

# The Front Porch



*Where the tea is sweet and the talks are long*

MARCH/APRIL 2023

## MADISON COUNTY

*A True Blue Getaway*

Page 12

**Joseph Edwards**

**The Legend No One  
Understands**

Page 36

**Harrell Reid**

**The Dean of Sheriffs**

Page 48

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# CONTENTS

The Front Porch | Mar/Apr 2023

## SITTIN' ON THE PORCH ----

8 **Lori Robinson Edwards**



48

ON THE  
COVER  
PAGE 12

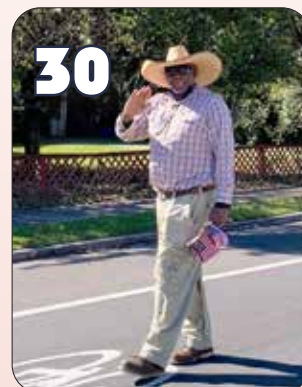
## Madison County

A True Blue  
Getaway

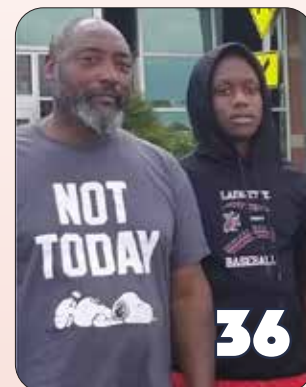


## FEATURES ----

- 22 **What's Happening**  
A Calendar of Events for Mar/Apr
- 26 **Glenda Hamby**  
Lifetime of Relationships
- 30 **Gene Hall**  
The Many Facets



30



36

- 36 **Joseph Edwards**  
The Legend No One Understands
- 40 **The Past Through Things**  
Historical Archaeology in  
Jefferson County
- 48 **The Dean of Sheriffs**  
Sheriff Harrell Reid
- 56 **Jeff & Jay Roberts-Sturms**  
Music and Mixology



56



40



# The Front Porch

Where the tea is sweet and the talks are long

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Publisher

Emerald Greene Parsons

General Manager

Cheltsie Holbrook

Editor

Laura Young

Staff Writers

Lazaro Aleman

Rick Patrick

Mickey Starling

Lee Trawick

Heather Ainsley

Grace McAlister

Advertising Specialists

Ina Thompson

Robin Jones

Advertisement Design

Mark Estefan

Dona Gilbert Day

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# The Front Porch

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General Manager



**Laura Young**  
Editor



**Lazaro Aleman**  
Staff Writer



**Rick Patrick**  
Staff Writer



**Mickey Starling**  
Staff Writer



**Heather Ainsley**  
Staff Writer



**Lee Trawick**  
Staff Writer



**Grace McAlister**  
Staff Writer



**Mark Estefan**  
Graphic Designer



**Dona Gilbert Day**  
Graphic Designer



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Sales Representative



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*Sittin' on the Porch with...*





## Story by Grace McAlister

*Photograph Courtesy of Lori Robinson Evans*

Lori Robinson Evans, a Live Oak native who is well-known for her work with the Suwannee Education Foundation (SEF), states she was “blessed with the best family in the world and with loving, supportive parents.” She grew up with two brothers, whom she considers her best friends, and is proud of her large family, as she has 10 cousins on her mom's side and 27 cousins on her dad's side.

“What was so great about having such a large family is that I had best friends from birth. And I didn’t have just one mom and dad; I had tons of aunts and uncles who were surrogate parents,” Evans said. “I had grandparents and great-grandparents. I think this beginning helped build my resiliency and drive, and helped form the woman I have become.”

Evans was born and raised in Live Oak. Following graduation, she decided she had to move out and see the world – so she did. Evans visited Brazil, South Dakota, New York, Texas, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Jacksonville, Fla., and many other exciting places during her travels. However, in 2015, she decided to return home, and she has never been happier.

“I guess that just proves what they say; you can take the girl out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the girl,” Evans says. A few of the aspects she adores about Live Oak are the city's fields, trees, freshwater springs and rivers.

“We are all blessed to call this home.”

Eventually, she attended Florida State College at Jacksonville, where she received her Associate of Arts in Communications and Public Relations, as well as Jacksonville University, where she graduated with her Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy.

Evans states she had a delightful childhood. Her extended family lived within a few miles of each other, so they were able to spend plenty of time together. Her

grandfather even dug a spring-fed pond, so she spent hours fishing, swimming and boating. In addition, Evans's best friend across the way had horses and motorcycles, and her other friend lived only a few miles down the road.

“We would ride our bikes halfway and then go to each other’s houses,” Evans says, adding how they would often go to the recreation center, skateboard and play racquetball together.

These days, when she has free time, Evans likes to play on her tractor, do construction remodeling and refinish furniture. She also enjoys gardening, boating and being around any body of water.

Although Evans is proud of many achievements she's had throughout her life, one of her proudest accomplishment was helping Madison County Memorial Hospital receive a multi-million dollar award to establish a Wellness Center.

Recently, Evans states, she was walking the halls of Branford High School when she saw a quote from David Viscott painted on the walls: “The purpose of life is to discover your gift; life's work is to develop it; and the meaning of life is to give your gift away.”

“I want to encourage everyone to ponder that. Find a place to discover, develop and give your gift to others,” Evans says.

This could be a church, a school, a nonprofit organization or even a hospital that needs volunteers.

“You get back what you give; and when you give your gift, gifts will be given unto you.”

Evans also urges residents to protect the community.

“Natural resources, infrastructure, schools, hospitals, small businesses, churches and agencies – they're all things that make a community a great place to live, play, work and worship. And we all have a responsibility for that. Support events, buy local and appreciate the awesome place we are all blessed to live in, because North Florida is a slice of Heaven on Earth.” ■

# Lori Robinson Evans



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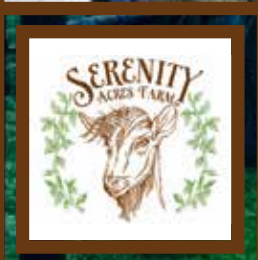
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# MADISON COUNTY

*A True Blue Getaway*

*All Photos Courtesy  
of Madison County  
Chamber and Tourism*

*Madison County is well known for its remarkable beauty. Serene landscaping, spacious parks, and an abundance of natural outdoor beauty makes this community a relaxing place to stay a while and unwind from a busy, hectic routine / Photograph Courtesy of Anna Davis.*



### Sponsored Content by Heather Ainsley

When the hustle and bustle of busy city life starts to take its toll on the average American, it's a good sign that its time to take a break. Even for those who don't live in huge cities like New York or L.A., the daily grind can certainly become taxing, and when it comes time to finally get a much-deserved vacation, the first step is choosing a destination.

Many of the factors that come into play when choosing a relaxing location to visit are amenities, scenery, entertainment and the unique experiences offered there. These factors play a critical role in how effective a trip will be in helping to recharge and relax someone who is traveling. But if you've never visited a particular city or town before, how do you know what interesting features they offer? Well, that is where the city's Tourist Development Council comes in.

Madison County is widely described as one of Florida's "best kept secrets," as its rural location and quiet, small-town demeanor largely hides its attractive scenery and vibrant recreational venues from the outside world. The Madison County Tourist Development Council (TDC) works diligently in partnership with the Madison County Chamber of Commerce to promote this amazing city and encourage traveling tourists to stop in and see everything the city has to offer.

The TDC is comprised of nine members, each a resident of Madison County. Each member serves a four-year term, and can be re-appointed. All members are appointed by the local Board of County Commissioners, and work together to carry out administrative functions involved with tourist development. That sounds complicated; but what does it actually mean?

When you visit a small, rural town, and stay a night at the local bed and breakfast or go camping in the local campground, your payment to that facility is taxed, like with all monetary exchanges. That tax, often referred to as the "Heads in Beds" tax, is collected and reported to the state. The state then gives that tax money back to the county that it was collected in, with the stipulation that the money will be designated towards furthering tourism



*The downtown and city areas are home to many examples of historical architecture, nestled amongst carefully manicured landscaping / Photography Courtesy of Anna Davis.*

and continuing the cycle of bringing new visitors and returning visitors to the area. The TDC is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the spending of that money in ways that encourage and promote tourism.

The Madison Chamber of Commerce works side by side with the TDC to promote local businesses within the community. While these two organizations are separate entities, they frequently work hand-in-hand with providing access to valuable resources, discounts and relationships to local businesses. This partnership also helps to increase tourism and revenue to Madison County.

The Chamber encourages businesses and organizations to engage in memberships that can be utilized to bring an influx of advertising and networking throughout the county, increasing a business or organization's visibility and reach within their community. Their

mission is to create a relationship that supports local businesses and organizations within Madison County and offer their assistance to those local businesses, which enables them to thrive in their own community.

The Tourist Development Council takes that relationship one step further, and advertises for local entities to areas outside of the Chamber's reach, enticing visitors from out of county and even out of state to travel to those local, small-town businesses. This influx of tourism can do wonders to boost a local economy, as travelers from out of the area often visit not just one business, but several local businesses during their stay, dining at restaurants and sometimes even patronizing local hotels and hospitality venues as well. This is largely beneficial to a rural community, as this helps to bring in revenue from outside of the county, boosting the local economy and helping to preserve the prosperity of





*Local festivals and events bring in the best that Madison has to offer in the ways of entertainment, talent, shopping, food and company / Photograph Courtesy of Anna Davis.*

family-owned stores, boutiques, shops and more, enabling them to flourish.

Another example of this partnership can be seen through local events. The Chamber frequently sponsors community events, festivals and happenings with its members that offer entertainment, enrichment and social connection within the community. While small organizations and businesses can certainly host their

own community events, support from the Chamber can greatly increase the chances of large-scale attendance. The Tourism Development Council advertises these events on an even wider scale, bringing out-of-county attention to local events that are held by the Chamber and increasing the chances of people traveling from out of area to attend. This also serves to bring new clients and money into Madison County,

and can greatly increase the attendance and success of an event.

This type of community enrichment isn't just all about business and making money, however. By increasing revenue to the county and by participating in successful community events, residents develop a deep connection to their community. By building memories and relationships that can be counted on year after year, the community grows strong. Children grow up and put down roots of their own, rather than moving away as soon as they get the chance. Having generations of families that have participated in local events and have frequented local businesses helps to develop a strong culture of togetherness within the community.

Jennifer Poore, who serves both as Executive Director of the Madison County Chamber of Commerce and as Interim Administrator for the Madison County Tourist Development Council, would like locals to know that Madison County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism is working diligently to help create a community that, "our children and our children's children will want to stay around for."





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*Madison is home to several privately owned restaurants and eateries, giving both locals and tourists alike delicious options for food and small-town atmosphere. / Photograph Courtesy of Anna Davis.*

There are countless reasons to visit Madison County. As such a rural city, Madison offers a significantly different pace than other tourist destinations. The City of Madison is home to just under 3,000 residents, and the entire county is home to just over 18,000 residents that live in an area that is over 700 square miles in size. That may seem like a lot of people, but not when compared to Orlando, the home of popular tourist destinations like Disney and Universal Studios, which is home to over 300,000 residents in the city alone.

This means that Madison is a far less crowded destination than other popular cities in central Florida. And while it may not be home to giant, corporate resorts, Madison County has a lot of wholesome, down-to-earth attractions that make for a unique and relaxing destination. The best part is that visitors can enjoy a fun day out and about without competing for elbow space while walking down the sidewalk!

One of the most significant draws of Madison is the abundance of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. Nestled in the northern part of central Florida, Madison sees the best weather for relishing outdoor activities, with temperatures in the spring months averaging in the 70s. This makes it

an ideal location for hiking, swimming, camping, biking or picnicking, and it has plenty of local businesses, sites and landmarks that enable all of those things and more.

Among the many outdoor activities that Madison has to offer, Blue Springs is certainly one of the most popular. As an official State Park, Blue Springs is a stunning example of Florida's finest natural beauty, featuring a crystal clear fresh-water spring that measures over 80 feet wide and over 25 feet deep. This first-magnitude spring sits in a limestone basin and is surrounded by beautiful hardwood and pine trees that frame the west bank of the Withlacoochie River. A prime destination for swimming, snorkeling, cave diving, picnicking, and enjoying the day, Blue Springs State Park was voted the best swimming hole in the United States by the USA Today's Reader's Choice Award, and is a must-see for those visiting the area.

When it comes to water features, Madison County simply can't be beat! Bordered on three sides by the Aucilla, Withlacoochie and Suwannee rivers, there are seemingly endless paddling, fishing, swimming, and kayaking opportunities available for both locals and visitors. For

those looking to enjoy more dry options, there are plenty of opportunities, including extensive bicycle paths, walking trails, locally-owned eateries, two museums and a vibrant community theatre program through North Florida College. The NFC Sentinel Upstage Players regularly host plays and old movies throughout the year.

Locals and visiting patrons alike can enjoy scenic canopy roadways, lush fields overlooking local farms, and a myriad of historical homes, monuments and buildings. Plus, with close proximity to larger cities like Jacksonville, Tallahassee and Gainesville, people who live in or who are visiting Madison can get all the big-city offerings they want without compromising on the comforts of staying in a small town.

With the beautiful landscape, Madison is an outstanding destination for campers, and has multiple camping options available to choose from. For those looking for a great golfing experience, there is Madison RV & Golf Resort. For those looking to stay cool and keep the kids entertained, there is Ragans Family Campground, which offers a 60-foot waterslide, a lazy river, ATV trails and fishing. If those don't fill your day, there are many other attractions to keep you busy, including Madison Outpost Adventures, Four Freedoms Park, Grace Manor Bed & Breakfast, Unity House, the Ray Charles Memorial, book stores, clothing shops, antique stores and more.

In addition to the everyday sights and splendor that can be found year round, Madison is also the birthplace of several interesting and enjoyable annual events. These community-driven festivities are scheduled throughout the year and help bring the local community and visiting patrons together in fun, well-mannered frivolity.

Every November, there is a Christmas parade and a tree lighting event, with added accompaniment from Mr. and Mrs. Claus themselves. There is also a 20<sup>th</sup> of May Celebration, Lee Day, the Annual Chili Festival and Edge of Town events every weekend. Throughout the year, the downtown Madison area hosts these and other small festivals, vendor villages and community fair events, which are organized and implemented by the Chamber, local businesses, residents and



community officials.

One of the biggest events that the Madison Chamber of Commerce hosts each year is called Down Home Days, and this annual celebration features the best and brightest of everything Madison County has to offer.

In 1981, it was decided by the Chamber's elected officials that a commitment was to be made every year by the Madison Chamber of Commerce towards the community. In order to unify the citizens of Madison County and the surrounding area, then-President of the Chamber, Roy Milliron, stated the following:

"I need a commitment from the board that the Chamber will sponsor an annual event, designed to bring the total community together and an all out effort to provide a meaningful service to our retail businesses."

All elected officials agreed, and Virginia Rowell was elected to serve as Chairman. "Teenie" Cave came up with the name Down Home Days, and a tradition was born. The very first Down Home Days celebration included a helicopter appearance, mechanical bull riding, art and crafts vendors from throughout the southeast, and a professional rodeo. While the festivities have certainly changed over



*Ragans Family Campground*

the years to include a variety of new and fun activities, one thing is always certain: There will be good food, good fun and good fellowship in abundance.

This year will be the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Down Home Days celebration. This event will include several different activities and events that will take place from Wednesday, April 19, through Saturday, April 22. Here's this year's festival line-up:

Wednesday, April 19 – A Night of Worship will take place at 6:30 p.m. at Four Freedoms Park, which is located at 112 Range St. in Madison.

Thursday, April 20 – Madison Veterinary Clinic will be sponsoring a community-wide dog show, which will begin at 6:30 p.m. Registration for this event is day-of only, and will begin at 6 p.m. The show will be held at Four

Freedoms Park.

Friday, April 21 – Becky's Dance Step Studios will be putting on a street dance performance. The performance will take place in the downtown streets of Madison, and will begin at 6 p.m. on Pinckney St. between Range and Shelby Avenues.

Saturday, April 22 – Beginning at 8 a.m. there will be a community Fun Run, and from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., downtown Madison will be home to a wide range of vendors and activities. Enjoy food vendors, shopping, kid activities, a car show, frog hop and more. At 10 a.m., the Down Home Days Parade will begin! This year, the theme will be "Building our Future."

Down Home Day's is the largest event that the community of Madison County has to offer, and each year hundreds of people, both locals and those visiting, enjoy a wide array of festivities.

"Down Home Days allows our community to come together and celebrate all that is Madison County," says Jennifer Poore. "It highlights our local businesses, organizations and incredible citizens. It's a hometown favorite, everyone comes out and has a great time."

Aside from its well-favored entertainment value, events like Down Home Days are excellent opportunities for economic growth in a small community. By promoting small, mom-and-pop businesses and local organizations, these small entities get exposure to a much broader audience, and this enables them to connect with customers on an even wider scale, with help from the TDC.

Anyone interested in participating in the Parade or as a vendor should submit



*Ragans Family Campground*



an application to the Chamber office. All applications must be submitted by April 10. Applications can be found on the Chamber website.

The Madison County Tourist Development Council has been serving the Madison community since its establishment in 1996. Since then, it has grown; the expected income from the tourist development tax was estimated to be about \$28,800 in the first year. Today, the expected annual income is nearly \$300,000. Since 2010, the county has received around \$1.6 million in tourist tax revenue.

TDC isn't planning to stop there, however. Over the last six months, their team has undertaken an entire brand overhaul, and they expect that within the next 12-18 months, they will have a new marketing plan, mission statement and a fresh focus on how to bring even more

tourists to Madison County, with complete identification of all the possibilities available for potential tourists to enjoy. They are striving to develop a new and improved strategic plan and marketing plan that will bring new people to the county while still maintaining the charm and joy of Madison County. While they certainly can't force new visitors to come to town and spend money, they can illustrate all the amazing things that Madison County has to offer and inspire people to come and experience this amazing place for themselves.

In the words of Wayne Shewchuk of Serenity Acres Goat Farm, who works as Vice Chair for TDC, "We can't control how many people actually come into the county. But we can control how and to whom we get our message out to, and what that message looks like."

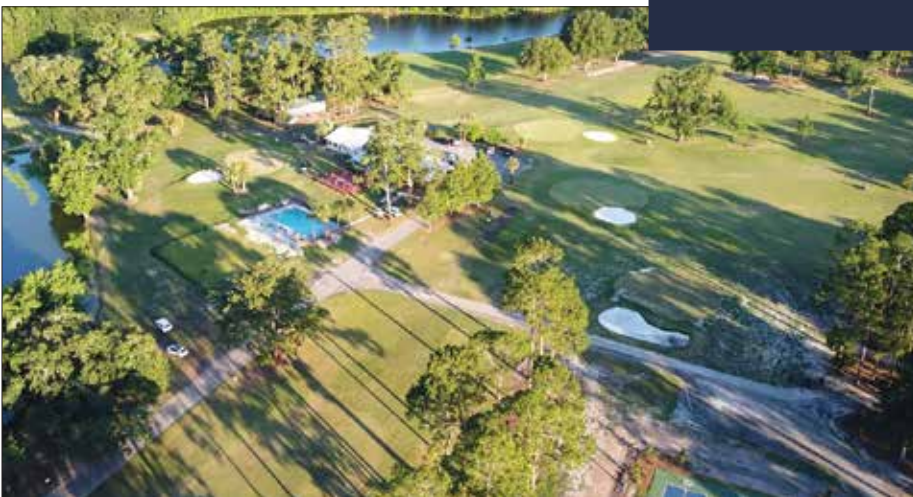
Festivals and community celebrations

are an excellent way for communities to celebrate their unique attributes and rich, small-town culture. Not only is it a fun, valuable way for residents to make new memories together but they can take pride in presenting their community to the outside world, showing off everything that helps make a small town great. Events like this can help reinforce the identity of a small community, reinforcing the bonds between citizens and enriching the surrounding areas with just the right amount of small-town charm. So, mark your calendars, check your planners, and save the date for this year's wonderful celebration of Down Home Days!

And if you're reading this later in the year, don't fret about missing out! There will be another amazing celebration just around the bend! In the meantime, there's still plenty to do, and Madison County Chamber & Tourism invites you to come and see beautiful Madison County, where "Our Attraction is Only Natural." ■



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# Down Home Days 2023

## EVENTS

### April 19 - 22

WEDNESDAY

A Night of Worship  
Four Freedoms Park  
6:30 pm - Food Provided

THURSDAY

DOG SHOW - FOUR FREEDOMS PARK  
REGISTRATION 6PM  
SHOW 6:30PM

FRIDAY

Becky's Dance Step Studios 6PM  
Grumpy's Diner on Main Pie Baking Contest

SATURDAY

Fun Run - 8AM  
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# WHAT'S HAPPENIN'

## MARCH

**March 1-4**

### **4 BIG Powerful Days**

Four different prophetesses will be at Love Ministry in Live Oak at 6:30 p.m. every night, plus music ministry by Suwannee County rapper "Live Oak" and The Hawkins.

**March 3**

### **Lions Club Chicken Dinner Fundraiser**

Enjoy the Madison Lions Club's annual Chicken Dinner Fundraiser from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Four Freedoms Park, 112 Range St., Madison, Fla.

**March 3-5**

### **Write Stuff Playwriting Workshop**

The Monticello Opera House hosts Four North Florida playwrights who share their original works through staged readings by local actors followed by Q&A. \$15 for Friday-Saturday, \$8 for one evening. Proceeds benefit Polo's Refuge Senior Dog Retirement Home and Sanctuary. For more information email [fourfriendswrite@gmail.com](mailto:fourfriendswrite@gmail.com).

**March 3-5**

### **A Weekend of Unplugging**

Suwannee River Rendezvous Resort in Mayo, Fla., is participating in a weekend of unplugging to celebrate March 5 as National Unplugging Day. For a weekend focusing on enjoying the outdoors, see opportunities at [suwanneeriverrendezvous.com](http://suwanneeriverrendezvous.com).

**March 11**

### **Lions Club Spring Show and Shine**

Bring your antique or modern car or motorcycle to show and shine, or just come to look at all the vehicles, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Car Quest parking lot, 1321 S. Jefferson St. in Monticello. No registration or fees are required. Raffle tickets and hot dogs will be for sale, with proceeds and donations to benefit those who cannot afford eyeglasses or hearing aids. For more information, call (850) 694-3509.

**March 11**

### **Revival in Concert**

Music lovers can enjoy the band Revival as it revives old rock 'n' roll, blues, soul and gospel at 7 p.m. on the historic stage at the Monticello Opera House. For information and tickets, call (850) 997-4242 or visit [www.monticellooperahouse.org](http://www.monticellooperahouse.org).

**March 11-April 1**

### **"Scenes of Nature" Exhibit at JAG**

See oil paintings depicting wildlife and landscapes by artist Patty Vickers at Jefferson Arts Gallery, 575 W. Washington St., Monticello, Fla., Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and by appointment by calling (850) 997-3311.

**March 16-19**

### **Suwannee Banjo Camp**

Study five string banjo in nature with some of the best teachers around. Nine class sessions in four different levels of instruction will take place at Camp Weed in Live Oak. For registration and information, visit [campweed.org](http://campweed.org).

**March 17**

### **St. Patrick's Day Block Party**

North Cherry Street in Monticello will come alive with Irish-themed festivities from 6 to 9 p.m., including live band, food trucks, beer garden and kid zone. For more information, check the Experience Monticello Facebook page.

**March 17-25**

### **Suwannee County Fair**

The Suwannee County Fair began more than 100 years ago and to this day continues to celebrate the best in the community with food, rides, animals, games, entertainment, music, agriculture, art and more. The Suwannee County Fair takes place at the Suwannee County Fairgrounds. For more information, visit [suwanneecountyfair.com](http://suwanneecountyfair.com).

**March 18**

### **21st Annual Wild Azalea Festival**

This festival in downtown White Springs, Fla., features the stunning Wild Azaleas that can be found along the banks of the Suwannee River. Enjoy a day of arts and crafts, food, bounce houses, car show, live entertainment, face painting, a pageant and more.

**March 21**

### **Business After Hours**

Network with members of the Madison County Chamber of Commerce from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at Greene Publishing, Inc., 1695 S. State Rd. 53, Madison, Fla. For more information, call (850) 973-2788.





# WHAT'S HAPPENIN'

**March 23–26**

## **Suwannee Spring Reunion**

Gather at the Spirit of Suwannee Music Park in Live Oak for a weekend of family fun featuring bluegrass, folk and blues music.

**March 28**

## **100th Anniversary Suwannee County Fair 5K Walk Run**

See [www.raceentry.com/100th-anniversary-suwannee-county-fair-5k-walk-run/race-information](http://www.raceentry.com/100th-anniversary-suwannee-county-fair-5k-walk-run/race-information).

**March 30–April 1**

## **Resonate Suwannee**

Three days of camping, music and art will be the highlight of the transition between March and April at Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park in Live Oak. Take time to enjoy the sounds of funk, blues, bluegrass, electronic and jam bands. For tickets and information, visit [resonatesuwannee.com](http://resonatesuwannee.com).

**March 31**

## **Duo Beaux Arts Four Hands, One Piano**

Enjoy a live concert by this internationally renowned and award-winning duo, along with dessert and coffee, at 7 p.m. in the Rumph Dining Room at Advent Christian Village, 23736 Park Center Dr, Live Oak, Fla. For more information, call (386) 658-5291.

## **APRIL**

**April 1, 2, 7, 8, 9**

## **The Madison Passion Play**

This drama depicting the trial, suffering and death of Jesus is presented on April 1 and 2 at 6 p.m., April 7 at 6:30 p.m., April 8 at 6 p.m., and April 9 at 10:30 a.m. by Madison Church of God, 771 N.E. Colin Kelly Hwy., Madison. For more information, call (850) 973-3339.

**April 6**

## **Gaelic Storm in Concert**

This multi-national Celtic group appeals to country-music folks who love their storytelling, bluegrass buffs who love their instrumentals, Celtic fans who appreciate their devotion to tradition and rockers who relish the the passion of their performance. For information and tickets, contact the Monticello Opera House at (850) 997-4242 or visit [www.monticellooperahouse.org](http://www.monticellooperahouse.org).

**April 8**

## **Downtown Monticello Easter Egg Hunt**

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., downtown merchants will have spring treats for kids. For more information, check the Experience Monticello Facebook page.

**April 8–10**

## **Eggstastic Easter Celebration**

Enjoy egg hunts, games, church services on Easter weekend from Saturday through Monday at Ragans Family Campground, I-10, Exit 258, in Madison. For more information, call (850) 973-8269.

**April 11**

## **Wings Over Suwannee**

This aviation festival shows off airplanes from pilots around the area at 1 p.m. at 13302 80th Terrace in Live Oak. A family opportunity to see and touch aviation instruments from all over.

**April 14–15**

## **Flea Across Florida**

Shoppers unite for the ultimate yard sale in Florida – a 275-mile shopping extravaganza stretching from Live Oak to Pensacola. Check with your local Chamber of Commerce for location and vending opportunities in your town.

**April 19–22**

## **Suwannee River Jam**

For more than 28 years this has been one of the biggest country music festivals in the South. The event includes hiking, barbecuing, biking, the Daisy Duke competition, golf cart parade, silent auction and tons of good music. For tickets and information, visit [www.suwanneeriverjam.com](http://www.suwanneeriverjam.com).

**April 19–22**

## **Down Home Days**

Madison's annual festival includes four days of fun events in and around downtown Madison. For more information, see page 19 or call the Madison County Chamber of Commerce at (850) 973-2788.

**April 21–May 7**

## **The Diary of Anne Frank**

This event includes a drama on the upstairs stage of the Monticello Opera House, drawn from previously unpublished portions of Anne Frank's memoirs about her coming of age during World War II, as well as a 34-banner traveling exhibit in the downstairs hall entitled "Let Me Be Myself." For information, call (850) 997-4242 or visit [www.monticellooperahouse.org](http://www.monticellooperahouse.org).





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# Glenda Hamby:



A LIFETIME OF RELATIONSHIPS



## Story and Photograph by Rick Patrick

When talking with Glenda Hamby, one of the first things noticed is the warm Southern charm that exudes from her voice. As sweet and charming as that voice may seem, one would be wise to remember that a sweet, charming voice does not equate to a demure weakness by any stretch of the imagination. That same sweet voice carries with it a sense of gentle strength that brought years of stubborn high school students to read and study Shakespeare, and state-wide politicians to yield to her vision for the smaller, rural schools around the state. Over her career, Hamby has used that voice and the gentle sweetness that comes with it, to forge relationships that have led to a lifetime of respect and friendships.

Hamby grew up in the small North Florida community of Foley, which she describes as a near perfect mill town. Before Proctor and Gamble opened the mill hundreds came to know as "Buckeye," the Foley community grew up around a saw mill, east of the seat of Taylor County, Perry, Fla. In its prime, Foley could boast of stores, a movie theater, housing for the mill workers and a school. It was in this Foley school that Hamby began her journey in education.

"The school was very good," recalls Hamby. "The teachers were excellent. There were 11 of us in the last graduating class of Foley Junior High School. Mrs. Sarah Shiver was our English teacher. We had her from seventh grade, eighth grade, ninth grade, to the 10th grade. She was very demanding. But, if you paid attention and you did what she asked of you, by golly, you could handle the language and you could write."

Hamby easily admits that the high standards and demands she encountered in her early education carried over into her career as an English teacher at Taylor County High School (TCHS). After graduating from high school at TCHS, Hamby went on to North Florida Junior College, in Madison. From there, she finished her undergraduate degree at Valdosta State College (VSC).

"There [at VSC], I was a sorority girl and I kind of chuckle, I was runner-up for Miss Valdosta."

Upon graduating from VSC, Hamby was contacted by George Collins, the principal at Gladys Morse Elementary School, in Perry, about taking a job teaching fifth grade at the school.

"At the time, I was thinking about becoming a stewardess," said Hamby. "I thought that would be exciting to travel the world. So, I was putting in applications for that. But, you know, having a guaranteed thing at home isn't a bad thing."

Hamby recalls that first year of teaching as a challenging and very rewarding experience. She told the story of a youngster named Johnny, who had killed a coral snake on the playground on the first day of school. When Johnny brought the dead snake into the classroom, rather than panicking, as many young teachers would, she told young Johnny that they could put the snake in a jar and fill the jar with formaldehyde to preserve it and "that can be our first science exhibit," as Hamby told the youngster. "I loved that little boy," recalls Hamby. "I later found out that he was in a very abusive home situation. We were able to get him out of that situation. There were several times we were able to help remove children from abusive situations and help get them placed at the Florida Sheriff's Boy's Ranch and Girls Ranch. I learned a lot in those days that you don't learn in education classes."

Throughout Hamby's teaching career, she became very adept at building relationships, both with students and professionals alike. Eventually, Hamby felt the urge to contribute at a greater level, so she decided to run for Superintendent of Schools in Taylor County. Hamby recalls many people telling her "a woman couldn't do it, a woman couldn't get elected."

"Well, I did it," Hamby said, recalling there were only four female elected superintendents in the state. "I kind of chuckled and said, 'I will be successful.'"

During her one term as Superintendent of Schools, Hamby was appointed to the statewide Board of School Superintendents.

"I caught some flak from some of

the people here because I was often away from Taylor County, testifying before the legislature about the needs of small counties."

It was during her tenure as Taylor County's School Superintendent that Hamby was able to change the way schools are funded in order to achieve a greater level of equity for small counties.

"The boys in Miami controlled [everything], and we got nickles and dimes and they got everything else," recalled Hamby. "When it came time to testify [before the legislature], we made sure the small counties were represented. It could make some of them cry, and often did. I didn't take drama for nothing," Hamby added with a wink. "We were able to work through that and get a more equitable funding formula. For the first time, a lot of small counties like Taylor, Madison [and Dixie] got more money per child than they had gotten before. Some of us paid a price for it. I do not mind that at all. When I lost that election, I taught the rest of the year down in Steinhatchee. I loved it. I loved those kids."

For many years, Florida's small counties were able to reap the benefits of Hamby's work.

After her tenure as the Taylor County School Superintendent, Hamby went on to serve the students of Bay County as the Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services. While there, Hamby continued to build relationships.

"I had the opportunity then to work with the military. It was just fascinating," said Hamby. "The general out at the base asked me, 'So, Mrs. Hamby, what is it that you want from me?' I said it was simple. I want your 'jet jockeys' in our classrooms. He looked at me and said, 'You got it.'"

From there, a program was implemented to have pilots from Eglin Air Force Base come into classrooms to provide extra assistance and instruction. Not to be outdone, both the Navy and the Coast Guard became involved in the program.

"I couldn't have asked for better community help. It was phenomenal."

Hamby was later recruited by Leon County Schools to serve as the Assistant Superintendent for Finance

and Inservice Training.

"I couldn't keep a job, but I got a pay raise every time I moved," laughed Hamby.

Here, Hamby was able to work with some familiar faces from her time in Taylor County.

"We had such good relationships, here in North Florida. We would help each other because, if I could train your folks in Madison County, or if we could put four counties together and do training, it saved us money, as well as they learned from each other."

By the time Hamby landed in Leon County, she had more than 30 years in the education field; plenty enough to retire.

After retiring, Hamby was asked to work with the United Way on a part-time basis. Hamby had served on the United Way's Board of Directors, and it was obvious that Hamby's established relationships in the region would be a great asset to the organization.

"All my professional life, I had begged for children; now I begged for everybody."

While with the United Way, Hamby spent time in Taylor, Madison, Jefferson and Leon Counties.

Now, Hamby spends her time back in Perry where she continues to be active with the Woman's Club, the library, her church and "whatever she wants to do."

Through it all, it has been the relationships she has been able to build; whether it was a small child from the Head Start program sitting in her lap, or dealing with the Speaker of the Florida House and Senate President and giving congressional testimony. That has been a key to her success. ■

# Jason Shoaf

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# THE MANY FACETS OF



# GENE HALL

## Story by Lazaro Aleman

*Photographs Courtesy of Gene Hall*

Longtime Jefferson County District 2 County Commissioner Gene Hall is generally a quiet and modest voice on the board, except when his priorities are at stake, at which instances he is apt to speak out firmly and forcibly.

These priorities, grounded in his background and experiences, are also reflective of his constituents' needs and interests. They primarily focus on affordable housing, economic development, livable wages, youth vocational training and recreational programs, and improving the average person's general welfare and standards of living.

Among Hall's many personas are a Jefferson County native with roots in the U.S. dating from the late 1700s; a college graduate with advanced degrees in geography and public administration; an elected official who has served on the Monticello City Council and is currently in his fourth term on the Jefferson County



Commission; an educator who is an adjunct professor at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and also teaches at various area schools; and a family man with grand and great-grand children.

He is additionally a member of the American Legion Post 234, Jefferson County Legislative Committee, Opera

House Board of Directors and Florida Association of Counties and National Association of Counties, as well as volunteering for Second Harvest, among other memberships and community activities.

Born in the southeast part of Monticello commonly known as Roostertown, Hall was the youngest of eight siblings. His mother, Ruth Lawrence Hall, died a month after his birth. Fortunately, Hall says, he had a good stepmother who helped to raise him and his siblings. The stepmother's name, he says, was Emma Lou Mosley Hall.

His biological mother, Ruth, he says, is buried on what was once the White House Plantation, also called El Destino, where she and her family long worked; land that now forms the St. Philip's Community. Both his parents, Hall notes, were Jefferson County natives, as were his grandparents. Hall, in fact, has been able to trace his family lineage to South Carolina, where his ancestors were first brought to the U.S. in



the late 1700s.

"We were brought to Florida as slaves from South Carolina, by way of Senegal and Nigeria in Africa," Hall says.

Dee and the late Bill Counts, at the Jefferson County Genealogical Library, helped him research his family history through slave auction sales, he says. "Which is pretty remarkable that they could trace the history of someone whose family came out of slavery," Hall says.

His father, Henry Hall, was a World War II veteran who made his livelihood as a carpenter. This occupation, which Hall calls "a pretty good trade for a black man back then," allowed his father to provide for the large family.

His father's post-war experiences, however, registered with the young Hall, who himself served in the Navy Reserve. A staff sergeant in the U.S. infantry during WWII, Henry Hall was wounded when his transport ship was torpedoed en route to the Pacific.

"A lot of men on that ship died," Hall says. "My dad got thrown overboard and was injured, but he survived and went on to fight in different battles in the Pacific."

The thing was, Hall relates, that when his father returned to the states, he wasn't afforded any of the GI Bill benefits that generally went to veterans for schooling and house purchases after the war; nor was he allowed to vote. None of the black veterans of that era were, Hall says. His father and other African-Americans, in fact, weren't able to vote until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1965, he says.

"Yea, my dad would talk about it, of course," Hall says of the period, not saying if the experience embittered his father.

The most Hall will say about the issue is that it was "unchristian."

"To fight for your country like my father did, and to come back home and not be able to go into restaurants, or stay in motels or hotels, and have to go in the back door of a lot of public facilities, it was unchristian," he says, shaking his head.

"It was just unchristian," he repeats.

Hall himself experienced segregation in his early life, going to the all-black Howard Academy until his seventh grade in 1970, when the federal government enforced integration in Jefferson County

schools.

"That's when we started having white classmates," Hall says. "We went to Howard Middle School. And from Howard Middle, we went to Jefferson County High School, where I graduated in 1976."

As he recalls it, the overall integration experience was generally a positive one.

"Most of us were glad to go to the white school," Hall says. "We wanted to find out about different cultures, music, mores and folklore. You know, find out about the other folks who lived in the county with us. We made new friends with people I still know. It was a good experience."

He allows, however, for one instance that he says "may raise some eyebrows." As he recalls it, a public swimming pool existed on the old high school campus off Water Street, behind the vocational training building that now serves as the site for Jamboree dances.

"I know some people won't want to hear this part," Hall says. "But when I was a boy growing up, before integration, there used to be a public swimming pool here. We'd pass by there and see the white kids having fun, and we prayed that one day we'd get a chance to swim in that pool. And then when the federal government said no more segregated public schools, man, we were jumping for joy. We just knew we were going to be able to go over there and jump in the water and learn how to swim. But when we integrated, they mysteriously closed down that swimming pool. That hurt. That really hurt."

The action was harmful not only to minority children, but to all children, Hall says. Because as a result of the pool's closure, many kids of both races never learned to swim and not a few drowned as a consequence, he says.

"We all knew of youths who drowned trying to swim in lakes or borrow pits," Hall says. "They didn't know how to swim, but they'd wanted to jump in the water, hot as it gets in Florida. They wanted to cool off, and they'd jumped not knowing how deep it was or knowing how to swim, and they would lose their lives."

This may explain in part, Hall concedes, his longtime fixation on bringing a public swimming pool to this community,

going back to his City Council days. The idea is one that he periodically proposes, no matter how many times it's been shot down.

"If we can get a public swimming pool here, students from the surrounding universities could teach the kids how to swim as part of their internship," Hall says. "I'm not talking about just minority kids. I'm talking about all the kids in rural areas. They deserve to have someone teach them how to swim. Not only is it a good recreation, but it keeps them out of trouble with the law, and it may save their lives one day."

Hall himself finally learned to swim at the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville, where he went to college.

"I didn't just go," Hall says. "I graduated with a degree in urban and regional planning. And I was also the first black person to get a master's degree in geography from the University of Florida."

And yes, he says, his parents put a premium on education and encouraged it as a means of self-improvement, which is why he and six of his siblings went to college.

Hall cites Judge Stephan Mickle and Dr. William Weismantle as friends and mentors of his during his UF days. Mickle was not only the first black to graduate from the UF School of Law, his was the first black law office in Gainesville, and he eventually was appointed to a federal judgeship, Hall says. Weismantle was a Jewish professor in the university's urban and planning department, who likewise took Hall under wing.

"I'll never forget either of those guys," Hall says. "They mentored and coached me academically, vocationally and socially. They groomed me."

At UF also, his white classmates taught him finally how to swim.

"I made friends there and they were always swimming like crazy, and so they taught me," Hall says. "And let me tell you, it was a deep pool down there."

What prompted him to return to Monticello upon graduation from UF and run for public office, he says, was a desire to make a difference in his hometown community.

"As a boy growing up here, I saw



the disparities and inequities in the distribution of public services,” Hall says. “In Roostertown and other black sections of the city and the county, streets and roads were unpaved or in disrepair, sidewalks were lacking, and outhouses still existed.”

These were inequities and disparities that he had learned at the UF could be remedied, he says.

“While at UF I learned about comprehensive and land-use planning, community development block grants, urban renewal; how to eradicate urban slums and such,” Hall says. “One of the big things we had here was a lot of substandard housing. And it wasn’t just the black community that I was trying to help. I’ve always tried to help the entire community, regardless of the race or skin color. It’s what I still try to do.”

Hall doesn’t recall exactly what years he was on the Monticello City Council, other than that it was in the late 1980s and that he served for about 11 years. During the period, he worked for the City of Tallahassee and Leon County Planning and Zoning Department, as the council was only a part-time job.

Afterward he moved for a short period to Atlanta, Ga., where he worked at various jobs. He returned to this area after about a year and was hired at Valdosta State University, teaching urban and regional planning and geography. From Valdosta State, he went to the Florida Department of

Transportation’s traffic and safety unit.

When District 2 County Commissioner Clifford Brown died in 2003, Hall decided to seek the seat. Brown, who had served since 1984, was the first black commissioner elected in Jefferson County, after the NAACP successfully sued the county in federal court to create single-member districts.

His decision to run for the commission seat, Hall says, meant that he had to resign his FDOT job, as Florida law prevented holding a public office and working for a state agency.

“It was a big chance I took, quitting the job,” Hall says. “We didn’t know what was going to happen. My wife Shirley was upset about it. It was a big risk. But I took it and it paid off. Yes sir, it paid off.”

Hall has held the seat since, except for a four-year term when he lost the election to Commissioner John Nelson, whom Hall describes as a good man.

“He won fair and square,” Hall says graciously of Nelson. “It was just his time to win. He did a lot to help improve the community. I admire him.”

Hall attributes his loss in that one election to having angered a number of his constituents when he voted against bringing a horse arena here that some saw as a job-creating opportunity and others saw as an entry point for organized gambling.

“There were a lot of people who were against it and didn’t want it to come,” Hall says. “But there were also a lot of people in my district who wanted it.”

Four years later, when he sought the office again, the voters returned him.

“People apparently had forgiven me,” Hall says.

A steadfast proponent of economic development, who served as chair of the North Florida Economic Development Partnership, Hall sees job creation as a priority, no matter the salary ranges. This not infrequently puts him at odds with colleagues who prefer to attract only higher-paying jobs. As he has told his fellow commissioners more than once, to many of his constituents, \$20,000 annually is nothing to sneeze at. It beats earning nothing, he says.

Hall recalls his parents talking about

the initial opposition to the now defunct Jefferson County Kennel Club (JCKC) when it first proposed coming here in the late 1950s. It took a citizens’ referendum to get the track approved, he says. For all of that, the JCKC proved a godsend economic engine that provided many jobs in the community, he says. Once it shut down, though, something else was needed to fill the economic void, he says. This is why he was glad to vote for the Trulieve medical marijuana facility, he says.

Hall applauds the many shops and small businesses that currently populate the downtown area. All the same, he keeps trying to get Walmart, Belk and other such large box stores to locate here, so that average working people can purchase items of necessity at affordable prices, he says. So far, the response has been that Monticello lacks the population numbers and traffic counts to attract such businesses, Hall says. Nonetheless, he keeps trying.

He was glad to see an Amazon facility locate recently in nearby Leon County. In his view, the western part of Jefferson County is ripe for development, particularly at the Lloyd interchange.

“Growth on the western part of this county is inevitable,” Hall says. “It’s going to happen. It’s just a matter of time.”

Jobs creation, economic development and affordable housing remain his trinity of goals, viewing the three as integral to raising people’s living standards and keeping youths engaged and out of trouble.

He recalls his own youth, when kids generally worked in the surrounding farms and ranches, picking peanuts, pecans, tobacco and other crops.

“I’ve worked since I was six,” Hall says. “We didn’t have to ask our parents for money. They told us go out and earn it, and we did. And we brought the money home and gave it to our parents, and they helped us to save it and taught us how to buy and pay for our own tennis shoes, supplies and clothes to go to school. Man, there were so many jobs here then, but yes, they were agricultural jobs. A young man who wanted to be a pretty boy, who didn’t want to put on work gloves or get dirt under his fingernails, then he wouldn’t be able to survive. But most of the kids



that we hung out with and the people we knew, they were industrious. The jobless rate was really low because everybody had something to do at the ranches, farms and plantations. It had a direct impact on the juvenile crime rate. We were working so much, we didn't have time to be breaking the law."

Hard work and education, along with a changing social climate, have indeed proven beneficial for Hall. Although born of humble means, he is now a respected elected official, lives in the Cooper's Pond Subdivision and, last last but not least, is proud to claim membership in the Jefferson Country Club, where he often goes to swim.

"This I'm especially proud about," Hall says of the country club, "because for a long period of time, due to the segregation laws, a black person couldn't go there or join. Black children couldn't go out there to play golf, or use the tennis courts or the swimming pool. I am living proof that the Good Lord can change some hearts and minds, so that we are now allowed to join." ■



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1981 STATE CHAMPION  
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# Joseph Edwards

## THE LEGEND NO ONE UNDERSTOOD

### Story by Lee Trawick

Anyone who has grown up around Lafayette County High School has heard the legend of Joseph Edwards. He has long been crowned the greatest to ever put on a uniform, and many argue he's the best running-back to come from the area. Edwards was the star running

back for the Hornets' famous 1981 State Championship team.

Edwards was born on July 23, 1964, the son of Calvin and Velma Edwards of Lafayette County. Little did anyone know at that time, their son would become the greatest Hornet to don a uniform. Edwards grew up following Hornet football and

watching players like Billy Jack Lee, Albert Watson and Jerry Massey. To him, they were the greats; they were among those he wanted to make proud. He didn't set out to be a legend.

"For me, football was just something to do with my friends. Who knew it would turn out to be something?" Edwards said.





While playing in the middle of the road in front of his house with his childhood friend, Jerry Thomas, Edwards fell in love with the game. He recalls playing football in the junior varsity ranks as an unknown.

"Back then, no one knew who you were. The coaches would watch you and put you wherever they thought they needed you," Edwards said. "For me, they put me at running the ball."

He quickly established himself as the star running back. At only 120 pounds in junior varsity ranks, Edwards was already turning heads and embarrassing opposing players and opposing coaches. Often they would say they had never seen anyone like him. Word quickly spread of his skills, amplifying the anticipation of his arrival

on the varsity stage.

There, he did not disappoint. The only difference was Edwards had grown to a whopping 140 pounds by the time he was a senior in high school. Teams would see him before the game and think, *He doesn't look like anything special. If I hit him, I could break him in half.* The problem was no one could find him until he was standing in the end zone.

"God blesses everyone with a gift. As a running back, you have an advantage over the defender, because you know where you are supposed to go," Edwards explains. "Then, sometimes, you must change directions to get to where you are going. I could read a defender's movements and knew what he would do."

In the world of sports, hunting and

fishing, stories always seems to grow larger with time. What was once a walk to school a few hundred yards away in a light mist of rain has slowly turned into walking in a snowstorm uphill. If one person tells a story, the chances of it being a tale are high. However, it may have some validity if you hear the same story repeatedly from multiple sources. For Edwards, the stories range from him telling the coach to take him out of the game and give someone else playing time because the opposing players were scared to try and tackle him and he was bored, to him having almost 200 rushing yards on three carries for three touchdowns midway through the first quarter. Assistant Coach Taylor McGrew reflects on coaching him throughout his career.

"That team had played together from junior varsity to the eventual State Championship. They would destroy teams so bad the starters would rarely play in the second half of games," McGrew said. "Joseph was so dominating, as great of numbers as he put up, people don't realize he had 90 percent of his carries in the first half because he didn't play in the second half. He had 3,800 yards rushing in three seasons. He could have easily had more than 5,000 yards, but he never played the second half in those games. He could do things with a football you can't even dream of. He would make every defender on the field look dumb without even trying."

Therefore, expectations were high for the Hornets as the storied 1981 season got underway. With Kerwin Bell as the Hornets' quarterback and standout players throughout the Hornets' roster, the Hornet nation knew the season could be special. However, no one could have imagined the wins would come in such dominating fashion. The Hornets would put up 30 points in the first quarter, while opposing teams would not have 30 yards of offense the entire game.

McGrew said, due to Edwards, "Opposing teams would have to stack the box against him, or he would rush for 500 yards a game."

With so much focus on Edwards, Bell feasted on opposing defenses. The Hornets would quickly score, letting the defense

run over teams to get the ball back in the hands of the offense. In comparison, it could be said the same for Edwards as for Bell. With so much attention given to Bell, Edwards would sometimes catch defenses on their heels.

Throughout the 1981 season, Edwards rushed for more than 1,500 yards. During this time, the Hornets hosted the Baker High School Gators, who posed the only real threat to that season with a daunting defense.

"The way they played defense was almost demoralizing," Edwards said. "They played such team football it was hard to run against them. If they got their hands on you, the first guy would hold you up until the rest of the team came and hit you so hard it would bruise your organs. We had never faced a team like that, but we knew we could wear them down."

At the end of regulation and with more than 33 carries on the night, the score was tied 7-7. In overtime, the Gators started on the 10-yard line, with first and goal. The Hornets would hold them from scoring, forcing the Gators to kick a field goal to take a 10-7 lead.

"There, McGrew pulled us together and told us, 'We will give Joseph the ball four straight plays if we have to, but we win right here, right now,'" Edwards recalls.

He remembers running on fumes, and credits McGrew for the win because he believed in him.

"I didn't know how much more I had in me," Edwards said as he was exhausted and beaten up.

At the same time, he continues to praise McGrew.

"The thing about McGrew is, he could always see the potential in his players and how far he could push us," Edwards explains. "Sure enough, he kept his word, because they gave me the ball."

Like the Gators, the Hornets began on the 10-yard line, where Bell took the snap and handed the ball off to Edwards. He battled for nine yards before being brought down inside the one-yard line. With the path to the State Championship less than one yard away, no one was going to stop them. On the second play,



Bell again handed the ball to Edwards, who found the promised land, beating the Gators 13-10 and advancing to the State Championship, where they made easy work of the Frostproof Bulldogs, 25-8, to win the only State Championship in Hornets football history.

Edwards went on to graduate from Lafayette High School in 1982. Soon after, he left Lafayette County. While he has an idea of the legacy he left on the football field, Edwards does not fully grasp the magnitude of what his play on the gridiron left behind for generations. Today, he lives in Oregon and tries to downplay his legend.

"I have heard from a few others about how people talk about the championship team, but I don't know about me being a legend," Edwards said.

Those who grew up watching the players after him often heard: "You should have seen Joseph Edwards run the ball. There's never been one like him."

Years later, when his single-season rushing record was put on notice by Eric McIntyre, even then people continued the sentiment, "You should have seen Joseph Edwards run the ball. There's never been one like him."

Today, he has long left the gridiron at

Lafayette High School; however, his legacy still stands tall at Dale Walker Field.

Despite his performance on the field, Edwards was alone; despite his brothers and sisters around him, he could confide only in his mother. No one knew his pain on and off the field. After a game on Friday night, Edwards would be so bruised and beat up he couldn't lie comfortably in his bed.

"Behind the scenes, no one saw my pain," Edwards admits.

While the bruises and sore muscles were on the surface, his pain was much more profound. Edwards grew up with the stigma of his last name and what that meant throughout Lafayette County, due to matters out of his control, all the while not saying a word. He watched his mother struggle while trying to hold their family together. He grew up visiting his father in a block

room, again, not saying a word. Edwards would often find himself looking up into the stands that cheered for him and his team, fighting the disgust he felt for what everyone knew, but no one would say. Weak against the powers that be, Edwards believed he could never escape the stigma surrounding his family, nor could he rectify the pain he felt in the confines of Lafayette County.

So, what happened to Joseph Edwards? When he walked off the football field in Frostproof as a State Champion, he never donned another set of pads. Instead, he left Lafayette County and made a life for himself away from football, where he found the peace and understanding of how to live with love and hope for others.

Today, the name "Edwards" is synonymous with greatness, a legend and a champion. The ties that bind Edwards to Lafayette County are no longer from the past, but the present day. His presence as a legend looms largely over the field as his son, Marcus Edwards, now coaches on and in his own right carved his path as another Hornet great. Along with his son pacing the Hornets sideline as the head coach, his grandson Tywan Williamson is the Hornets quarterback. ■



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*The Past  
Through Things:*

HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN  
JEFFERSON COUNTY, FLORIDA



**Story by Dr. Willet A. Boyer, III**

*Photographs Courtesy of Aucilla Research Institute*

Jefferson County is an area where evidence of the past is all around us. People have lived in this area for more than 14,000 years, and some of the oldest archaeological sites in the United States are located here in the rivers and springs and off the coast. Even if you limited the time you considered to the historical period – the last 500 years – there would still be many cultures and events to choose from. Jefferson County was a part of the territory of the Apalachee Indians and their ancestors. They encountered the first European explorers in the United States when Panfilio Narvaez and Hernando de Soto travelled through this region in 1528 and 1539, respectively.

In the 1600s, Spanish mission towns were built throughout modern Jefferson and Leon Counties, as well as the rest of peninsular Florida and coastal Georgia. In the early and mid 1800s, this region was the center of plantation agriculture in Florida, with numerous farms worked with the labor of enslaved people, as well as one of the centers of fighting in the Seminole Wars. Historical structures and sites are still standing throughout Monticello and many other areas of the county which date from this later period, as well as roads which were originally Native American trails or Spanish roads before the U.S. acquired Florida in 1821.

In addition to the visible sites which show this region's incredible historical and cultural heritage, beneath the ground's surface and under the surface of the waters of this area lies an enormous treasure trove of information about our historical past – in the form of historical archaeological sites. Until recently, much of the archaeological study of this area has focused on the more ancient cultures of this area, such as the Paleoindians, associated with



*Rev. James Thompson, of the Springfield Pallbearer Society, and Dr. Willet Boyer, III, working together at the Springfield Pallbearer cemetery / Photograph Courtesy of Sylvester Peck..*

sites such as the Page-Ladson and other underwater sites located on the Aucilla River. However, over the past several years, the Aucilla Research Institute (ARI), headquartered in Monticello, has begun a series of archaeological surveys and field projects which have concentrated on the historical archaeology of the region, from the early contact period to the present day. As an ARI Associate Scholar and historical archaeologist, the author has been involved in leading ARI's ongoing historical projects in this area that are intended to bring the region's heritage to light.

**Studying European Exploration of North America: The Early Contact Initiative**

One part of ARI's field research projects has focused on the period of early European exploration of North America. ARI's Early Contact Initiative is intended to help locate archaeological sites associated with the earliest European expeditions in this area – particularly those of Panfilio de Narvaez in 1528, and Hernando de Soto in 1539. In particular, the Early Contact

Initiative is intended to locate sites which may be linked to named Native American towns or villages within the written accounts of each of the two explorers who crossed the region.

One such site is Asile, the westernmost chiefdom of the Timucuan Indians. The accounts of the Hernando de Soto expedition indicate that Soto and his advance guard spent a night at the town of Aisle before crossing the "River of Ivitachuco" – the modern Aucilla River – by building a bridge and fighting off an attack by the Apalachee Indians, whose territory began west of the Aucilla in modern-day Jefferson County. After beating back the attack, the Spaniards came to the first town of the Apalachee, Ivitachuco, and found that the Apalachee had set fire to the town before retreating. Soto and his men spent the night camped near the burning town before advancing to the Apalachee principal town of Anhaica, in modern-day Tallahassee. Asile was recorded as being "subject to Apalachee." During the 1600s, Asile continued to be an important chiefdom, with the Spanish





*ABOVE AND BELOW: Since 2021, students associated with Jefferson County schools have been working with archaeologists and volunteers on both archaeological digs and cemetery cleanups and preservation / Photographs Courtesy of Aucilla Research Institute.*





mission San Miguel de Asile being founded in their territory. In addition, the Spanish hacienda of Governor Benito Ruiz de Salazar was founded in the territory of the Asile, on the western bank of the Aucilla River, and served as a wheat farm and cattle ranch until the hacienda was abandoned in 1651.

In 2020-2022, ARI conducted archaeological testing at a cluster of sites on the eastern side of the Aucilla, in Madison County, and on the western side of the river in Jefferson County. These sites were found to be a part of the Suwannee Valley archaeological culture, associated with the westernmost Timucuan chiefdoms. One of the sites tested, the Floyd's Mound site, had an additional upper layer with Fort Walton culture artifacts – the types of artifacts and ceramics associated with the historical Apalachee Indians. Radiocarbon dates suggested this site was occupied in the later precontact period, and the location of these sites is the area where the historical Asile chiefdom would have been. Further research at the sites will help to determine whether they may be the site of the early contact town of Asile described in the Soto expedition chronicles.

Since 2015, the Aucilla Research Institute has worked a number of field seasons at Wakulla Springs State Park in Wakulla County. During this research, a series of Fort Walton culture sites were discovered by volunteers working with ARI archaeologists. Several of these sites were found to have optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dates which showed the sites were occupied during the early contact period, and, at one of the sites, Spanish artifacts dating to the early contact period have been located. The location of these sites and the dates from both Native American and Spanish artifacts recovered suggests these sites may represent the early contact town of Aute, first encountered by the Narvaez expedition in 1528, and later visited again by the Soto expedition in 1539 – one of only three sites associated with both explorers.

In addition to field research on the early contact period, ARI is also doing laboratory studies on early contact Spanish artifacts to learn more about

their manufacture and transport to the Americas. A paper presented at the 2023 Society for Historical Archaeology conference in Lisbon, Portugal, entitled "Revising Sixteenth-Century Olive Jar Chronology: The View from Two Early Contact Sites in Florida." (Willet Boyer, John E. Worth and Caroline Peacock, 2023) analyzed Spanish olive jar sherds recovered from the Governor Martin site in Tallahassee, the 1539 winter encampment of the Hernando de Soto expedition and the Tristan de Luna settlement site from 1559-1561 in Pensacola. This research showed that sixteenth century olive jar sherds can be used to date historical sites from that period to within a decade or less, based on their shape and thickness. This information will be valuable in dating and identifying sites which have an early contact period component.

#### **African-American Archaeology in Jefferson County: Historical Sites and Cemeteries**

Since 2019, ARI's Jefferson County Historical Sites Survey has been working to identify historical sites and historical cemeteries throughout Jefferson County, particularly sites associated with the African-American community. When Florida was acquired by the United States in 1821, Jefferson County and neighboring Leon County became the center of plantation agriculture in Florida. In Jefferson County, numerous plantations were created which grew cotton using the labor of enslaved people. The Florida archives have numerous freedmen's contracts, all signed between 1866 and 1867, signed by newly freed people to work growing crops for that year, as well as militia rolls dating to 1870 for three African-American militia units created to protect African-American voters during the first elections after the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments were passed. The freedmen's contracts and the militia company muster lists from the nineteenth century have men and women with family names that are still prevalent in Jefferson County today, providing documentary proof that African-American families in this region have historical roots dating back nearly 200 years into the past.

ARI's Jefferson County survey began in 2019 to identify historical cemeteries and historical archaeological sites which had not previously been recorded in Florida's Master Site File. Sites recorded in the file are assigned site numbers and publicly recognized as cemetery sites and historical sites, providing them some protection against disturbance. Jefferson County originally had only 15 such recorded cemetery sites when ARI's survey began; today, 153 such sites have been recorded for the county, with more being discovered and recorded as the survey continues. Many of the cemetery sites are associated with historical plantation sites or with homes or small communities which no longer exist, which makes the recording and preserving of the sites even more important.

The recording of these sites has only been possible because local members of the community have been willing to share information about their family histories and community history with archaeologists and researchers studying Jefferson County's past. Many residents have been generously willing to help with identifying places, their ages and importance to the community, including, among others, Rev. James Thompson, head of the Springfield Pallbearer's Association; Mr. Thomas Glenn; County Commissioner Eugene Hall; and Mr. Marsaun Harris, whose families are associated with the Old Mount Zion Family Cemetery in western Jefferson County; members of the Gallon family, including Dennis Gallon, Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Gallon McGhee, Washington Gallon, and others; Alonzo Hardy, local historian; Ms. Jacqueline Seabrooks, of the Property Appraiser's office, and head of the Jefferson County Cemetery Preservation Association; Dr. Sylvester Peck, of FAMU, author of a history of the pallbearer's societies; and many other members of the community whose knowledge of the sites and of their history has been critical in understanding the cemetery and archaeological sites and their ties to the people of the region.

Since 2021, students associated with Jefferson County schools have been working with archaeologists and volunteers on both archaeological digs





*The Floyd's Mound site had Fort Walton culture artifacts associated with the historical Apalachee Indians.*

and cemetery cleanups and preservation. Students learning American history helped to excavate the detached kitchen at the Byrd/Chamberlain archaeological site, associated with the Trelawn Plantation founded in 1836, over the 2021-2022 field season, as well as assisting with testing at the Palmer site in the western part of Monticello. In 2022-2023, students have helped to clean and restore damaged areas at the Stokes/Sanders cemetery in northeastern Jefferson County and at the 1821 City Cemetery in downtown Monticello. Through direct, “hands-on” educational programs involving local students, ARI and Jefferson County Schools have helped both to teach students local,

American and world history through historical archaeology in the field, and to help students see their ties and their families’ to the incredible historical and archaeological heritage of this region.

#### **For the Future**

Through the use of ground-penetrating radar, ARI archaeologists and volunteers hope to more clearly identify and define cemeteries in this region to allow for the sites’ greater protection. Ground-penetrating radar, or GPR, allows researchers to identify burial areas and structural foundations below the ground surface without digging and excavation, which lets sites remain undisturbed and

thereby better protected and preserved for the future. As the field programs for both the Early Contact Initiative and the Jefferson County Historical Sites Survey continue, it is hoped that more local students and members of the community can be directly involved in working to preserve our community’s past long into the future.

Anyone who would be willing to share their knowledge of the past, or who would like to find out more about ARI’s field programs or historical research, can contact Dr. Willet Boyer of the Aucilla Research Institute at [landoftherivers@hotmail.com](mailto:landoftherivers@hotmail.com). ■





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## THE DEAN OF SHERIFFS

# Harrell Reid

**Story by Lee Trawick**

*Photographs Courtesy of Harrell Reid*

"The idea is not to live forever, but create something that will."

– Andy Warhol

Although born to Harry and Kathryn Reid in Valdosta, Ga., on March 31, 1947, Harrell Reid has been a lifelong resident of Hamilton County. His father owned a funeral home in Hamilton County that he hoped his son would one day take

over. However, despite the path that was created for him, Reid had other plans. Upon graduating high school in 1965, he moved to Gainesville, Fla., where he could attend the University of Florida and played football. He laughs at his claim to fame while playing for the Florida Gators, which was the fact that he got to play with Steve Spurrier for one season.

Reid graduated from the University of Florida in 1971 with a Bachelor's Degree

in Physical Education. From there, he began following in his mother's footsteps by becoming a teacher. However, he would only teach for one year before deciding to join the other family business by going back to school in Miami, Fla. for his mortuary license in 1972. Reid then returned home to work for his father.

He felt uneasy about himself, feeling his calling was elsewhere. Growing up, Reid had a neighbor who was a police





officer. Over the years, he began feeling more and more drawn to a career in law enforcement. Eventually, he began going on ride-alongs with deputies in Hamilton County before joining the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office under then-Sheriff Charlie Columbus Rhoden. When he started, he was working one night a week and on weekends.

Then, in 1988, Reid decided to throw his name in the political ring by running for Hamilton County Sheriff. At the time, