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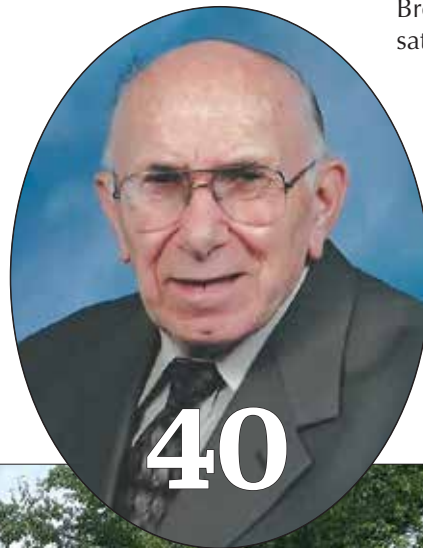
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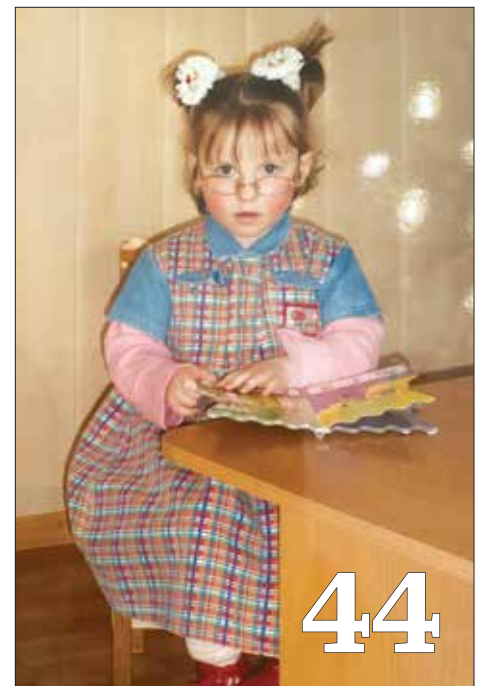
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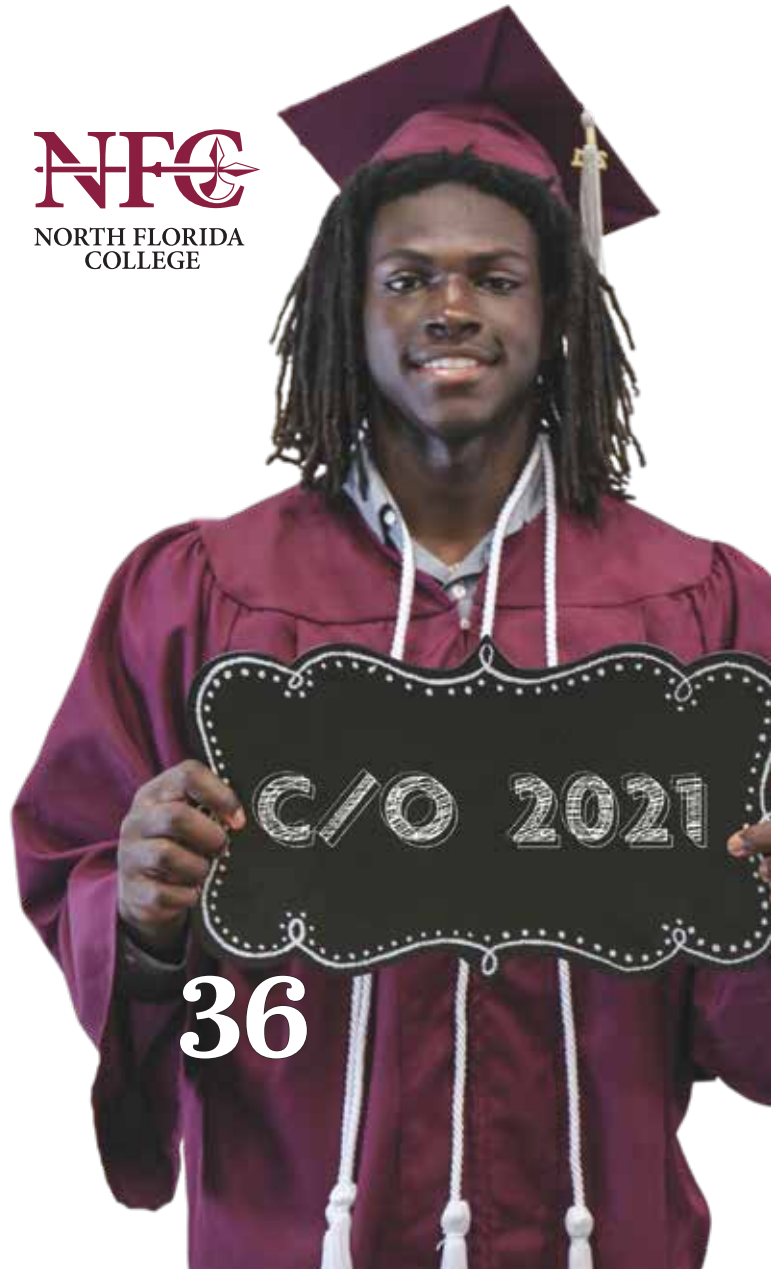
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Meet Our Staff



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. Along with the many tasks she handles in the finance department, she also manages the Circulation, the Classified and Legal section of the weekly newspapers the *Madison County Carrier* and *The Madison Enterprise-Recorder*. Amber is also a commissioned Notary Public in Florida. She was raised in Madison County and graduated from Madison County High School in 2008. Amber has an 11-year-old 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.



MICKEY 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 Future 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.



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." Lee now resides in Lake City with his wife, Lorin Trawick and their two children. He is a reporter for *Riverbend News*.



DANNY FEDERICO was born and raised in Tallahassee, Fla. Growing up, Danny 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, Danny is now actively pursuing a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and a minor in Journalism from the University of Central Florida. Danny now resides in Branford, Fla., enjoying reading, writing screenplays and short stories and spending time with family.



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.



ALEXANDRIA "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 of joining 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 of becoming a Pediatric Dentist. In her free time, she likes spending time with her husband of six years, shopping with friends and doing anything to make her nieces and nephews happy.



JEANETTE DUNN is a native of San Francisco, Calif. The daughter of Angelo Roccasalva, an Italian immigrant who arrived on Ellis Island in 1939, Jeanette 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.



HEATHER AINSLEY was born in Virginia Beach and was raised in South Florida. She graduated from Eastern Florida State College with an Associate of Arts degree in 2013. Heather is a self-taught artist and specializes in wood-burning, watercolor and acrylic paintings. She creates a wide variety of items that she sells at festivals in her spare time, including painted concrete leaves and hand painted greeting cards, but is best known for her wood-burning work. When she isn't working on her art, she can be found reading or working on the book she is writing. An avid animal lover, Ainsley has a home full of pets that she shares with her long-term boyfriend, Ben Abbott. Together, the two of them enjoy hiking and enjoying the great outdoors with their two dogs and visiting the many springs and river systems that Florida has to offer.



SYDNEY HOLDER was born in Gainesville, Fla. and was raised in Suwannee County. Eighteen-year-old Sydney was the valedictorian of the Branford High School graduating class of 2021 and is looking to gain experience before attending college full-time. An avid writer and a passionate musician, Sydney has been enjoying her time reporting for the *Riverbend News* and now, *The Front Porch*. She looks forward to majoring in music education at Stetson University in the fall, achieving her goal of becoming a band director and sharing her love for music and writing.



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 lived throughout the Big Bend area for the majority of her adolescent and adult life. Currently, Justice resides 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.



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. Taylor 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.



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.

The Front Porch

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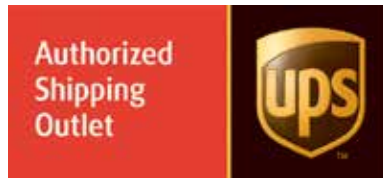
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Sittin' on the Porch with...

Ann Murphy

Story by Sydney Holder
Staff Writer

Photography by Shane Mathews

Ann Murphy is well known for her time dedicated to serving her community in the Suwannee County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) and on the City Council of Mayo. Murphy was born in Crawfordville, Fla., and has lived in Mayo her entire life. She possesses a strong love for helping people, especially children, and has family-born passions for God and sports. In this edition of *Sittin' on the Porch*, Murphy shares her life story and advice to the upcoming generations.

Murphy has been working for the SCSO for the past 28 years, and has been in the field of law enforcement for 32 years.

Murphy never planned on working for the Sheriff's Office but rather enlisted in the National Guard during high school. After graduating from Lafayette High School (LHS) in May 1982, Murphy went to Fort Dicks, N.J., for basic training and then went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, for additional training. She planned on going to nursing school to become a combat medic, but after returning to Mayo, began part-time work. From there, she never stopped working and decided to leave the military; she began as a dispatcher at the Lafayette County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) and substitute at LHS. She recalls teaching the kids as a "treat." After the secretary at

LCSO left, Murphy took over their job. She worked as the LCSO secretary for eight years before transferring to the SCSO, where she works currently.

Her passions lie with people, and she strives to be her best to help others, not for recognition.

"I do things because I love them, not for the recognition. I do it because I love what I do and I love people. I am a people person. I love helping people and being around people. My brother used to always say, 'You're just a social butterfly.'"

Murphy has been on the City Council of Mayo since 1991, and is currently the Mayor of Mayo. She has had plenty of chances to hold the seat of mayor, as the council of five rotates the position between themselves either annually or every few years, depending on what the situation calls for.

"I have a love for people, and I think that's why I got into being on the council and running for office," Murphy said. "I'm not a true politician, I just love people and helping people any and every way I possibly can."

Murphy does explain that residing on the council is never the easiest task, and that she has had to handle many controversial issues during her time as Mayor. She does explain, however, that this is just an aspect of life that faith can overcome.

"Everyone wants the limelight except

when it comes to issues no one wants to face," Murphy said. "You know you have to deal with the good as well as the bad. I just enjoy it, like I said, I pray about it, and God will lead me in the right way to be a better person and be able to serve my community to the best of my ability."

Murphy comes from a big family, her mother having had eight children. Murphy and her family were raised in Mayo, and she decided to live there her entire life.

"...A lot of times I think I could've left, but I just love the small town atmosphere as a whole," Murphy explained. "Mayo's a small little city where you know everybody on a first name basis, life histories and all. I've lived there my whole life, and I wouldn't change it."

Murphy credits her large, loving family as the ones to inspire her passion for sports and devotion to God, particularly her grandfather.

"I was the middle of eight kids; I had two sisters and five brothers," Murphy explained. "My grandma had 14 kids, so we have a big, close-connected family. When we were growing up, we had two things we were going to do; we were going to go to Church and sporting events. You didn't have a choice; you just had to love them. My granddad loved sports, and so like I said we went to church and we went to sporting events. I

still have it in me, and I still love it like I did growing up."

Murphy certainly does continue her passion for sports and has intertwined that with her love for children. She runs the Lafayette Recreational Youth Basketball League for students in first through sixth grade, and also coaches for the LHS Basketball Team as a volunteer project to the school.

Murphy brought two loving children into this world, Marisha and Marcus, and was allowed to raise her third baby, her God Son Sergio, as well. Now, she has five grandchildren, and one on the way, due in August.

