated nearly all her school clothes to the Divine Mercy Center, a local clothes and food bank operated by the Catholic church where the Ketring family were members.

Angel's father, Ward, recalled when Angel, who had become involved with the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program at Taylor County High School, in Perry, Fla., went on a trip with



Angel always enjoyed performing with the Taylor County High School Marching Band. [Emily Ketring/Courtesy]



Angel with Flopper the Wonder Dog. [Emily Ketring/Courtesy]

the local JROTC group. "She tore up the dollar menu at McDonalds, helping her fellow JROTC students who didn't have much money for food," said Ward.

There was another instance when Angel led her fifth grade gifted class in school to take action. Angel had seen news reports of the conflict and devastation in Darfour. Angel was especially moved by the impact the war was having on the children of that area. Angel organized relief efforts to help the children of Darfour. When a local television station interviewed her about the project, Angel said, "People are dying over there, and I think we need to do something about it."

Emily recalls another instance that gave a glance into the level of compassion Angel had for others. Angel and a friend of hers were having a "what if" sort of conversation. The question was raised of "What if a robber was robbing your house?" Angel's

friend said he would kill the robber. Angel rebuked her friend, saying he shouldn't kill the robber. Her friend argued that if he didn't kill the robber, the robber would kill him. Angel's reply was that it would be better "if he killed me, because if he kills me, his soul is not ready to die." This was from an eight-year old little girl.

Angel's extraordinary compassion extended to animals as well, especially to the dogs she called her friends. "My dogs are my friends, not owned," Angel would often say. Angel was particularly close to a mixed breed dog named "Flopper," whom Angel insisted was a "wonder-dog." Once, when Angel was very young, she was at the park with Flopper. Despite Angel's repeated warnings, another youngster who was repeatedly aggravating Flopper, was dealt with by a nip from Flopper. This caused



I am a Driven Enthusiastic Young Female

*I am a driven, enthusiastic young female ...
I wonder about the ecstatic road ahead of me.
I hear dedication pushing myself forth.
I see my life in ten years with many mistakes as well as accomplishments.
I want to make a best friend.
I pretend to know what I'm doing.
I feel anxiety beating down like the blistering sun.
I touch ambition to live life to its fullest.
I worry about losing a relationship with my siblings.
I cry when I have fatigue.
I am a driven, enthusiastic young female.
I understand that life may be rough.
I say that I am a Catholic.
I dream about how life will turn out.
I try to present satisfaction to others.
I am a driven, enthusiastic young female.*



problems with City Hall, in Perry. Not to be intimidated by City Hall, young Angel wrote a letter in Flopper's defense. She posed the members of the City Council with a question. "What if your soul was in her body? You would want some respect."

In mid-September of 2012, Angel hopped into a car with a friend to pick up another friend who lived just a few miles away. A short time later, Ward received the call that is every parent's worst nightmare. Angel had been in a serious car crash. Both Ward and Emily rushed to the scene. Fearing that valuable time was being lost, Ward demanded that Angel be transported to the hospital. Angel's sister, Carmina, later said she remembered the medics performing CPR on Angel. In her book, "Angel of the Beatitudes," Emily recalls the scene at the hospital. "Finally, they allowed us to approach her and her head had so many tubes, so I kissed her feet. When I touched her, she was cold, but I still hoped. When doctors approached me, my only question was, 'Is there hope?' One doctor said,



Ward and Emily Ketring at the entrance to Angel's Dog Park, in Perry, Fla.
[Rick Patrick/Greene Publishing, Inc.]

"There is always hope."

Angel was going to have to be transported to the hospital in Tallahassee. Not being able to travel with Angel; Emily, Ward and Carmina set out on the 50-mile trek from Perry to Tallahassee. Emily's older son, John, wanted to stay with Angel "so she would never be without one of us." As they drove to Tallahassee, Emily continuously prayed. "We prayed the entire drive, and I actually remember thinking during the Our Father that I was on dangerous territory. When I stated, "thy will be done," I knew that His will may be my greatest fear realized. I said the prayer anyway, and I even had guilt because I wondered if I should have protested His will. I went with my instinct to surrender. Later, I wondered if that was a mistake. The Holy Spirit led me and the Virgin was beside me in my darkest hour."

After arriving in Tallahassee, the Ketrings received the words none of them ever wanted to hear. Angel did not make it. She was 15-years old.

Today, Ward and Emily do not speak of Angel in the past-tense. They speak of her in the present. Somehow, that seems fitting, because Angel's loving spirit lives on. For many years, the Boys and Girls Club in Perry, where Emily is the administrator, held a food drive in conjunction with Angel's birthday. The Perry City Council decided to open a dog park within the city limits of Perry. There was little hesitation when it came to the name for the park. The council contacted Ward and asked if the park could be named for Angel, and in October of 2013, "Angel's Dog Park" was dedicated. There is a memorial at the entrance of the park that bears a picture of Angel, along

with "Flopper, the Wonder Dog."

When it came time for Angel's confirmation, she chose St. Francis of Assisi to be her patron saint. Looking at Angel's life; a more appropriate choice could not have been made. Angel lived her life as an example of St. Francis' compassion for those less fortunate; both human and animal. "Angel is a very loving person, she was born that way," says Ward.

One definition of the word "beatitude" is "supreme blessedness." That fits Angel well, both for those who were blessed to have known her and for those of us who are blessed to have experienced the example she left for all of us.

Emily's book, "An Angel of the Beatitudes" can be purchased from Amazon. It tells not only Angel's story, but Emily's inspiring story of healing after experiencing such loss. "I published [the book] in hopes of helping another parent through the horrific loss of a child," said Emily.

Emily continues to work as the Director of the Perry/Taylor County Boys and Girls Club. Ward is the manager of the Perry/Foley airport. Ward also serves as a council member of the Perry City Council.

Angel's life can possibly be best summed up in Angel's own words; in a pair of poems she wrote about herself. ■



I am a Loving Hypocrite

*I am a loving hypocrite.
I visualize a future helping those in need.
I hear my patient's broken voices.
I observe their hectic position.
I anticipate to become the best occupational therapist.
I am a loving hypocrite.
I seem like an ambitious runner.
I feel the striking impact on my feet from the dirt road.
I touch the finish line with my stomach as it snaps in my presence.
I disapprove of those who quit.
I weep when I do not break my personal record.
I am a loving hypocrite.
I understand that life comes with unpleasant difficulties.
I represent being pro-life.
I demonstrate happiness through life's dips.
I challenge to be well rounded.
I hope to better my generation.
I am a loving hypocrite.*



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Monticello Mountain Man:

Living a life of adventure



Story by Rick Patrick

Staff Writer

"Who knows what Romance, what Adventure, what Love, is lurking around the next turn of the road, ready to leap out on us if we'll only travel that far?" - Jack London

When Travis Sander, formerly of Monticello, Fla., saw the 1972 Robert Redford movie, "Jeremiah Johnson," as a kid, the movie planted a dream in his mind and in his heart. That was to one day leave the "easy" life of North Florida behind and embark on a life of adventure, living in the "bush."

When Sander's daughter finished high school, he sold his belongings, packed up and moved from North Florida to the wilds of Alaska. That was in May of 2019. Now, Sander lives in a camper trailer about 20 miles from the small town of Talkeetna. Talkeetna, nestled in the shadow of Mt. Denali (sometimes called Mt. McKinley, it is the highest peak in North America) and about 120 road miles northeast of Anchorage, Alaska, sits near the confluence of three rivers, the Susitna, the Chulitna and the Talkeetna. The town has an estimated population of 965 and boasts of having one store and one post office.

Much like the title character in the movie that inspired Sander, he had to learn hard lessons about living in often very harsh conditions. "During that first year, I made just about every mistake you can make," said Sander. "I had hypothermia, got trampled by a moose when I got caught between a mother and her calves, and then there was the time I had two feet of water in my camper when the river flooded."

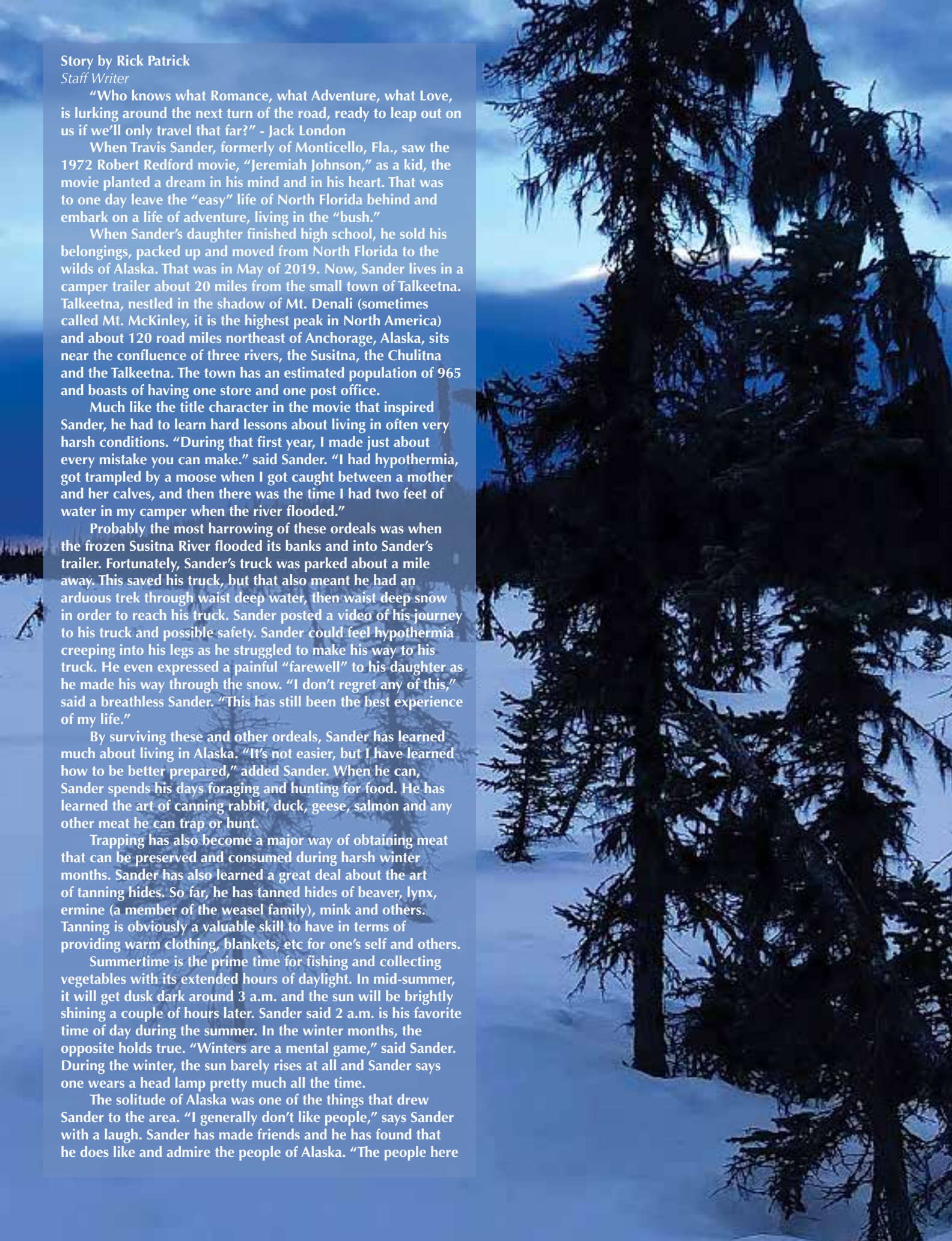
Probably the most harrowing of these ordeals was when the frozen Susitna River flooded its banks and into Sander's trailer. Fortunately, Sander's truck was parked about a mile away. This saved his truck, but that also meant he had an arduous trek through waist deep water, then waist deep snow in order to reach his truck. Sander posted a video of his journey to his truck and possible safety. Sander could feel hypothermia creeping into his legs as he struggled to make his way to his truck. He even expressed a painful "farewell" to his daughter as he made his way through the snow. "I don't regret any of this," said a breathless Sander. "This has still been the best experience of my life."

By surviving these and other ordeals, Sander has learned much about living in Alaska. "It's not easier, but I have learned how to be better prepared," added Sander. When he can, Sander spends his days foraging and hunting for food. He has learned the art of canning rabbit, duck, geese, salmon and any other meat he can trap or hunt.

Trapping has also become a major way of obtaining meat that can be preserved and consumed during harsh winter months. Sander has also learned a great deal about the art of tanning hides. So far, he has tanned hides of beaver, lynx, ermine (a member of the weasel family), mink and others. Tanning is obviously a valuable skill to have in terms of providing warm clothing, blankets, etc for one's self and others.

Summertime is the prime time for fishing and collecting vegetables with its extended hours of daylight. In mid-summer, it will get dusk dark around 3 a.m. and the sun will be brightly shining a couple of hours later. Sander said 2 a.m. is his favorite time of day during the summer. In the winter months, the opposite holds true. "Winters are a mental game," said Sander. During the winter, the sun barely rises at all and Sander says one wears a head lamp pretty much all the time.

The solitude of Alaska was one of the things that drew Sander to the area. "I generally don't like people," says Sander with a laugh. Sander has made friends and he has found that he does like and admire the people of Alaska. "The people here







are tough people. They are not judgmental at all. All that matters to them is, 'Can you hunt, fish or trap?'" Sander is not completely alone in his adventures. He moved to Alaska with his dog, "Whiskey" and a cat named "Miss Kitty." Unfortunately, he lost "Whiskey" in an accident, so for a while it was Sander and "Miss Kitty." Now, Sander has a new companion to keep him and "Miss Kitty" company; a retired, 10-year-old sled dog named "Sissy." Sissy has turned out to be a nice addition to the household. "It's been about a year and a half since I lost "Whiskey," said Sander. "It's not impossible to survive up here without [companion] animals, but it is harder without them. I have Miss Kitty, but that's not the same. I can't take her outside. It's been great having Sissy. I've spent time with her and I knew she was about to retire and I thought about adopting her, but I wanted her to choose me. I'm glad she did."

Dog sled racing is a huge sport in

Alaska. Many people are familiar with the most famous dog sled race, the 1,100 mile-long Iditarod race, which is held each March from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska. However, there are many other races held throughout the state. Sander's new companion, Sissy, has competed in numerous races, including the Goose Bay 150, the Chugiak 20 and the Willow 300.

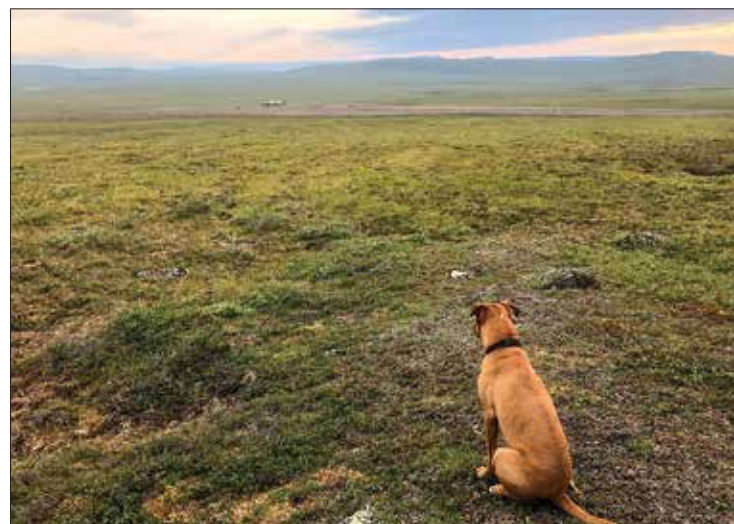
Sander plans to work toward providing guide service in the near future. He also has set a goal for himself to build a one-room log cabin for himself, Miss Kitty and now, Sissy.

Sander is a native of Monticello, Fla. He graduated from Aucilla Christian Academy as a member of the Class of '93. He attended North Florida Community College and Florida State University, where he studied recreational and leisure administration. He is the son of Alice Sander of Monticello. His daughter, India, is at the University of Florida studying wildlife

conservation and ecology.

There is an old adage that says "Whatever does not kill you, makes you stronger." Alaska has yet to claim the life of Sander, and it has certainly made him stronger. "This is what I've always wanted to do with my life," says Sander. Ever since I was 10-years old and saw 'Jeremiah Johnson' for the first time, I've wanted to be a mountain man. I won't say I'm a mountain man yet, but I am definitely living my dream. This is what I would tell anyone, 'If you have a dream, just go for it!'"

You can follow Sander's Alaska adventures by subscribing to his YouTube channel, "Surviving Alaska with Whisky and Miss Kitty." ■





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Photo courtesy of Serenity Castanon- Castanon says her favorite design is her cow heads, as she enjoys being able to design a cow however she imagines. Her favorite scent right now, she says, is honeysuckle.

Aromatic entrepreneur

Story by Danny Federico

Staff Writer

Photography by Danny Federico and Serenity Castanon

Meet Serenity Castanon, the founder and owner of Serenity's Scents. Only 10-years-old, this native of O'Brien, Fla., makes her own car fresheners which she calls "Freshies."

Unlike most kids these days, Castanon started her business in the summer of 2020,

stating, "I was tired of spending my time on my phone and other electronics and I wanted to be more productive." She said she wanted to start her own business, so she threw some ideas around with her mom and dad. "Then, my Freshie business was created!"

Although she didn't want to give away all of her secrets, Castanon revealed she learned to make car fresheners from the video platforms, TikTok and YouTube. "I'm

not giving all of my secrets out, but they are made from a certain type of beads, coloring powder and fragrance oil," she said.

Castanon says her Freshies take around a week to make; the beads she uses come unscented, so she has to let them cure in a scent for seven days before using them, or else they won't hold their scent. After that, they're off to the oven to bake and set! She sells regular Freshies for \$8 each, which could be a pre-made air freshener or



Castanon offers a wide variety of design shapes, allowing the opportunity for multiple mix-and-match custom orders.

she can fill custom orders with any desired design and scent. Custom orders can range from \$8 to \$10, depending on what the order requires.

In addition, Castanon also sells Oopsies, which she says are “pretty much an oops item. At times, when making custom freshies, I would have some scents left over, but not enough to use for another Freshie. So, I threw all the multiple scents into a jar, mixed them up, and Oopsies were created!” These unique Freshies are available for \$3. Bulk orders of 20 or more also receive a discount.

Castanon currently offers four scents, including: honeysuckle, piña colada, magnolia and fierce, which has a “manly scent.” She also offers a wide variety of



design shapes, allowing the opportunity for multiple mix-and-match custom orders. These designs include: a pumpkin; a cow head; a rooster; a sunflower; a unicorn; a dog bone; a dog paw print; a cross; a football; a cheer megaphone; a jersey; a scrub top; a llama; a sea turtle; a flag; an apple; a pencil and the shape of Florida.

“Honeysuckle is my favorite [scent] right now,” Castanon said. “[My favorite] design is probably my cows. I love getting creative and being able to design a cow however I imagine.”

Although it’s small at this time, Castanon says she wants her Freshie business to grow as much as possible.

“Summertime is when I can truly focus on building it more since there’s no school,” she said. During this time, she’ll have the opportunity to work on some of the projects she’s been coming up with, such as a special kind of unscented Freshie for those with allergies.

She’s also actively attempting to work with wax melts. Castanon says she’s still in the trial stage for this product, but it’s something she’s “super excited” about. “It’s a lot harder than I expected,” she said. In February, Castanon advertised on her Facebook page this new product, with which she requested five people to try and provide their honest feedback. “I’m still trying to perfect a few things with the design, but the reviews say that the scent lasts a long time, which makes me excited to hear! Once I finally get them perfected, I will be selling them as well.”

Along with being a young entrepreneur, Castanon says she loves to draw and is a huge fan of Harry Potter and anime. As for her earnings, Castanon says she saves some of the money she earns to throw back into her business and when she buys something, it’s usually gifts for her friends and family.

“I truly want to say ‘thank you’ to every single customer I’ve had,” Castanon said. “When I started this, I never expected for it to grow and continue to do so! They’re all amazing and helped me see that I can achieve anything I set my mind to. Thank you for that and for believing in my 10-year-old self.”

Visit Castanon’s Facebook page, “Serenity’s Scents,” to view her many Freshie options. To place an order, comment on a pre-made Freshie or send a private message for a custom order. ■



Castanon says her Freshies take around a week to make; the beads she uses come unscented, so she has to let them cure in a scent for seven days before using them, or else they won’t hold their scent. After that, they’re off to the oven to bake and set!



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Jefferson Farmers Market

Story by Merry Ann Frisby
Contributor

Photography by Emerald Greene Parsons

Walking into the Jefferson Farmers Market, you are met with a glorious display of colors, textures and smells. Brilliant red tomatoes, waxy and dusky looking poblano peppers lure the vegetable shopper. Sun on net bags of Vidalia onions sends the lovely pungent smell airborne.

The Jefferson Farmers Market is a Monticello attraction and centerpiece. Founder Edward Strickland has sold food here in the same spot for almost thirty-one years. Strickland began by selling local pecans to markets in south Florida. He “noticed that there were vegetable markets in each community.” Strickland had also worked in the nursery business, so a local market was something he felt like he could do. Strickland added, “besides my wife told me I needed to stay home.”

Strickland purchases local and regional vegetables and fruits. He follows the seasons from south to north when buying the various kinds of produce. Strickland buys his produce from South Florida all the way north to Tennessee. Watermelons are beginning to be available in South Florida and will be in the market soon. The Vidalia onions are starting to come in, also.

Strickland operates out of a converted gas station. He started small, and the business has grown piece by piece. Now, The Jefferson Farmers Market also sells meats and sausages from local butchers, bedding plants, herbs and firewood in season. Strickland says he just keeps his eyes



open for products that local people may want.

The Jefferson Farmers Market has grown larger than just our local shoppers. Strickland says that he has a number of shoppers that drive from both Madison and Leon counties for his products. People will drive an hour out of their way to shop at the market. It is not unusual to see all the parking spaces full.

Edward Strickland is not the only family member to work at the Market. His son, Sam Strickland, is there hauling boxes, manning the register and chatting with the almost steady stream of customers. Sam adds "Tomatoes are always a best seller and during the summer, local farmers bring in their crops, too; we sell peas quicker than we can shell them." Managing sales of perishable goods is constant work.

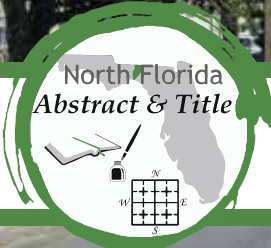
Sam was a forest firefighter but joined the business. "I was gone too much. I wanted to see my kids every night. It's a lot of work, but now it's a family business." Sam is certain that the business will continue to thrive because "people got to eat." When asked if Sam was planning to continue running The Jefferson Farmers Market, he said he was there until his father decided to retire. Grinning, he said, "I'm going to run him slam out of a job."

Come sample the delights of local produce. Visit The Jefferson Farmers Market at 690 East Washington St., Monticello. ■





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Leased around late 1985 by Bob and Jean Cornett, these Lexington, Ky. founders of the Festival of the Bluegrass in Lexington wanted to build a place where music, specifically bluegrass, could be heard all year. With hard labor by them and many friends who camped at the sight off and on for years to help build this wonderful

Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park is one of the most loved festival, music and camping parks in the world...just next door on the Suwannee River.

The internationally celebrated Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park, located on the banks of the famous Suwannee River in Suwannee County, Florida, is a jewel discovered by thousands over the years. It's time for you to discover this magical, wonderful place where music lives and is among the happiest places anywhere!

campground and music park, it soon became known all over America. Now, it's known all over the world!

Today, what was once thick woodlands

along the Suwannee, with a few camping sites, is this mystical, magical, happy place loved by thousands upon thousands (more likely millions!).

Owned and actively running this camping and music park on this beautiful 800 acres is the Cornetts' son, James Cornett. A man of many talents, James knows practically every who's who in the music world of many genres of music. He hosts multiple festivals every year, except in 2020, when with no warning, a monster called Covid-19 raised its ugly head and silenced live music internationally. Many prayers later, it appears the pandemic caused by this monster hopefully will be gone soon. At the music park, music is already returning with social distancing!

James Cornett did not let Covid-19 take away his desire to make his campers, cabin owners, daily visitors and festival promoters happy with music and fun at this great destination.

The Music Park is once again open,



the SOS Café is open, and its awesome new screened in porch is usually filled with campers and visitors each Friday and Saturday evening. These guests not only enjoy great food on the porch, but enjoy tremendously talented artists who love to visit the porch and entertain. Every type of music from country to bluegrass, gospel and on and on is offered by these artists from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Friday and Saturday night. Soon, the legendary Music Hall behind the SOS Café will re-open, where the best of the best bands from all over Florida and Georgia come to play on Friday and Saturday night, from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. Music fans fill this Music Hall, enjoy great food and dance the night away or just visit with friends they make there.

General Manager Teena Peavey says the Music Hall will soon re-open, where on Thursday nights, Ted “Teddy Mac” McMullen, a celebrated Elvis Tribute artist originally from Madison County, then the Jacksonville area and now Live Oak,

oversees karaoke for a large crowd of music lovers and dancers of every age. One of the oldest guests is in his 90s! Peavey says she is looking forward to announcing the return of this very popular karaoke night!

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destination of many, many brides!” Each year, in January, Suwannee Weddings holds a wonderful bridal show with the latest astounding bridal dresses showcased during a live fashion show. Here you will find wedding vendors from food to coffee, limousines, insurance, jewelry, wedding planners, wedding cakes, florists and much more. You may go to www.suwanneeweddings.com or call Carol at (386) 364-1683 or email her at Carol@musicliveshere.com.

Festivals and Other Events This Year

Spirit of the Suwannee members, fans and festival goers are anxious to see what may happen in the fall of 2021. It appears Suwannee Roots Revival, an Americana/bluegrass type music festival, will take place in October. The famed Hulaween, which draws more than 20,000 fans, may take place, but only if guests can attend safely. So if that’s your festival, stay tuned. Fans were devastated in 2020, when Hulaween had to be canceled due to the Covid-19

pandemic. The year 2021 will welcome guests for weekends like July 4; Labor Day; Sept. 3-6; Grandparents' Day, Sept. 10-12, Thanksgiving, Nov. 25; and Old Tyme Farm Days & Swap Meet, Nov. 26-27; as well as Suwannee Lights, which will begin that weekend and run nightly thru the last of December, with Snow Days for the kids to be announced. The annual New Year's Eve party hopefully will go as planned, also. Live music is currently available on the porch every Friday and Saturday. More events will be announced throughout the year, so go to www.musicliveshere.com/calendar often.

Things To Do When You Arrive

Year-round activities include disc golf, traveling the 800 acres on the banks of the magnificent Suwannee River on golf carts available for rent at the Country Store, bird-watching and catching the daily evening flights at one of the largest bat houses in the world, as millions of bats take off to feed on mosquitoes but return later in the evening. There, daily sightings of beautiful birds and wild animals, such as deer, hawks, eagles, bluebirds, redbirds, woodpeckers and more can thrill those who live in cities where wild animals are never seen. It is also a great teaching tool for children to learn to love and respect nature.

If you need supplies, the Country Store

awaits you onsite, with just about anything you could possibly need, including face masks made by the employees during the pandemic.

Treehouse tours are always open, with a guided tour for visitors. Once you've checked in to your RV spot, primitive camping site or your cabin, it's time to relax and rid yourself of distress. This 800 acres of North Florida woodlands has so many golf cart trails, biking and hiking trails and bird watching opportunities, as well as disc golf, fishing and festivals to entertain you. If you are a horse person, this is your destination, as there are rentable horse stables and miles of horse trails on and off The Music Park. You may never want to return home after experiencing this paradise! That's ok, the Music Park sells built-to-taste cabins!

At the Music Park, canoeing is almost a daily outing for many who paddle the southern flowing, tea-colored Suwannee River, made famous by Stephen Foster in his song, "Old Folks at Home," also called The Swannee River, the Florida official song. Stephen C. Foster wrote "The Swannee River (Old Folks at Home)" in 1851, according to myflorida.com. After Foster wrote the song, he sold it to E. P. Christy, a businessman who operated a series of minstrel shows. Foster is reported to have chosen the term "Swannee" because its two-syllable

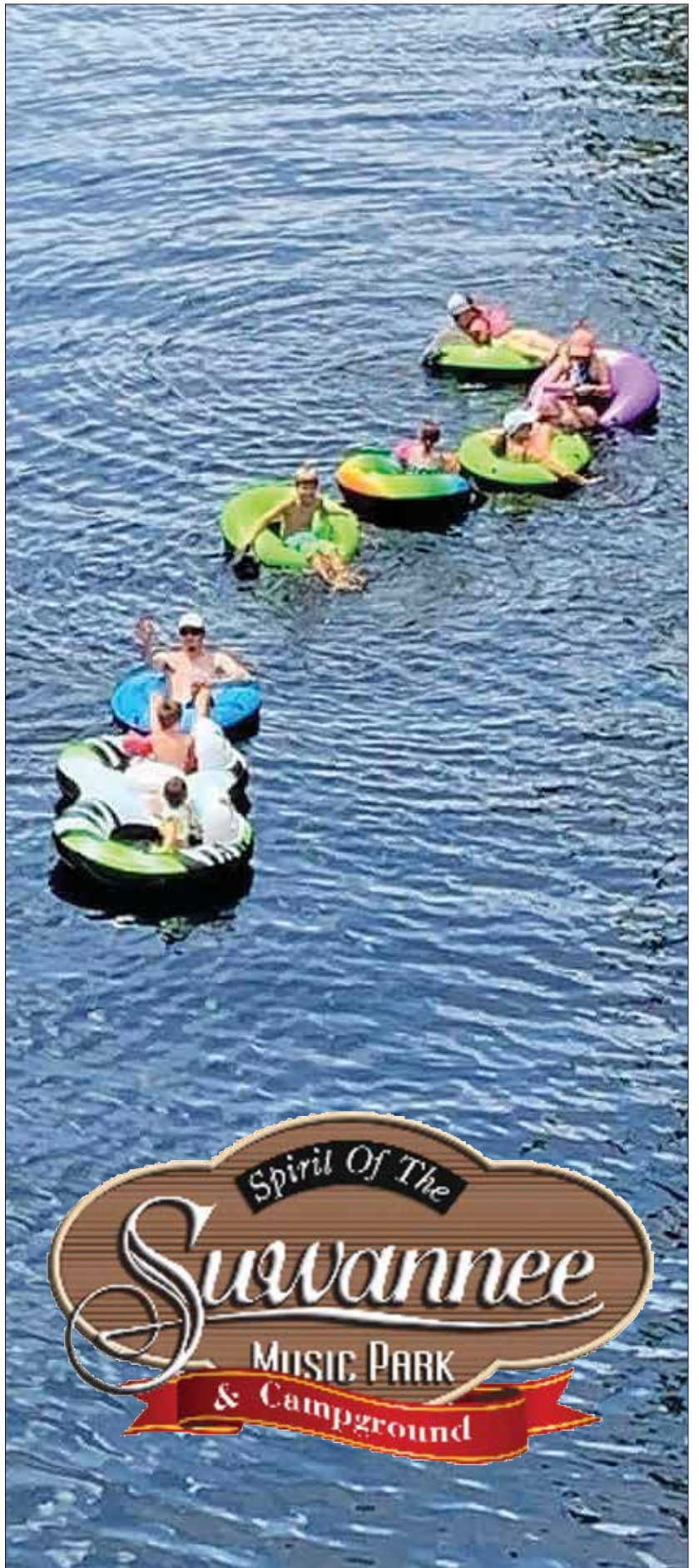
cadence fit nicely into the music he had composed. The composer was not familiar with the Florida section of the Suwannee River, because he never visited the state. A memorial center at White Springs, just a few miles away, honors Foster, who authored about 200 popular songs during his prolific career.

Fisherman, Kayaking and Canoeing Paradise

The Suwannee provides a canoeing and fishing paradise for Music Park guests. The Suwannee Canoe Outpost, located at the boat ramp inside the Music Park, rents canoes and provides pickup at your destination. The Outpost is the original premier canoe outfitter on the Suwannee River and has been at the Music Park since 1993. The location provides customer satisfaction while minimizing shuttle times! Park your RV, camper or rent a cabin at the Music Park, paddle the river and then cook up your catch and eat supper under the stars and beautiful oak and pine trees along the fabled river. What a place!

The Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park is located at 3076 95th Drive, Live Oak, Fla., off US 129 North 4.5 miles north of Interstate 10 and 4.5 miles south of Interstate 75, at the beautiful and famed Suwannee River. To keep up with upcoming events, go to www.musicliveshere.com. They can't wait to see you! ■







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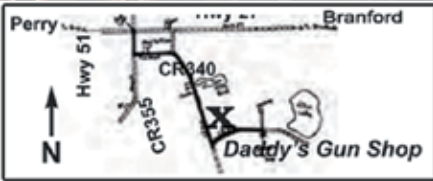
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The Perry Crazy Wheels is one of Marzuq's oldest operating units. Pictured during the 2019 Florida Forest Festival are the members. Standing, from left to right, are: Joe Rodgers, Corey Mathews, Allen Wood, Calvin Cone, Al Miller; Glenn "Tater" Padgett and Beau Rodgers. Kneeling, from left to right, are: John Willoughby and Patrick Whitt. [John Willoughby/Greene Publishing]

THE MYSTIC SHRINE:

A history of the Marzuq and Morocco fez

Story by John Willoughby
Contributor

There's a song famously tuned by the comedic Ray Stevens that directs attention to one of America's greatest phenomenons: shriners, who, at the same time, are among the country's most-dedicated philanthropists.

In nearly every parade across the United States, the fez-wearing men can be seen marching to the beat of a drum or zooming past spectators in a motorized, undersized go-cart. Even in the Big Bend of Florida, shriners make their appearances in the largest marquee events of the area – not only to bring smiles to the faces of many, but to draw awareness to the cause their

founding fathers built: the Shriners Hospital for Children.

Marzuq Shrine of Tallahassee and their sister-center, Morocco Shrine of Jacksonville, have served the needs of children in the area with specialized orthopedic and burn-related needs since before the 1980s, even stretching farther than that. While no exact date can be pinpointed for when the first child was helped by a shriner in the area, there's more than enough history about local shrinedom to know it's been around for generations.

The Tallahassee center is fairly-new – nearly 31-years old, to be exact. What is now the headquarters for Marzuq was once a club belonging to the Jacksonville-

based Morocco Shrine. "Morocco was the mother temple of the southeastern United States," Jim Stanley recalled, who has been a shriner in the area since 1969. "There was no Marzuq Shrine Center then; it was Morocco."

According to their storied history, Morocco was among the first shrine centers in America, when the fez became more prominent in society, and still holds jurisdiction over a majority of the northwestern portion of Florida. From 1888 until the early 1900s, Morocco was the only center in the fraternity for members native to Florida, Alabama and Georgia to join, even when there was no hospital to support.

The Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles



Florida Governor Haydon Burns (left) was a member of Morocco Shrine, even during his term as Governor of Florida. He stands with Morocco Potentate Frank Winchell (left) during a mile-long, 90-minute fun-filled shriners parade in Tallahassee. [State Archives of Florida/Courtesy]

of the Mystic Shrine as it is now formally known, took shape in 1870 when members of New York's Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons decided for an organization promoting fun and fellowship for freemasons. Both Walter Fleming and William J. Florence are dubbed, as the creators of Shriners International, after their first official meeting in 1872.

Word spread rapidly, with clubs and shrine centers popping up all over the country and in neighboring territories, of which Morocco was the 42nd to open their doors. Being known for their philanthropic efforts through the hospital networks, the earliest shriners were even helpful prior to the hospital's creation; namely with Morocco shriners helping the sick during a yellow fever epidemic in the late 1800s.

After a visit to a Scottish Rite hospital (the Scottish Rite organization being a member of Masonic-organization family) by a member the overwhelming need for orthopedic care for children, the nobles of the mystic shrine passed a resolution creating the Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children, now simply known as Shriners Hospital for Children.

Well before the shrinedom's mission came to sight, Morocco's jurisdiction slowly dwindled as the country grasped the idea of fun, fellowship and philanthropy. Two years following Morocco's creation, Yaarab Shrine of Atlanta, was chartered as the 52nd center in North America, covering the entirety of Georgia. Zamora Shrine of Birmingham, Ala., later became chartered in 1891, with all of Alabama under their wing.

Florida as a whole remained under Morocco's title until clubs throughout the

state began claiming their own territory in 1918, starting with Egypt Shrine of Tampa. Robert See, who is now the Vice President of Branford Shrine Club and a former member of the now-defunct Live Oak Shrine Club (both under Morocco's name), remembers his grandfather being a part of the mass exodus from Morocco into their own pieces of shrinedom. See noted that his grandfather, Robert Mims – a railroader between Jacksonville and Miami for the United States Postal Service, was among the first to join Miami's Mahi Shrine in the 1920s.

See, being a member and current vice president of Branford Shrine Club, chartered in 1962, said he's always admired the fez he now dons. He was a member of Live Oak Shrine Club before it folded just years ago, and while he was the only shiner left in the Live Oak Roadsters parade unit, his cart was put back into use by Morocco and now serves as the pace car for the NASCAR-themed parade unit, The Morocco Thunder.

Many centers have developed far and wide, such as Shaddai Shrine, of Panama City Beach, Fla., Bahia Shrine, of Orlando, Fla., and Azan Shrine of Titusville, Fla. Likewise, Marzuq Shrine, was chartered in the summer of 1989, claiming their stake from the capital city.

The Tallahassee Shrine Club had formed as a branch of Morocco in the mid-1940s, but plans began taking shape to bring Marzuq to life in April of 1985. After a meeting between club members Lewis Brantley and Joseph Gillispie, and following past legislation lowering the number of signatures needed to form a center, six counties were released from Morocco to Marzuq in 1988, following letters of support from other centers in the state. Morocco still claims Hamilton and Suwannee counties, though there are no active clubs in the area, other than in Branford. Even Madison's shrine club, chartered in 1947 under Morocco and elected into Marzuq's jurisdiction in 1992, holds 25 Morocco members today.

Small but mighty, Marzuq Shrine of Tallahassee has been home to over 300 Shriners in the North Florida area, including Lafayette, Madison, Taylor, Leon and Wakulla Counties. However, before Marzuq put their name on a fez, it was Morocco Shrine Center of Jacksonville which held down the Big Bend, including the counties currently under their reign: Suwannee and Hamilton Counties.

Marzuq officially received their charter during the 115th Imperial Session in Canada, on July 6, 1989. Gillispie then became Marzuq's first potentate. "It was the only [state] capital in the country that didn't have a shrine temple," said L. Gary

Wright, a Monticello resident who sat down with the Monticello News in 2020. Wright was among many, along with Gillispie and Brantley, within the movement to form Marzuq.

With the issue of signatures needed barring the center from rising, "we argued on the basis of being the only [state] capital in the country that didn't have one, so they granted one to us."

Wright was elected potentate (otherwise known as the district president of the shrine center) in 1991, two years after its founding year, remaining to this day the only Jefferson County noble to serve in such capacity. Madison County is in a similar position, only having the late Tommy Greene, hailing from Madison, to serve as potentate in 2004.

Other potentates for Marzuq have come from the immediate area, including Troy Thompson of Lafayette County (1995), along with Calvin Cone (2018) and Joe Rodgers (2020), both of Taylor County. It is not known if there are past potentates of Morocco, living or deceased, in Hamilton or Suwannee counties.

"One thing about the shriners and masons ... if you think you're a big shot, they are going to bring you down to size,"



Billy Moses, a member of Morocco Shrine, joined Marzuq during the 2018 Down Home Days parade in April of 2018. [Savannah Reams/Greene Publishing, Inc.]

Wright commented. "No one is above anyone else. No matter what your stature may be among the world, among us, no one is above another one, we just have different levels of responsibility."

He continued, "The philanthropic side is what has great appeal to me, and to many other shriners ... there are no requirements from the children in terms of gender, race,



Morocco Potentate James Jones and First Lady Marie Jones. [Morocco Shriners/ Courtesy]

religion or anything in their background. It's my favorite charity." In fact, the help of shriners to families in need has no regard to the families ability to pay.

Marzuq shriners parading is a common sight in the Big Bend area, with an occasional Morocco shriner making an appearance, mostly during the Florida Forest Festival in Perry, which draws a multitude of members from Jacksonville, Albany, Ga.'s Hasan Shrine and Montgomery, Ala.'s Alcazar Shrine.

Amusing the spectators are often the Marzuq Bandits of Wakulla County, the Hillbilly Clan and the Perry Crazy Wheels. "The whole thing about shriners ... everything we do is supposed to be about a big smile," said Wright. "Because the whole idea is kids and to make kids smile, whether they are sick or not."

Today, there are nearly 200 shrine centers across North America, South America, Europe and Southeast Asia. Efforts continue annually to raise money for the nearby Shriners Healthcare for Children clinic in Tampa, as well as Marzuq's and Morocco's transportation fund, assisting patients and their families with costs associated with clinic and/or hospital visits.

More than 20 facilities operate today under the name of Shriners Hospitals for Children, with facilities in Hawaii, Canada, Louisiana, Oregon, Kentucky and Mexico. Each hospital or clinic specializes in specific care, ranging from orthopedics and burn care, to sports injury and fractures, spinal cord injuries, and craniofacial and cleft lip/palate. Approximately 1.4 million children have been treated by the facilities and 145,608 children were cared for in 2019 alone.

To learn more about Shriners Hospitals for Children or their supporting fraternity, visit www.shrinershospitalsforchildren.org or www.shrinersinternational.org. ■

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