"It's just me in Mayo. I am divorced, nothing bad, we are still best friends, but after I got divorced my only goal was raising my kids. Making sure they were raised and that they got all the love and attention."

Murphy still has strong connections with her children and grandchildren. After Marcus returned from coaching at West Point, he returned to coach football at LHS. Marisha works for courthouse administration in Lake City and Sergio works locally for UPS.

"Everyone is still local," Murphy said. "I'm just glad my son moved back because he's been up north for the past 12 years. So he moved back to the state of Florida with his wife and my grandbaby."



Murphy's proudest personal accomplishment was having and raising her children. Her proudest accomplishment through the Council of Mayo was putting up the "Welcome to Mayo" signs.

"Like I said, a lot of my strong family values came from my parents and grandparents," Murphy said. "My dad died when I was 13, so it was really my mom that raised us. But, it was a great life. Even with this job, I'm dealing with people and talking with people a lot. At the end of the day, if I could make them feel better about themselves, then I feel like I've accomplished something."

Murphy is working on closing the chapter of life she is in now, and opening the next. She explains that she has been fortunate

to have traveled, particularly to Hawaii, but New Orleans and Las Vegas are still on her bucket list.

"I'm just trying to figure out what my next chapter is, with retiring and just trying to figure out, as people say, 'What I want to be when I grow up.'"

During her relaxed interview, Murphy explained her advice to the younger generation of children regarding challenges and life's purpose. She reiterates that though living is flawed, it is what makes life complete.

"You just have to always realize, a lot of people say life is not fair, but it's just. You have to make the best of what we have and live everyday to the fullest....If there's one thought I could leave with, to the younger people that are growing up today, always strive to do your best. Never allow anyone to tell you can't do anything. All things are possible. I've found a lot of times, our younger kids get lost by the wayside because if you have a bad childhood it keeps going. At some point, someone has to break the cycle. But we also need to know that life is hard, and like I said before, you have to accept the challenges that come along with that...We are going to go through life with ups and downs because it's a part of life. If you haven't had any downs, then you haven't really lived life to its fullest." ■

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HAZARDOUS WASTE

Hazardous waste is collected at the Main Office and at some of the collection sites. JCSWD prefers to accept all of the following items at the Main Office.

- Household: cleaners, cooking fats, oils & grease, aerosol cans, kerosene, photo chemicals, chemistry sets, spot removers, adhesives, glue, resins, fluorescent tubes & bulbs
- Outside: gasoline, insecticides, weed killers, pesticides, fertilizer, propane cylinders, swimming pool chemicals
- Paints: oil-based, latex, stains, thinners & strippers, solvents & varnishes, wood preservatives, hobby supplies, artists' supplies
- Cars: engine degreaser, brake fluid, transmission fluid, motor oil, oil filters, batteries, antifreeze
- Batteries: all single use and rechargeable batteries
- Electronics: television & computer monitors, vacuums, blenders, etc. (anything with a cord)
- Medications: medications must be given directly to an employee at the JCSWD main office. Please remove the labels from bottles. Needles and similar supplies should be placed inside of a large bleach jug or similar and sealed securely. Note: Red Sharps Containers must be taken to the Health Department.

RECYCLING

Reduce! Reuse! Recycle! Recycling containers are located at all collection sites. Help keep reusable items out of the landfill. JCSWD collects the following:

- Cans: tin & aluminum (examples: food, dog & cat food, soda, beer)
- Paper goods: newspapers, magazines & office paper
- Plastics: soda & water bottles, milk jugs, laundry detergent bottles
- Cardboards: cereal & food boxes, laundry detergent boxes, shipping boxes, brown grocery bags. Note: Wax coated cardboard (example: meat and produce boxes) are not accepted.
- White goods: refrigerators, freezers, washing machines, dryers, air conditioner units, (anything metal)
- Glass: all clear, brown and green glass and jars

This program is partially funded by our recycling sales. Unfortunately, there is a high level of scavenging and theft of metal and aluminum cans from our collection sites, resulting in a loss of income to the County.

In an attempt to combat this loss, we have added OFFICE PAPER to our recycling program! The previous office space in the warehouse has been prepared for storage of office paper, which includes items such as copy paper, stationary, notebook paper, envelopes, magazines, file folders, and paper-based packaging. The campaign will be announced in April, 2015.



TREE DEBRIS

JCSWD provides a dedicated site for residents to dispose of tree debris. The site is conveniently located in a central area to county residents, just off Tyson Road at 8639 Landfill Road. No other items may be disposed of at this location. Call our office for access information.



ANIMAL CONTROL

At this time, the Animal Control program is limited to assisting the Sheriff's Department with dangerous and aggressive dogs. Stray animals are not accepted.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

A code investigation may be initiated upon a signed complaint by a county citizen. Our goal is to help citizens find solutions that will bring violations into compliance without the need for formal proceedings.



ADOPT-A-ROAD

This popular program encourages businesses, civic groups, or residents to adopt a two mile section of road to control litter, beautify and clean roadsides, and improve the appearance of the County road system.



TIRES

Citizens are allowed to dispose of only 4 tires per household per month. Commercial tires are not accepted at collection sites. JCSWD is a registered tire-hauler and can assist businesses with proper tire disposal.



CONTAINER RENTAL

JCSWD offers temporary container rentals for construction or cleaning projects and permanent container rentals for scheduled refuse pick-up. Sizes range from 4 yard, 6 yard and 8 yard (square) household to 20 and 30 yard (long) construction containers. Rental rates are as low as \$1 per day.

GRAPPLE SERVICE

JCSWD offers bulk grapple service for citizens who wish to have a large load of debris (tree or refuse) picked-up from their home. Each load is \$100 for county residents paying the landfill assessment.



THE PERFECT STORM

lives inside of her

Story by Lee Trawick
Staff Writer

On Feb. 16, 2004, in Gainesville, Fla., Holly and Dan Marsee welcomed their youngest daughter, Mattilyn (Matti), into the world. They brought her home to Suwannee County, where she was raised in Live Oak alongside her older sister, Ashtyn. Her father was a National Champion football player for Florida State University and her sister was an All-American Cheerleader. Most little sisters would find it hard to carve their own path with so many accolades already set before them, but the perfect storm was beginning to take form inside of her.

Matti attributes her thirst for being

the very best at whatever she goes after to her parents, who have always told their children they don't care what they go after, as long as they give it all they've got or don't give it at all. Matti took their words to heart. "I push myself and do my best in everything I do," Matti said. "Overall, I'm a perfectionist in everything, so that can be overwhelming when something doesn't go perfectly. With that being said, the people in my life always tell me it's okay and help me back up when I don't do something perfectly."

Over the years, Matti has excelled in many sports, relying on the many positive role models and examples of excellence present in her life. In her sophomore year at Suwannee High School (SHS), Matti was a member of the varsity tennis team and was appointed to the All-Area Tennis Team. In her junior year at SHS, she was a varsity cheerleader and was appointed to the National Cheerleaders Association All-American Cheerleading Squad. In addition to athletics, Matti is also a member of five different SHS clubs, including Interact Club, Beta Club, Leo Club, Key Club and

the National Honor Society.

"I'm in the top three percent of my class with honors, dual enrollment and AP classes. My grades come before any of my extracurricular activities," Matti said. "Other than my grades, I can't say one accomplishment is bigger than the other. Each thing I've accomplished has led me to the next. Without the smaller ones, I would have never gotten the bigger accomplishments."

This ideology is what launched Matti to heights she never dreamed of. While Matti was involved with tennis, she watched Serena Williams dominate the court and told her dad she wanted to be like her. Her dad's response was simple: "Then you've got to put the work in. That means time, dedication and working out." It's in this moment Matti began to realize the doors lifting weights could open for her.

One day, when she was 10-years-old, her father was giving her a few pointers as she was messing around with the weight bar. There, Toby Irby, coach of the powerlifting team, Hillbilly Power, saw her and wanted her to join the team. "Matti is a



Matti Marsee lifts 163 pounds to secure the Bronze medal at the 2021 USA Nationals event in Detroit, Mich., which took place June 28-30.



Matti displaying her FHSAA 2021 State Championship medals.

very hard-worker and is motivated to better herself," Irby said. "Her desire to win runs deep and is stronger than most her age. She

has a good attitude and is eager to learn." From there Matti began turning heads with her success in weightlifting, even gathering sponsorships from various organizations, such as *GoMedal.com*, a global company based out of Finland, which is a juggernaut in the sport of powerlifting.

Matti has gone on to set four world records in powerlifting at the age of 14. These records are in squats at 100 kg. or approximately 220 lbs.; bench press at 55 kg. or approximately 121 lbs.; deadlift at 120 kg. or approximately 265 lbs. and total weight at 267.5 kg. or approximately 590 lbs. When achieving these records, Matti weighed in at only 52 kg. or approximately 115 lbs. After setting world records and garnering world endorsements as a

powerlifter, Matti decided to gamble on herself and turn to Olympic lifting.

Matti began competing in USA Weightlifting (USAW) meets, where she was introduced to Daniel Camargo, an 18 year veteran of the sport as both a competitor and Team USA coach. "The first thing I noticed was her coachability. In this sport, it's not all about strength; whereas in the powerlifting world she came from, it was more strength than technique," Camargo said. "All athletes here are talented, but what sets Matti apart is her character. While weightlifting, you're being judged and confined to stay within a set of rules and techniques. Therefore, weightlifting is a test of skill and mental toughness. When things may not be going



Matti Marsee is pictured with USA Olympian Weightlifter Kate Nye as they compete at the USA Nationals together.



The Marsee family, pictured from left to right, are: Dan Marsee, Ashtyn Marsee, Emma Marsee, Holly Marsee and Matti Marsee.

right, Matti doesn't fold, but instead rises to overcome it."

Coach Camargo has trained alongside and coached some of the best in the world. He states he's confident about Matti's future. "The US Olympic team consists of four women and four men. That's out of thousands of women vying for one of those spots. To say she will be an Olympian is tough because there are so many variables and no one can predict the future," Camargo said. "However, I can say with confidence that Matti has a real good shot at joining the USA team for the Pan-Am games within two years, which is a precursor for the US Olympic team. I'm excited to see where she goes."

Matti attributes her success to her family and coaches. "My dad and my family encourage me when it comes to not only weightlifting, but my life goals also," Matti said. "My dad put great role models in my life, aside from my family, like my coaches and lifters I've gotten to meet through his connections in the weightlifting community."

Although Matti has had many global achievements, to herself, along with her friends and family, she is still the same little girl from Live Oak. She still enjoys competing with her friends at the high school level, where she is a two-time Weightlifting State Champion. "I appreciate the praise, but I don't think about the things I've done until I do things like this," Matti said. "I try not to dwell on the things I've done, but instead what I will do next. I keep my goals in perspective, so I always focus on the next step. I don't think I've truly done anything great. I've just worked hard and I plan to work hard for as long as possible. I want to continue to work my

hardest and see how far it takes me."

On Tuesday, June 29, 17-year-old Matti competed on the largest stage in the United States, which is also the same stage the USA weightlifting team uses. Not only did she compete, but Matti also ended up standing on the podium with three bronze medals around her neck. She also caught the eye of some of the biggest names in the sport, including Kate Nye, a Team USA Olympic weightlifter competing in the Tokyo Olympics; Mike Gatone, a member of the Team USA coaching staff and Phil Andrews, USA weightlifting CEO.

Matti's parents have tried to instill in their daughter that this is bigger than the sport itself. Matti completely understands, there is more in the works than just lifting. "To tell the truth, I don't know if people look at me, but if they do, I feel I've done something right. I try not to get caught up in who likes and who doesn't like me. Still, I do try to make it a point to go out of my way and talk to everyone I can," Matti said. "If I had to give any advice, I'd say go for it. There are thousands of pro athletes and, yes, chances may be slim in becoming one, but there's still a chance as long as you're willing to work for it."

"Matti is such a team player and goes out of her way to work with the Junior Varsity squad and go the extra mile to make them feel comfortable," said SHS Cheer Coach Traci Green. "That goes a long way in telling the type of young lady she is."

"Weightlifting, as a whole, has taught me the more I put into something, the more I'll get out of it," Matti said. "When I don't do something perfectly, I can still be happy with myself at the end of the day if I try my hardest." ■



Matti stands on the podium with her 2021 USA National bronze medals.



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HOW SALT ROAD GOT ITS NAME



Story by Susie Reams

Contributor

Before the American Civil War of 1861-1865, most of the salt consumed by people of the southern states of America was shipped from Europe to the south.

Salt was an incredibly important commodity of that time of pre-refrigeration. People used salt as the primary way in which to preserve meats because, at that time, no one had refrigeration. Salt was also used as a seasoning for meals, as an ingredient to many products and packing fragile food products.

During the Civil War, however, salt became a treasured asset for people in



the southern Confederate states. Union blockades prevented supplies of salt from being shipped to the Confederate states from

overseas as the ships carrying salt were not being allowed to reach southern shores.

Without the assurance of overseas

shipments, people who lived in the Confederate states began to look elsewhere for salt and discovered that the coastlines of Jefferson and surrounding counties were the perfect area for salt gathering and production. Soon, there were saltworks set up along the coasts of Jefferson, Wakulla, and Taylor counties.

The Salt Road, later named County Road 257, was founded when Floridians began hauling salt from the Florida coastline to the rest of the country.

Salt production became so essential in the south that workers at the salt works were exempt from being drafted into the Confederate Army. In order to extract the salt, workers would boil saltwater in kettles until there was nothing but salt left.

The resourcefulness of the Confederate people in producing their own salt came to the attention of the Union armies, resulting in the Union locating and eliminating the working salt sites in the south. They did not want the south to have the ability to create salt. In addition, the attacks on salt factories made these operational salt sites dangerous for workers.

The workers would work at the salt sites seven days a week. The working salt sites were built up high, near the shorelines, in marshy areas where trees are usually growing. This is likely an area in which



you could find saltworks. The marsh also protected the sites from incoming ocean high tides. The workers would collect the water during and immediately after a high tide, when the water was beginning to recede, then boil the water for salt.

Today, one can still find remains of these monuments to that significant time in the nation's history, dotted along the Jefferson, Wakulla, and Taylor County coastlines.

At the time, it was not unusual for these salt works to be built on top of Native American burial mounds. Because of this, archaeologists often find Native American artifacts mingled with objects used in salt collection. It is not at all unusual to find an old iron kettle that was once used for separating water and salt from long ago; a relic of the time when brother fought against brother. ■

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Fred Mahan and his “Paper-Shell” Pecans

AND THE PLANS TO PLANT



Story by Heather Ainsley
Staff Writer

Fred A. Mahan was born on Oct. 6, 1886 in Kansas and lived to be 73-years-old. He was well known for his love of Jefferson County and his efforts to bring beauty to the City of Monticello, where he was not only a resident for many years of his life, but also a highly respected and admired business owner.

In the 1920s, the pecan and nursery stock industries began to boom. Several nurseries had begun to produce and ship large orders of trees and grafting stock plants. One of the two largest producers in the Monticello area was Monticello Nursery Company, owned by Mahan and it was the second largest nursery in the Southeastern United States at the time. Mahan and his nursery were known for their wholesale of pecan trees, as well as the sale and stock of ornamental plants.

Mahan gained national notice in 1921, when he won “Best Pecan” with his variety of pecans called Schley. The following year, he won another award, this time for his Mahan pecan, which quickly grew in popularity due to its thin, easily cracked shell. “The Mahan is outstandingly the finest variety to plant, as it has an extra thin shell, extra-large size and has excellent flavor and starts bearing earlier than any other known variety. Trees of the Mahan variety have actually been known to start bearing in nineteen months. This is the variety that won first prize in the last world-wide pecan contest in 1925,” said the May 26, 1929 edition of The Daily Democrat newspaper.

The Mahan pecan was the most profitable variety of pecans and was more attractive to growers, as it made

50 percent more meat per pound of nuts than smaller varieties and cost no more to raise. This resulted in the Mahan pecan being worth more to sell to the local crackeries. The City of Monticello soon became known as the chief center of paper-shell pecan production.

The award-winning tree which produced the famous Mahan pecan was actually an accident. A sapling of unknown parentage grew by chance into what would soon become the pecan champion of the world after being planted by J.M. Chestnutt in 1910 in Mississippi. This genetic anomaly was appreciated by Mahan, who not only bought propagation rights in 1927, but uprooted the tree and shipped it over 600 miles to its new home at the Monticello Nursery in Jefferson County, where it was planted beside the Schley pecan tree that won the first prize at the previous world-wide contest in 1921. The trees were planted within a few feet of one another, making it possible for interested onlookers to view both award-winning pecan trees at the same time. Schley pecans were considered the absolute

finest pecan variety until the discovery and propagation of the Mahan pecan.

In 1927, Mahan managed to successfully propagate this anomaly of a tree, allowing its genetically unique nuts to be cultivated by farmers, gardeners and the occasional hobbyist alike, making the Mahan pecan the household name we know today.

Mahan pecans sold in 1929 for a dollar a pound, the equivalent to nearly \$16 a pound in today's market. Today, you can recognize the Mahan pecan by its long, slender body, usually around two and a half inches long and it's thin, easily cracked shell that harbors a large, flavorful nut. Many of the pecans that are sold locally are Mahan pecans.

In addition to his fame in the pecan business, Mahan was passionate about Jefferson County.

Many current residents of Monticello, as well as those who may not live in the area but regularly pass through to Tallahassee, have likely used US 90 to travel back and forth between the cities. Twenty-five miles of US 90 is called Fred Mahan Drive. This stretch of roadway

connects Tennessee Street in Tallahassee to West Washington Street in Monticello.

Mahan earned the honor of having the roadway named after him with his unyielding generosity. In the 1930s, at the height of the Great Depression, Mahan used his nursery to donate countless plants and trees to the county's unemployment relief commission. These plants made it possible to hire workers during a time of great unemployment and shortages of jobs, under the implementation of the 1931 President's Organization for Unemployment Relief. The role of such organizations at federal and local levels was to create jobs so work-ready laborers were able to reenter the work force. Mahan's donation of ornamental plants and trees not only made it possible to improve the quality of the appearance of Monticello, but gave able-bodied workers jobs in a time of record unemployment.

The donated plants and trees were planted along the highways, in churchyards, cemeteries and streets to help beautify the city. The stretch of roadway, soon to be called Mahan Drive,





employed over 45 common laborers at 30 cents an hour, for an average of \$39 a month.

That may not seem like much money today, but in 1935, \$39 a month would equate to over \$766 per month today.

The crepe myrtle trees that are an icon along scenic Mahan Drive are a long-standing reminder of Mahan's generous donation. Many of the trees that can currently be seen lining the road on each side are the very same trees donated by Mahan and the Monticello Nursery that helped employ so many displaced workers and enable them to provide for their families in a time of much uncertainty and struggle.

So, when you drive down US 90 and you see the crepe myrtle trees blooming in all their exuberant beauty each spring, think of Fred Mahan, a generous pecan grower, who one day saw an opportunity to make this little town so beautiful, in more ways than one. When you crack open a Mahan pecan to enjoy, remember that even accidental successes are most valuable when shared with others.

Mahan was laid to rest in the Mahan Gravesites, located on West Washington Street in Monticello, close to the center of the city for which he cared so much. ■



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The heart of a hero

100-year-old Earl Mills tells his story of WWII

Story by Lee Trawick

Staff Writer

When thinking about the birth of America on July 4, 1776, it is imperative to remember all the nation has experienced and seen. In classrooms, history comes off as taking place so far in the past that it becomes no more than words in a textbook. This is not the case for Earl Mills, a Live Oak resident who has lived through and seen a little over 100 years of America's history. Mills was born on April 26, 1921, on his family's farm, just south of Live Oak, where he currently resides. Mills' age isn't the only thing that sets him apart, though, but also the places he's traveled to and the things he's seen.

In 1940, Mills joined the Army National Guard and attended basic training at Camp Blanding, in Starke, Fla. With World War II looming, President Theodore Roosevelt quietly prepared for what he saw as the inevitable. Although the popular opinion throughout America was to stay away from the war, President Roosevelt put pressure on the military to prepare soldiers for war. In June of 1943, Mills answered the call to war. Mills found himself at Fort Benning, Ga., where he prepared to join a relatively new unit formed in 1942. This unit is now widely documented as the Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne Division.

Already trained as a motorman, 23-year-old Mills volunteered for airborne school. "The idea of an extra \$25 was nice, and it looked interesting, watching from my barracks as those boys jumped," Mills said. However, he was sent to jump school in Chilton Foliat, located just west of London, England. With the urgency of

the war bearing down on them, the men attending jump school in England endured a brutal crash course. Instead of the regular one jump per day, a number set to prevent injury and complete understanding of the procedure, the men were performing two to three jumps a day. It was here that Mills became part of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

After weeks of gearing up for their mission, with little information to go off of, the men gathered around to read words of wisdom from General Dwight D. Eisenhower, which were provided in his notorious "Order of the Day" on June 6, 1944. "Your task will not be an easy one,"

Eisenhower said in his statement. "Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely."

With the weather conditions dictating their launch date, the eager young men began to grow frustrated with being told to stand down. Mills was no different. "I remember I wanted to go ahead and get it over with," Mills said. "We had been planning for it for so long, and the moment had finally come. I kept thinking, 'Let's go!'" Although it was considered critical and daunting, the bones of the mission were simple: jump from the C-47, land behind enemy lines, link up with the rest of their unit, then gather the equipment and begin



[Library of Congress/Courtesy]

fighting the enemy.

At approximately 12:15 a.m., on June 6, the men of the 101st Airborne Division began their air assault in the Invasion of Normandy, in France. Led by Captain Frank L. Lillyman, the division cleared their C-47 and began their descent into a world setting ablaze below them. At the same time, they realized they were being shot at and had no way of escaping. "The only thing I wanted to do was get my weapon and find somewhere to hide that night," Mills said. As dawn rose, Mills looked for anyone who wasn't an enemy, with only a pocket clicker as a signal. It was around 2 p.m. that afternoon when Mills finally heard someone else with a clicker. There, he linked up with two other guys and, eventually, linked up with the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. His unit was in France for only a short while before returning to England for refitting.

On Sept. 17, 1944, Mills made his impact again by taking part in the largest and most daring operation, Operation Market Garden. This operation took place in the Netherlands and consisted of three airborne divisions: the 82nd Division, the 101st Division and the British 1st Division; the four drop zones for the 101st Airborne Division were in the Dutch towns of Son and Veghel. Here, Mills fought alongside his fellow soldiers for nearly two months before being relieved and sent to northern France for rest and refitting. During this campaign at Market Garden, the 101st Airborne Division suffered 2,903 casualties, many of whom were Mills' friends or people he had come to know.

On Dec. 16, 1944, Mills and the 101st Airborne Division were linked with the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, where they were called on in response to Hitler's attack. The American front was beginning to crack, leaving the entire northern wing of the Allied Army and the Army to the west exposed. With limited ammunition, winter clothing and preparation, the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment gathered ammunition from withdrawing U.S. units and any other units they encountered on their way to Bastogne, a small village in Belgium. After reaching Bastogne, General Anthony McAuliffe sent the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment northwest, towards the town of Longueville, to slow down the German force marching in their direction. This allowed the 101st Airborne Division time to organize and set up a defense against the hard-charging German Army. During this time, Mills took part in the Battle of the Bulge, the most pivotal battle since D-Day.

There, in the harsh conditions, Mills was well outside of his element. With the weather averaging 20 degrees and eight inches of snow, socks were just as important as ammunition. The phrase "soldier on" wasn't just a saying for Mills and his fellow soldiers - it was a way of life. "We all did what we had to do. We fought and lost so many men there. We were surrounded and almost overrun to the point the German commander was within voice-speaking range. I remember him telling our commander it was hopeless and demanding us to surrender," Mills said. "Our commander gave a one-word response: 'nuts.' So, we did what we could and knew we were going to fight until either they captured us or killed us. But, surrendering wasn't on our minds."

At the last minute, when they were out of ammunition and preparing bayonets, General George Patton and his Third Army arrived. "We were only moments away from them overrunning us when General Patton showed up," Mills said. When the weather finally cleared, the Allies' planes were able to provide coverage and bomb the Germans' advance. The front lines were so close together that Mills recalls many American soldiers getting caught up in friendly fire. Nearly no one left the Battle of the Bulge unharmed, and Mills was no different, suffering from





shrapnel to his face due to overhead artillery bursts hailing down. Because of his injuries, Mills was shipped to Paris, France, for brief medical attention before rejoining his unit.

After holding off Hitler's last desperate push, Mills and his regiment were charged with taking back Europe and liberating the people from years of terror. They began their charge, continuing to fight those who refused to admit the war was over. With Hitler on the run, Mills and his fellow soldiers were tasked with the mission to capture The Berghof, also known as the Eagle's Nest, Hitler's home in Berchtesgaden, Bavaria, Germany. Along this march, Mills' company would take prisoners of the German XIII SS Army Corps and LXXXII Army Corps, along with several prominent Nazis. On May 5, 1945, the 101st Airborne Division arrived at the Eagle's Nest, putting a stop to the tyranny.

After the war ended, Mills was restless and nervous, trying to readjust to civilian life. At home, everyone seemed to carry on with their lives as if World War II was a long-lost, foreign story people only read about. Feeling isolated and alone, unable to escape the atrocities he witnessed, Mills reenlisted into the U.S. Air Force, where he made a career.

Later, while on leave, Mills met a beautician named Myrtle Hardee in a donut shop. He began to talk to her and knew he would spend his life pawing over her. In 1948, they married and spent 68 years together until Myrtle passed away on May 25, 2016. Mills said he considers himself blessed because of her and their life together, during which they raised two children. "I loved her and she loved me and I know I'll see her again," Mills said. "I know she's in a better and happy place and I look forward to seeing her again."

Mills now resides on his family's old farm, tending to his cows. Through it all, Mills continues smiling because of his relationship with God and the life he has gotten to live. "We did what we had to do and just kept going; it was our job and we did it. We did it for each other, our country and our families back home." ■

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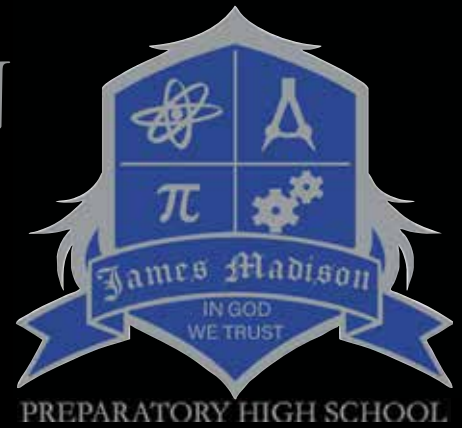
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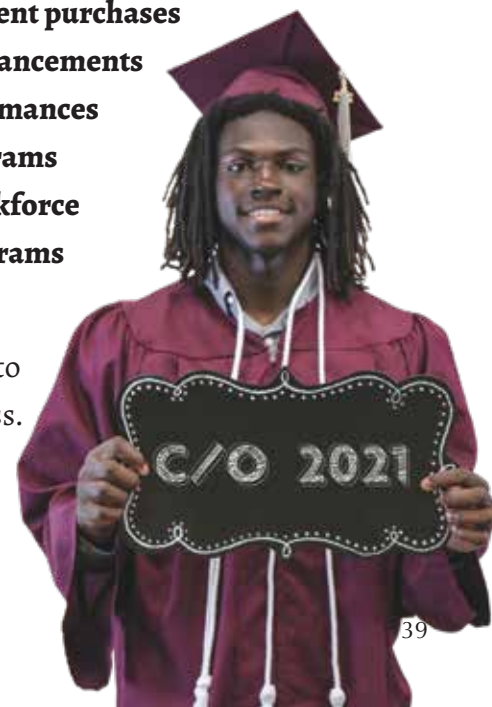
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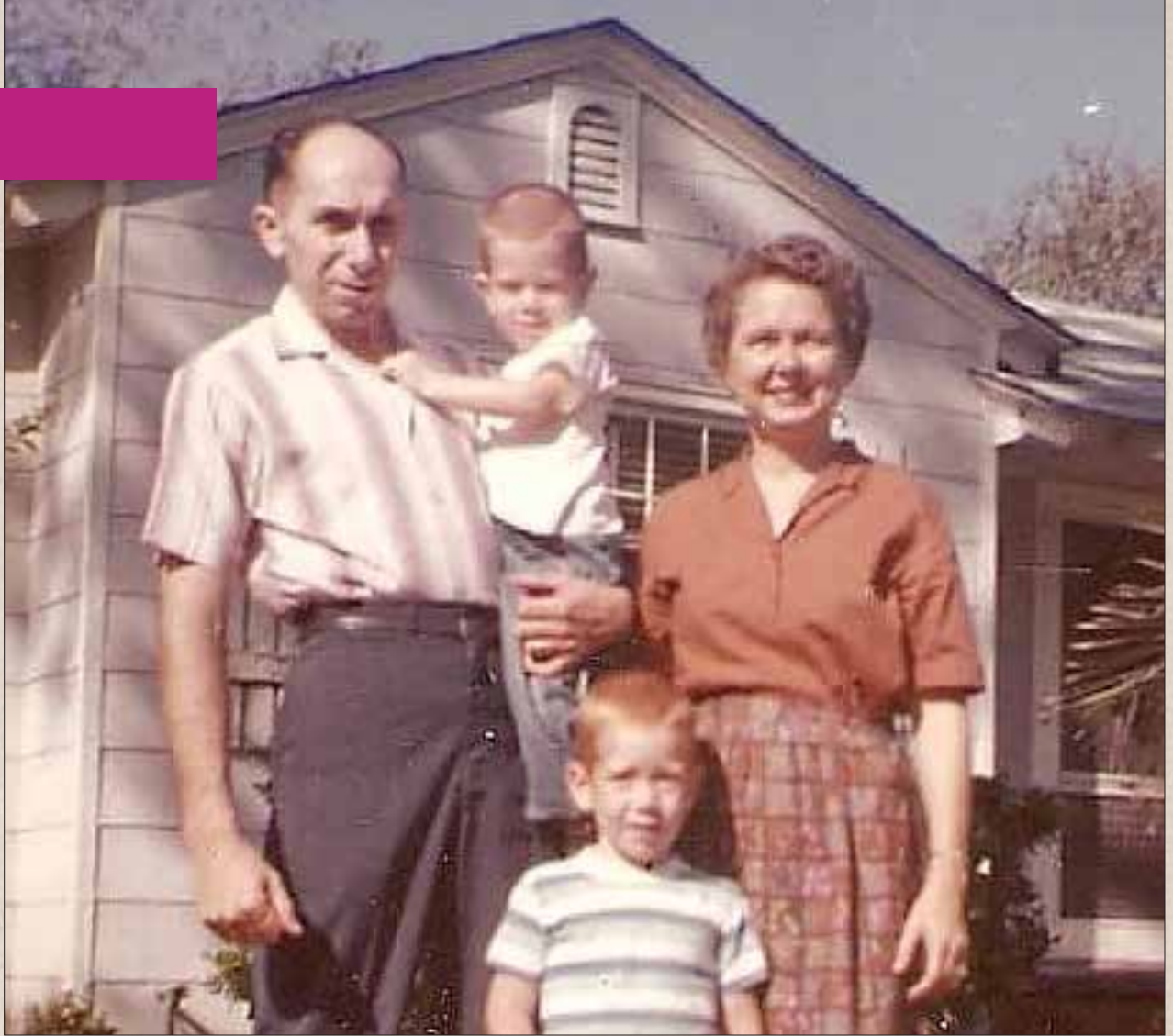
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The Glen Baker family, Glen (holding Billy), Ola and Bobby (standing in front)

BRO. GLEN BAKER:

A LONG, SATISFYING AND ACTIVE MINISTRY

Story by Rick Patrick
Staff Writer

With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. Psalm 91:16 [NIV]

Bro. Glen Baker recently celebrated his 95th birthday. That alone should be considered by anyone as a great accomplishment and reason to celebrate. However, for the retired minister, it's the life lived during those 95 years that gives the real reason for celebration.

Baker was born in the small southern Indiana town of Mitchell, in 1926. There, he would grow up to develop his basketball

skills. Despite his lack of height, standing at about 5' 4" tall, he was able to play basketball at Ouachita Baptist University, in Arkansas. After attending seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas, he entered into the ministry.

From 1952 until his retirement in 2014, Bro. Baker served in the ministry in Baptist churches in Jacksonville, Tampa, Pensacola, Milton and, of course, First Baptist Church, in Perry. "Most of my work majored in Sunday school," recalls Baker.

In 1962, Baker, along with his wife, Ola, and two sons, Bobby (the oldest) and Billy, was called to First Baptist Church, in Perry, to serve as the Minister of Music

and Education. There, he spent eight years helping to grow both the Sunday school and Vacation Bible School programs, while Ola helped lead the children's choirs. "Ola loved leading the four-year-old children's choir," said Baker. Baker was also instrumental in the development of the Royal Ambassadors (RAs) program. The RAs was a program aimed toward boys that introduced biblical principals through activities such as camping and sports. This was also the time when the church began a tradition of a father/son camping trip to Goose Pasture, on the Wacissa River. During that time in Perry, the Bakers developed deep friendships that

continue to this day.

In 1970, Bro. Baker was called to First Baptist Church in Milton, Fla. There, he served 12 years as the Minister of Education and Assistant Administrator of the church. He was also the program director for the Ministerial Association in Milton. While in Milton, Baker used his love for athletics and youngsters to originate a baseball league with the area churches. "We figured if we could get kids involved in baseball, that would lead to the whole family becoming involved in church," said Baker. Baker was also instrumental in starting a pre-school daycare for working families that served approximately 100 kids, along with a summer church camp initiated under Baker's watch. These and other programs helped increase Sunday school participation each year to the point where the church was averaging between 500 and 600 in attendance each week.

Then, in 1989, Baker was called back to First Baptist Church, in Perry, to serve as the Associate Pastor. At first, Ola was hesitant. She had moved several times and felt "settled" in Milton, with little desire to move again. However, Ola finally consented and Bro. Baker and Ola returned to Perry. Baker recalls that they were received with a "standing ovation" when they were reintroduced to the church that had loved them so when they were younger. Under Baker's leadership, growth was once again seen in Sunday school attendance. Baker also continued to help combine sports with church, participating with the church's softball team once again. As Baker advanced in age, he became more involved in developing a senior adult ministry, even helping lead a Senior Adult Choir.

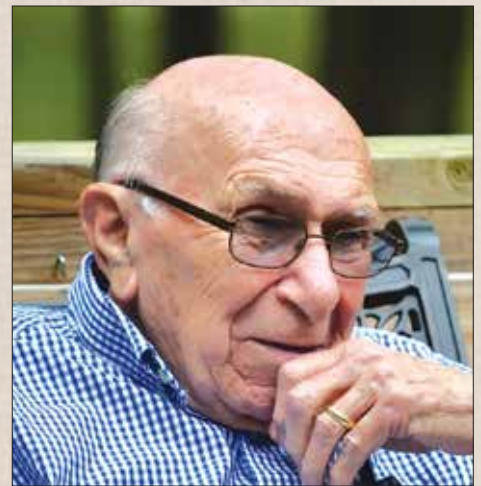
In 2008, Ola Mae Baker sadly passed away. As time went on and Baker continued to perform his ministerial duties, loneliness began to set in. One particular woman, Ella Mae Whiddon, had been very active in the church for many years. Ella Mae's husband had passed away in 2003. With both Baker and Whiddon being actively involved with the senior adult ministry in the church, it was natural that they would be in each other's company on a regular basis. As Baker prayed about a solution to his loneliness, he says he heard an answer from the Lord. "Man, she's right there at your elbow," Baker recalls hearing. Baker said he was very reluctant at first, but continued to receive reassurance from the Holy Spirit that, "She's the one." Finally, Baker and Whiddon agreed to meet for lunch, but both decided it might be best if they went out of town, away from any prying eyes or wagging tongues. As time went on, their "appointments" as they called them (they didn't call them "dates"), became more frequent. There is some question on how effective their efforts at



keeping their "appointments" secret were. After a short time, the couple decided to get married in the church office. The pastor said the church office just would not do and suggested the church fellowship hall, but it was decided the fellowship hall would not be adequate. So, the only remaining course of action would be, the church sanctuary. According to Baker, it was one of the biggest weddings the church has seen. He estimated approximately 350 friends, family and well-wishers were present. It may seem out of the ordinary that two people, well in their eighties, would get together and begin having "appointments" that would eventually lead to a walk down the aisle. But to see the smiles on their faces, one can easily understand this is a very blessed relationship. As Baker's youngest son, Bill, puts it, "They have been good for each other." Bro. Glen and Ella Mae will celebrate their 12th wedding anniversary in October.

In 2019, Bro. Glen suffered a TIA, which carries with it many of the same signs and characteristics of a stroke. This resulted in Baker spending time in the hospital. As he was recovering, he made the decision that he was going to build [his health] up. "I was not going to let it get my health down," said Baker. That was when Baker began a daily regimen of walking. To begin with, he could only muster a few feet. However, he stayed with it and by the time his 95th birthday rolled around, he celebrated by walking a quarter of a mile, surrounded by his sons, their families, grandchildren and, of course, Ella Mae. Baker continues to maintain his walking routine every day.

It has been said that it is the "dash" between the birth and death dates on a person's tombstone that tells the true story of a life. Much of Bro. Baker's "dash" will come from the countless number of children who



Glen and Ella Mae celebrate Glen's 91st birthday.

have come to Christ through the many years of Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, led by Bro. Baker. When the time comes for Bro. Baker to receive his well-deserved heavenly reward, his "dash" will certainly represent a long, satisfied life, shown by the fruits of His salvation. ■

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Meet the Perry family. Pictured, from left to right, are: Kelbey Perry, Drew Perry, Sheila Perry, Herbert Perry, Harper Perry, Becca Perry, Ethan Perry and Gabrielle Perry. Pictured in the front left is Olivia Perry.

Story by Lee Trawick
Staff Writer

Up to 70 percent of orphans who actually ‘age out’ are left to turn to prostitution or organized crime. Of the remaining 30 percent, 20 percent end up in the prison system and 10 percent commit suicide. Less than one percent actually make it to a university or other higher education. (hopenowusa.org)

Olivia Diann Perry was born on July 26, 2004, in Vinnytsia, Ukraine, 5,800 miles from Mayo, Fla., where she now calls home. Olivia was four-years-old in March 2009, when Sheila and Herbert Perry first laid eyes on her in an orphanage in Vinnytsia.

The odds were stacked against Olivia. At three-months-old, she was left at a hospital. From there, she became another statistic in the staggering number. There are over 650 orphanages in Ukraine and there are approximately 100,000 orphans housed throughout the country.

The majority of orphans is due to mothers being unable to provide for their

children. With a poverty rate of 51 percent, the number of orphans in Ukraine has increased to a substantial problem no one seems to care about, as they were once described as the forgotten children. Many of these children have special needs or need advanced medical attention, which the orphanages are unable to provide. Every three days, a child with special needs dies because they do not get the necessary medical attention they need to survive. Olivia may have been oblivious to the horrific statistics she was surrounded by, but she was not oblivious to her surroundings.

Olivia had lived in an orphanage for four and half years. During that time, there were no “baby’s first steps,” “baby’s first birthday” or “baby’s first tooth.” She had nothing to call her own, as the orphanage could not afford to dress each child with their own clothes. If Olivia wore a dress on Monday, another child would wear it on Tuesday. Many days, she went without shoes because there were not enough pairs to go around. In Ukraine, the temperature can

drop well below zero for weeks at a time and averages 39 degrees during the winter months. Because of this, Olivia learned to cling to what clothes she had and shoes, if she could get a pair, a lesson Herbert and Sheila learned on their very first night.

“The first night we got her back to the hotel, we honestly did not get to spend that much time with her. They would only let us see her an hour at a time. She didn’t speak English and we didn’t speak Ukrainian. Even during the time we spent with her, we couldn’t communicate. We had to use a translator,” Sheila said. “So, we didn’t really get to see her personality a lot, until we could leave with her. I tried to take her shoes off that we had bought her and she freaked out. She finally had a pair of shoes and was not going to give them up. That was really the first glimpse of her personality.”

Before Herbert and Sheila could bring Olivia home, Olivia had to first see a doctor for her medical file. While Herbert and Sheila admit things are considerably different in Ukraine, it was never more evident than



Olivia is shown reading a book at the orphanage.

when Sheila found herself sitting on a bench outside while waiting to see the doctor.

“Over there you do not schedule doctor’s appointments, you sit outside in the cold and wait,” Sheila said.

Olivia received a clean bill of health, despite Sheila’s skepticism. At that point, Herbert and Sheila were just trying to get Olivia back home. Every other day their social services were asking for more and more money, telling them they had to donate clothes and groceries to the orphanage in Vinnytsia, where Olivia lived. While they had no problem donating to the orphanage, they were at their limit with all the different hoops they were asked to jump through.

Herbert and Sheila were finally able to bring Olivia home on Mother’s Day weekend of 2009. However, Sheila was skeptical and sensed something wasn’t right. Upon arriving home in Mayo, Olivia’s struggles were not over. Not only was there a language barrier, but a culture barrier, as well. For example, where Olivia came from, she had never seen crayons, nor had she ever seen a porcelain toilet. Although Olivia lived in a status of filth and despair, it was the only life she had known. Now, 5,800 miles away from her birth country, Olivia was asked to start over, just as she did when she was three-months-old. Only this time, Olivia had living angels on her side.

“It was a struggle for several years. Things didn’t begin to level off and reach a level of normalcy until she was about 12-years-old,” Sheila said.

Shortly after returning home with Olivia, Herbert and Sheila wanted to know what they were up against. They scheduled a doctor’s appointment for genetic testing at Shands Hospital in Gainesville, Fla., where it was determined Olivia had a rare disorder called Prader-Willi Syndrome, a genetic disorder in which part of chromosome 15, passed down by the father, is deleted. The most common symptoms are behavioral



Olivia in the orphanage in Vennyyska, Ukraine, before being adopted by the Perry family. Olivia is pictured on the far right.

problems, intellectual disability and shortness in stature. Hormonal symptoms include delayed puberty and an extreme constant hunger, causing obesity.

“Finding the clinical diagnosis helped us with a direction for treatment,” Sheila said. “Plus, when times would get hard, I always had to remember where she would’ve ended up. God laid a desire in our hearts to adopt and I know God wanted us to have Olivia. We are so blessed to get to watch her grow up in our family.”

From there, Olivia went to occupational therapy and speech therapy in Gainesville, 80 miles away from Mayo, three to five times a week from the age of five to 10-years-old. Olivia spent two years in pre-K, then two years in kindergarten before continuing on in her education.

Then, in January of 2016, Olivia had back surgery to correct scoliosis, which is a sideways curvature of the spine, often developing during puberty. Over the next two years, every six to eight months, Olivia had to go back for outpatient surgery to have the rods in her back extended.

Today, Olivia is a vibrant young girl with an electric smile. She will be going into the ninth grade at Lafayette High School in August.

“When we brought her home, Olivia had limited speech and was more of an introvert. The only place Olivia had lived in was the orphanage,” Sheila said. “Since we brought her home, she has learned to speak better. She loves school and has traveled to many places with our family.” ■



Sheila shows Olivia pictures of herself in the orphanage in Ukraine.



Olivia stands with other children from the orphanage. She is pictured to the far right in a blue jacket.

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Culinary artisan Chef Art Smith's rise to food fame

Chef Art taught 1,000 Shell Oil Company employees virtually on Thursday, July 1.

Story by Danny Federico

Staff Writer

Hamilton County is known for many things, including the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, White Sulphur Spring and many other amazing hidden gems. However, one of the county's most well-known gems resides in Jasper, where he was born and raised. Chef Art Smith was born on March 1, 1960, to parents Palmer Gene and Addie Mae Smith. He is well known for being Oprah Winfrey's personal cook for 10 years, as well as cooking for former Florida governors Bob Graham and Jeb Bush. He is also known for his three cookbooks "Back to the Table," "Kitchen Life: Real Food for Real Families" and "Back to the Family."

Before his success, though, when he was a young boy, Chef Art spent a lot of his time with his own Mary Poppins named Leila Curry. In fact, she played a large role in his success today. "My parents were hard working people. They were just trying to provide for their family and pay for their house, so they entrusted this beautiful woman to take care of me and my brother," Chef Art said. "She's the first one that really taught me about food, because I would be next to her by the stove and we would do some cooking."

Chef Art said one of his favorite things to do with Curry was to sit and listen to soap operas like "Dark Shadows" and "The

Edge of Night." Because of the time and how prominent the civil rights movement was, Chef Art said newscasts would often be on the television. "I would say to Leila, 'Why are people fighting?' She would say, 'Honey, people just need to learn to love each other.' That's all. She wouldn't go and talk about anything in particular, she'd just say people have to love each other."

The amount of love, care and time Curry put into Chef Art's childhood had a significant impact on his future. "My whole career was based on taking care of people," he said. "That's what I did for 20 to 30 years." Chef Art then stated how, in searching for a photo of Curry, he found her 70-year-old daughter, Edna Curry, whom he planned on meeting. "I want to tell her, 'Edna, thank you for sharing your mother. I feel she was my mother, too and I feel you're a sister,'" Chef Art said. Curry was in Chef Art and his family's lives until he was 12-years-old, when she passed away. "The care and the love she gave me enabled me to do the jobs that I do," Chef Art said.

Curry's memory and ideals live on in the way he, himself, cares for those he cooks for and looks after.

When reminiscing about his time in Hamilton County, Chef Art recalled a couple funny stories. When he was 14-years-old, he began cooking at the Kentucky Fried Chicken in Jasper. "It was so funny," Chef Art said. "Later, in my most recent life, I said on Top Chef Masters, 'My mama didn't teach me how to fry chicken, the Colonel did.'"

He then went on to say, in another amusing story, how his ticket out of Jasper was a scholarship he received from the University of North Florida for a macrame table he made in high school. Chef Art also received a scholarship for playing the piano, which he began learning at four-years-old so he didn't have to work in the tobacco fields. While at the University of North Florida, he read about the chef to the governor. "I'm like, 'you know, I wouldn't mind doing that.' So, I moved to Tallahassee and started doing parties at Florida State," Chef Art said. He stated he

became popular on campus for cooking for dignitaries and deans at Florida State University (FSU).

While at FSU, he learned about an internship at The Greenbrier luxury resort, located in West Virginia. "I felt like I was cooking at Buckingham Palace," Chef Art said. The men running the

kitchen, however, did not provide an easy work environment. "They loved to run my butt around that kitchen and they used to scare the hell out of me." Chef Art said, to get away from them, he would run and hide in a nearby pastry shop. There, he met a chocolatier by the name of Mark Gray, who was a very consoling presence. "He told me, 'Art, if you're going to hide in here from those people, you're going to make chocolate.' So, he taught me how to work with chocolate," Chef Art said. "He saved me. If he weren't there, I probably would have quit or something horrible would have happened to me."

Due to his failing grades, Chef Art had to return to FSU. Once he brought his grades back up, he went on to apply for the Magic Kingdom College Program and was accepted after three to four attempts. In the program, he learned how to bake pastries and even how to make beautiful cakes. Chef Art said one of his best memories was being able to make a lovely birthday cake for his mother that year.



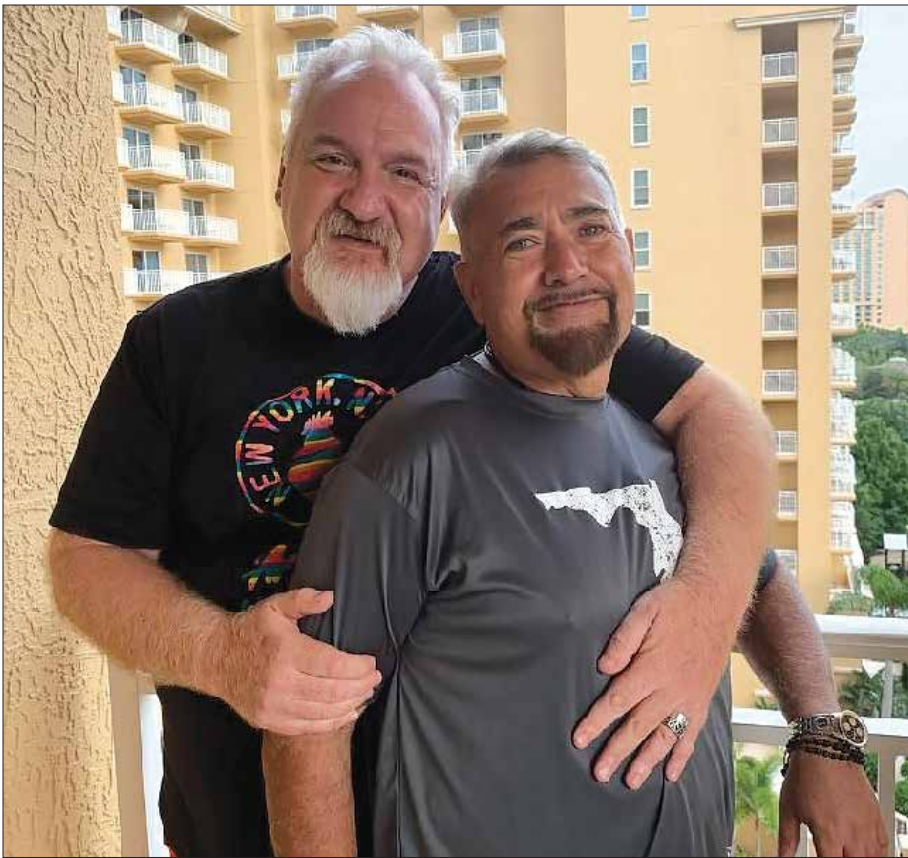
Leila Curry taught Chef Art about African American culture and food between the ages of three-months-old to 12-years-old. She was considered his second mother.



Chef Art Smith was Oprah Winfrey's personal chef for 10 years and got to cook for former Florida governors Bob Graham and Jeb Bush.

Again, he returned to FSU due to his grades. This time, after cooking for prominent faculty, the dean suggested he work for the Governor Bob Graham as his chef. Chef Art said he decided to quit school to do just that. However, when he first arrived at the Governor's mansion, a party was being held for Adele Graham. Chef Art stated he wanted to help cook in the kitchen but was instead told they had caterers and he needed to wait tables. "I did the party and I was a gentleman," Chef

**"The care and the love she gave me enabled me to do the jobs that I do."
- Chef Art Smith**



Chef Art lives in Jasper with his husband, Jesus Salguero. Together, they have four children.

Art said. "Then, I got invited back." While working for Governor Graham, Chef Art was able to cook for Mikhail Baryshnikov, Carl Sagan, Joseph Papp and many other amazing people. He did this for four years, before flying to Amsterdam to work as a chef on a yacht, traveling all over the world.

Along this journey, Chef Art stated he relied on his Walkman to keep him entertained. However, because it required a lot of battery power, he said he would take the batteries out of the many television remotes. "There must have been about 20 televisions on that yacht, so I would take the batteries out of the remotes, put them in my Walkman and then, when they were dead, I'd put them back," Chef Art said. "My Walkman and Madonna got me across the ocean."

When the yacht made it back to Florida, the owners decided to keep it docked behind their house in Boca Raton. He then went on to work at Gillionville Plantation in Albany, Ga. and the American European Express in Chicago, before he started moonlighting. While working for Williams-Sonoma, Chef Art began a catering business. It was during this time he met Andre Walker, Oprah Winfrey's hairdresser, who told him, "I know someone who'd love you." When he got the call from Walker to make lunch for Oprah, Chef Art



Chef Art broadcasts from Bungalow Gigi around the world via Zoom.



Chef Art's first job for Oprah was cooking for her famous book club.

was in Washington, cooking for the second inauguration of Bill Clinton. However, as luck would have it, he made his way over to cook for her. Chef Art ended up cooking for Oprah for four months before being hired on as her personal chef. His first job, he said, was to cook for her book club.

In 2015-16, after 10 years, Chef Art returned to Jasper to take care of his mother, who was suffering from Alzheimer's. She has since passed away. He now resides in Jasper with his husband, Jesus Salguero. Together, they have four children, Angel Smith-Salguero (18), Brando Smith-Salguero (15), Zummy Smith-Salguero (13) and Zuky Smith-Salguero (12).

"After you work for someone like Oprah Winfrey, you truly think you can walk on water," Chef Art said. "When I came back, I thought I could walk on water and I wanted to create a business here to help people get jobs." Chef Art stated he wanted to create some kind of programming to help further peoples' education. "So, I bought Smith-Wardlaw

Mansion in Madison. I had this idea that we could put in a cooking school, but then I was told you can't run a school in a wooden building. Then I thought, well, we'll do it virtually." He states he bought the house on his own, then gave it to Reunion Center, Inc., a 501c3 which is a nonprofit with the primary goal of educating people. Chef Art states his personal goal is to be able to educate people virtually. Reunion Center, Inc., was founded in 2014 by Chef Art with the vision of "an America moving forward together, united around a common health, opportunity and dignity."

"I've been doing a lot of virtual teaching from a little cottage with my phone," Chef Art said. On Thursday, July 1, Chef Art taught cooking to 1,000 people with Shell Oil Company all across the Americas. Now, he's looking at new ways to expand education. "You don't have to have a classroom now to teach," Chef Art said. While he loves Smith-Wardlaw Mansion, he believes it needs to meet the needs of the community, not just as a

historic landmark, but also as a place of learning.

As a first step toward this ultimate goal, he had a quarter of a million dollar kitchen installed in the house to teach students with. "What I want to do now is find the best social media person I can afford and figure out how we can effectively reach thousands virtually," Chef Art said. "I don't think we need them in a classroom...I'm hoping there'll be, sooner than later, a product we can get made here and sell it; something from Jasper to put people to work."

However, like any other project in the works, Chef Art's ultimate goal of teaching thousands will require time, funding and, most of all, community participation. "One thing to keep in mind is fame does not equate to money," Chef Art said. He stresses the process takes longer than people expect and requires a lot of resources.

To learn more about Reunion Center, Inc., the many education and community programs offered or to donate to its cause, please visit reunionus.org. ■

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WHEN THE LINE OF DUTY *becomes the* LINE OF FIRE

TAYLOR COUNTY
HERO FACED
DEATH TO
SAVE OTHERS

Story by Mickey Starling
Staff Writer

Taylor County native Robert Lundy grew up enjoying the beautiful shorelines and peaceful atmosphere found in Steinhatchee. The close-knit community inspired in Lundy a desire to serve others, and law enforcement seemed to be the perfect means of accomplishing his selfless goal. Lundy felt privileged to graduate in 2003 from the Kirkpatrick Center, a law enforcement training facility located in Gainesville, Fla.

The following year, Lundy was brimming with pride when he joined the Taylor County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) as a deputy. The next ten years proved to be routine, but enjoyable days of service for Lundy, who loved being in law enforcement. On a cool February morning in 2014, Lundy was en route to Timberland Ford, in Perry. He was turning in a work order to have a spotlight installed on his cruiser.



Robert Lundy was thrilled to receive the Florida Attorney General's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award in 2016. Pictured, from left to right, are: Gov. Rick Scott, Robert Lundy and Attorney General Pam Bondi.



What should have been an uneventful morning quickly turned into Lundy's worst nightmare. As he was completing paperwork in the service department, a man came running breathlessly from the showroom, screaming for help. The gentleman was bleeding from his arm as he explained that there was a man who had just driven his vehicle through the front window and exited the vehicle, armed with a shotgun. The gunman, later identified as Earl Edward Clague, Jr., went on a shooting spree, injuring several people. A wounded Timberland employee later died from their injuries.

Little did Lundy know, Clague would soon be within feet of him as he pursued Timberland Ford owner Brett Falicon, who was screaming for help as he ran in terror from Clague's murderous pursuit. But, Lundy never got the opportunity to see Clague before he fired his shotgun into Lundy's abdomen at close range. Fortunately for Lundy, the shotgun was loaded with birdshot.

However, when fired at such close vicinity, birdshot has no time to separate, so it remains as deadly as most bullets. As Clague's shot struck Lundy, he managed to retreat to the rear of his cruiser. Meanwhile, Clague positioned himself at the front of the vehicle, intent on killing Lundy, whose gun was trained on the area where he last saw the assailant.

As Clague raised to take another shot, Lundy triggered several



This tattoo, honoring Lundy's bravery while in the line of fire, is on the arm of Ross Mahoney, the son of John Mahoney, who was also injured during the shooting in February of 2014.

rounds, some of which struck Clague through both lungs. Clague wasn't satisfied to surrender and was climbing to his feet, gun in hand, preparing to continue the shootout when Lundy was forced to fire more rounds to incapacitate Clague, who died from his injuries.



*First day on the job
with the Taylor County
Sheriff's Office.*

As the adrenaline slowly faded from Lundy's body, he looked down to discover that several organs were hanging from his abdomen. "I was terrified and certain that I would die within minutes," recalls Lundy. Yet, before those fateful minutes passed, Sheriff Wayne Padgett arrived and quickly came to his aide, placing his hand into Lundy's gaping wound and carefully pressed his organs back into his body and reassured him that he was going to make it. "I've never been so happy to see someone in my life as I was in that moment," remembers Lundy.

Survival was far from guaranteed for Lundy, who spent four days in Doctor's Memorial Hospital, in Perry before becoming septic. He coded several times in those first few days and was only given a three-percent chance of living through the ordeal.

Lundy was quickly transferred to Shands Hospital, in Gainesville, Fla., where doctors worked diligently to stop the infection, repair his injuries and give him a fighting chance at life. After two months in the hospital, three weeks of which were spent in a coma, and about a year of home health care, Lundy continued to fight the good fight and slowly improve.

Nothing about his recovery has been easy. Lundy weaned himself off of painkillers after needing them for about two months. "I came off too fast and had some withdrawals," said Lundy, who still contends with a drop foot and blindness in one eye and tunnel vision in the other.

Due to his numerous injuries, Lundy was forced to retire from law enforcement, leaving the TCSO as a lieutenant in 2016. However, he did not hang up his badge without first receiving some much-deserved appreciation for his heroism in the face of death. In 2015, he was selected as the Florida Sheriffs Association Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. The following year, Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi presented Lundy with the Florida Attorney General's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award. Florida Governor Rick Scott and many other dignitaries were present for this special occasion.

Lundy has also been blessed with the support of numerous fellow law enforcement officers, churches and organizations that came together to help his family with emotional and financial support. "The community was really good to us, and we appreciate everything they did," said Lundy.

The saying, "You can't keep a good man down" certainly holds true where Lundy is concerned. Dealing with disability and limitations can be depressing, but Lundy reflects on the fact that he should not have survived the shooting. He relishes time with his wife and daughters, grateful to share each moment with them. "I don't give up," commented Lundy. "The Lord got me through the shooting and He can get me through anything else." Thanks to his unflinching bravery seven years ago, several other Taylor County residents have that same opportunity to continue trusting God with their future. ■



Friends gathered around Lundy to offer their prayers and support during his early days in the hospital.



The Lundy family's faith saw them through the difficult days of Lundy's recovery. Today, they enjoy each precious moment they have together. Pictured, from left to right, are: Robert, Kelly, Emily and Allison.



Nothing like a daughter's love to speed the healing. Allison Lundy visits her dad after he came out of a lengthy coma.



Robert takes his first steps, months after being shot at Timberland Ford, in Perry.





RAISING KINGS

The history of the Boyz to Kings program

Story by Alyssa Ridenour
Contributor

Every nonprofit organization has a backstory; something that gave someone an ultimatum and led to the establishment of a program beneficial to the community. Perhaps, it's a deep-rooted passion. Maybe it's a long history of trials and tribulations. It could just be an observation that something needs to be done.

For Madison's Merv Mattair, the real eye opener came during his employment with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). For 10 years, he worked with boys and young men at Greenville Hills Academy, a facility for troubled

youth. These were children who would one day find themselves in prison if something didn't change. Mattair began as a childcare worker and later became a program director. During his time there, he conducted a survey and learned that approximately 90 percent of the boys there did not have an active father figure in their life.

A quick look at some statistics shows that growing up without a father figure can have some pretty detrimental repercussions. Fatherless children are four times more likely to end up in poverty, twice as likely to suffer from obesity, twice as likely to drop out of school and seven times more likely to become a teen parent. Additionally, fatherless children are more likely to

have behavioral problems, to face abuse and neglect, to abuse drugs and alcohol, to commit crimes and to go to prison. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 19.5 million children in the United States are growing up in a fatherless home.

Mattair strives to put a dent in these statistics by providing services to families who need it. The Boyz to Kings program, founded by Mattair in 2009, offers guidance and support to young men who need a role model in their life. The program strives to keep the young men in the community off the streets and focused on a brighter future ahead.

The adult leaders in the group work diligently to instill the 12 guiding principles: respecting themselves, reading literature,

improving their appearance, honoring their family, accepting accountability, never giving up, respecting their queens, staying physically fit, making positive decisions, respecting their elders, learning from other people's mistakes and praying.

To encourage academic success, Boyz to Kings offers incentives for different achievements. For instance, they once awarded all their students who earned straight A's with \$100 and gave away \$50 to the student with the most Accelerated Reader points.

Boyz to Kings established a partnership with the Madison County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), which has given them the opportunity to receive funding from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. The MCSO has met with them and shown them how they go about making arrests, how their dogs attack, sniff for illicit substances, etc. At one point, the boys had the opportunity to learn about firefighting and play tug-of-war with local firefighters.

One of the primary missions of the Boyz to Kings program is to keep the young boys and men in our community off the streets, off the couch and doing something productive. This is why the program has formed a weightlifting team, known as "Triple F," which stands for Faith, Fitness and Family. Furthermore, the organization prides itself on providing extra help with school work and a heightened focus on community service. They instill qualities such as service to the community, respect for elders, love for those around you, etc.

Over the course of 12 years, Boyz to Kings has seen many success stories. Former Boyz to Kings student Charlie Fulmer joined the Army after graduation. While enlisted, he attended vocational school and obtained a vocational certification in cyber security. Upon completion of his contract with the United States Army, he obtained his dream job in IT for a company in Tallahassee and has been happily married to Lacey Fulmer for four years.

Zarrion Robinson is one of the most recent graduates from the Boyz to Kings program and will soon be off to Stetson University, where he will be majoring in sports medicine. His mother is Denise Robinson. Denise enrolled her oldest son, Deonte McGee, in the program as well. He was the first enrolled student after the foundation of the organization several years ago. McGee is now a proud father.

Mattair, the founder and CEO of Boyz to Kings, learned many difficult life lessons at a very young age and hopes to spread his wisdom and knowledge to the younger generation, in an effort to ensure that they won't make the same mistakes he did. He stresses the necessity of loyalty, kindness



and compassion, not only in a relationship, but with anyone around you. Furthermore, he educates on the importance of being a good role model to not only your own child, but to others who may be observing you.

Mattair was born in Gainesville, Fla. and moved to Madison with his parents when he was two-years-old. He has five siblings: Curtis Mattair, Jr., Kelvin Mattair, ElShaunti Mattair, Rosaline Cooper and Shantel Wise.

After several years of dating and having a child together, Mattair married his high school sweetheart, Denise Mattair, who he has spent every day loving and cherishing over the course of 27 years. Their oldest child is 25-year-old Lyric Mattair, who will be getting married in August, at Cocoa Beach and recently brought a beautiful new life into the world. The couple then went on to have another child, young TJ Mattair, who is now 12-years-old.

Mattair is active in numerous churches. He is a member of the school board at James Madison Preparatory High School and a supporter of the community at large. In 2015, Mattair was selected as Grand Marshal for the 20th of May Jubilee Annual

Event. However, he felt the decision was not the best they could've made and thought that civil rights leader David Dukes deserved to carry that title before he would be willing to accept it in the future. Roughly two weeks after having the decision reversed and awarded to Dukes, the Madison County Chamber of Commerce contacted him to inform him that he had been voted Madison County Citizen of the Year. In 2019, Mattair was once again awarded Grand Marshal and went on to lead the parade.

Mattair's parents are extremely proud of how far he's come in life. "He's a very strong young man," stated his father, Curtis Mattair. "He's determined, and he has a great love for children. His success is rooted in his determination to achieve his goals. He is a loving father and husband, and his spiritual background is influential as well. He has been a great son to myself and his mother. We are very proud of him."

Mattair hopes to launch another program called "Girlz to Queens" by 2022. This program will have the same ideas and motives as Boyz to Kings, but it will be more catered towards the girls and young women.

Anyone interested in enrolling their child in the Boyz to Kings program can visit their website at www.kingsqueens.org. Boyz to Kings welcomes all boys and young men ages six through 17. There are no monthly dues or fees to apply. Fill out an application online and Mattair will send out a confirmation email informing you that your child has been added to a queue. Once their turn comes up, they come in for a pre-orientation to get them set up in the organization. Donations are also accepted on the website and are greatly appreciated. Boyz to Kings is a nonprofit organization and does not charge for its services. ■

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Brews Better Life for Abby Reams

Story by Rick Patrick
Staff Writer

When one talks with Abby Reams; daughter of Joe and Kathy Reams, of Greenville, Fla., one gets the impression of a typical young college girl. Her warm and friendly personality comes through, effectively concealing the difficulties this young woman has faced. Abby has lived her life facing the challenge of the medical condition known as Cystic Fibrosis (CF).

According to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, CF is a “progressive, genetic disease that causes persistent lung infections and limits the ability to breathe over time.” In patients with CF, a certain gene causes a particular protein to become dysfunctional. When this protein is not working as it should, it causes mucus in various organs to become thick and sticky. In many CF patients, this occurs in the lungs, causing airways to become clogged. This can also trap germs, such as bacteria, which can lead to infections, inflammation, respiratory failure and other complications. However, CF doesn’t only affect the lungs. Abby stated that, in fact, her lungs have remained in fairly good condition, especially when compared to many other CF patients. In Abby’s case, the CF has affected her pancreas much more than her lungs.

Living with CF as a child and into young adulthood has brought its fair share of challenges to Abby. Abby says the biggest challenge she has faced is to remember



to take her medicine any time she has something to eat. “Most of my challenges have been physical,” said Abby. “I had a very supportive family and great friends while I was growing up. They always helped me to remember to take my medicine any time I ate anything. That was one of the biggest challenges because if I forgot to take my medicine, I would get really bad stomach pain.” Through the years, Abby learned how to cope with CF, although it still carried challenges that most young people never faced. “Even though my CF affected my pancreas much more than it

did my lungs, I still had to have airway treatments every day,” added Abby. “That meant, if I wanted to go spend the night with a friend, I would have to carry a big machine that weighed about 40 pounds.” Fortunately, for Abby, her health has improved tremendously over the past five years. “I’ve been able to stop my airway treatments for the past year,” said Abby. She still takes medication on a daily basis, but the medicines she is taking have gone a long way toward improving her health and quality of life.

“I was lucky because my doctor was able to get new and better medicines for me just as soon as they were approved,” said Abby. These medicines have not only improved Abby’s life, but hundreds of others dealing with CF. Abby has been able to connect with other “CFers,” as Abby calls them, through social media, and a community has developed. Many of those CFers have shared their stories with Abby about new drug therapies that carry little, or no, side effects. Many of these breakthroughs have been made possible by the research performed by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

When Abby was diagnosed with the disease as an infant, her older sister Kelsi, said “What can I do?” Kelsi, about six or seven-years-old at the time, thought about opening a lemonade stand in order to raise money for CF. The problem at the time was, it was December; which, as anyone knows, is not exactly the prime time of year for

A photograph of a woman with brown hair, wearing a black and white patterned dress, smiling and holding a baby. The baby is wearing a blue t-shirt. At the top of the page, there is a decorative chocolate drizzle graphic. The background is white.

the lemonade market. But, as it turns out, December is a very good time of year for hot chocolate. Kelsi also quickly figured out that donuts are a good match to go with hot chocolate. So, Kelsi opened a hot chocolate and donut stand near downtown Greenville, with the proceeds going to help those dealing with CF. This turned out to be an immediate success. So much so that Kelsi and her family ran their hot chocolate and donut stand on a yearly basis, each December, in Greenville. "The town was very supportive of us," recalls Kelsi. "We had a lot of fun with our hot chocolate stand. [Our sister] Chloe was right there with us from the beginning. We all also participated in the CF Walk and the Skeet Shoot [CF fundraiser] every year." Over the years, approximately \$25,000 was raised for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation by Kelsi, Abby and Chloe. This money not only went toward much needed research, but other programs to help improve the quality of life for those dealing with CF as well.

"I am so proud of my sister for what she was able to do in raising all that money," said Abby. Little did young Kelsi know at the time when she asked, "What can I do?" the impact her efforts; along with the help of family, friends and a supportive community, would have on her younger sister's life and the lives of many more. She just wanted to help in any way she could. One should probably never underestimate the impact a young person can make when she sets her mind to "do something" to help others. Often, those efforts have a way of coming full-circle, much the same way it has for the Reams sisters.

Abby, now 18, is a student at Florida State University, where she is focusing her studies on the hospitality field. She has hopes of becoming a chef one day, following a passion for cooking that dates back to her days as a very young child, when she named herself "Joe Cooker" while "cooking" in her play kitchen. She also works part-time at Masa

Abby with her little nephew, Jack.

Sushi restaurant, in Tallahassee. "I love to cook," says Abby.

In the 1980s, a young person diagnosed with CF could barely be expected to survive their teenage years. However, now, thanks to advances in medical treatments, that life expectancy has been extended well into adulthood. As more research continues and new therapies are developed, that life expectancy will continue to extend further. Not only is the life expectancy being extended, but the quality of life for those with CF is being improved at a tremendous rate.

If you are wondering, "What can I do?" to help those dealing with CF, you can find many ways and ideas from the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Simply go to www.cff.org/Get-Involved to find several ways you can get involved and help. The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is an accredited charity with the Better Business Bureau. ■



Chloe (left) and little sister Abby.



Abby with her high school volleyball coach, Cathy Rogers.



The Reams family.

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Over the years, Young (right) has attended many leadership conferences, including the Chapter Presidents Conference, Chapter Officer Leadership Training and the Middle School Discovery Conference. These conferences taught him life skills, such as speaking, teamwork and organization.

A YOUNG MAN'S PASSION FOR AGRICULTURE

Barrett Young Elected

FLORIDA FFA STATE VICE PRESIDENT

Story by **Danny Federico**
Staff Writer

Barrett Young, a 17-year-old from Branford, has been instilled with a passion different from most youth. While kids and teenagers are gradually being sucked into videogames, social media and the latest trends, Young has been building an impressive resume in the agricultural field.

A recent graduate from Branford High

School (BHS), Young began participating in Branford's 4-H chapter when he was four-years-old and began to focus on Future Farmers of America (FFA) when he was 11-years-old. Although his mother, Stacy Young, is the FFA advisor for Branford, Young says he wasn't forced to join.

"It's kind of funny, because everyone says 'just because your mom's the advisor, you're kind of brought into it.' It wasn't really my mom's choice; she didn't really

force me to do FFA or anything I didn't want to do," Young said. "It's something I wanted to strive to do."

Young said he first got involved in FFA because he wanted to become a better speaker and become more comfortable in public.

"I also wanted to keep the agriculture aspect, I wanted to learn about the new developing ways in agriculture; it's always piqued my interest, some of the new



Young (center) poses with FFA members from Branford High School, Branford Middle School, Suwannee High School and Suwannee Middle School chapters at the 2021 Florida FFA State Convention and Expo, in Orlando, after he was elected Florida FFA Association's Area II State Vice President.

technologies, being able to work farms, run specific science experiments and overall just being able to raise my own show animals. It had all the things I really wanted to do and it worked around my school schedule really well. It was just something I always wanted to do, not just because 'well, your mom is the ag advisor.'"

Young has also participated in livestock shows since he was a child, having shown goats until he was eight-years-old. He then began to show pigs until he was around 14 or 15-years-old, when he moved up to showing cows. Even though he's spent the least amount of time showing them, Young said cows are his favorite animal to show, because it takes a lot of time and work, especially when making them comfortable with a person's presence. "So, you build on an emotional level with them," Young said. Although he doesn't have any farm animals of his own, Young said he and his brother interact with farms, where they're able to see around 100 cows on a day-to-day basis.

During his time in FFA, Young has held many positions. In middle school, he held the positions of sentinel in sixth grade and president in seventh and eighth-grade; in high school, he held the positions of secretary in ninth-grade, vice president in 10th grade and president in 11th and 12th grades.

In addition to his FFA responsibilities, Young was also a member of multiple extracurriculars, including BETA Club (where he served as a representative), as well as BHS's varsity football team and varsity baseball team. Young was also named BHS's 2020-21 class vice president and even graduated as the 2021 Valedictorian.



Barrett Young (right) poses with Sara Dasher Carte (left), who was the last state officer elected from Branford 25-years-ago.

During his time in FFA, Young was awarded numerous awards. He was also awarded multiple certifications, including Florida State Fair Ethics, a Florida Hunter's Education Certification, a Florida Boater's Education Certification, an Associate of Agricultural Systems, an Associate of Agriculture, an Agritechnology Industry Certification and an Animal Science Certificate.

Young's dedication and passion for the agricultural field lead him to an outstanding recognition, as 161 high school seniors were selected to make up the 57th class of U.S. Presidential Scholars. Eight of the named seniors hailed from Florida,

including Young, who was selected as the U.S. Presidential Scholar in Career and Technical Education in May 2021. In addition, he was one of two winners of the state's Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Good Citizen Award in February 2021.

His success doesn't end there, though. Young made Branford history on Friday, June 18, when he was elected Florida FFA Association's Area II State Vice President. The last state officer from Branford elected to this position was Sara Dasher Carte, who was elected 25 years prior. This announcement was made on the final day of the 93rd Florida FFA State Convention and Expo, which was held in Orlando, from Monday, June 14, through Friday, June 18.

To achieve this honor of being nominated Area II State Vice President, Young had to go through an extensive screening process in Haines City, Fla., which took place a few months before the convention. This screening process was composed of five different events, which tested the applicant's knowledge about agriculture, as well as leadership. Afterwards, a screening committee reviewed the applicants and selected the top two from each area.

"The fact that I was able to succeed in that and then eventually get elected, not only because I was good at screening and everything, but because I actually had the support of others, that meant a lot," Young said. He added that he was grateful to know he had support from, not only his chapter, but from chapters in the surrounding areas, as well as the support from people he's built relationships with along the way. "It just means a lot that I can represent Branford at



Community service is important to both Young and his chapter. He has participated in food drives, donating backpacks, tutoring, landscaping the school, donating produce and decorating the Branford community for the holidays.



Promoting agriculture education and the agriculture industry is a passion of Young's. He has spoken to the school board, town hall and other agencies on behalf of his chapter and local farmers.



Young (left) grew up like the majority of most FFA kids, exhibiting hogs and steers at the county fair.



Young (second from right), along with three fellow chapter members, competed in the National FFA Agriscience Fair after winning state with their projects.

a higher level."

As a state officer, Young will serve the Florida FFA Association as an ambassador in local, state and national activities in order to inform, motivate and inspire fellow FFA members. This is something Young says he's always wanted to do.

"I want to be able to leave my own mark," Young said. "I want to be able to connect with kids and make them feel comfortable in FFA. Sometimes kids can get nervous, especially with having to interact with people they may not usually walk up to and generally speak to. I just want to build relationships and help people expand their comfort zone."

Young will hold the position of Area II State Vice President until the next Florida FFA State Convention and Expo in 2022.

Due to the amount of travel involved in this position, Young plans on taking the upcoming year off from college. However, he said he plans on attending either Warner University or reapplying to the University of Florida, where he would like to pursue a degree in biological engineering.

"[FFA] has been the most impactful

thing I've been involved in. It's definitely opened up a lot of doors, given me many opportunities, let me meet a bunch of people...just made me more comfortable in general. It's a way to actually connect on a higher level with people that are actually relatable to you and have the same interests," Young said. "FFA is not just for farm kids. I believe FFA is a very beneficial organization to everyone that's involved, whether you're trying to take your mind off things or if you want to expand your knowledge of the agricultural field. For me, personally, it's had a great impact, not only in meeting people and learning what they go through, but also expanding my knowledge of agriculture and the practices used today."

Young said he couldn't have gotten this far without all of his supporters, who have been his backbone in encouraging him to be the best he can be. "Whether or not that was hard love or just pushing me forward, knowing what I can do and how I can excel and demanding, not only the best, but perfection, as well. There's just not enough words I can use to thank all of them." ■



Long before he could join FFA, Young (left) was active in 4-H. His passion for agriculture began at a young age and has continued to grow over the years.

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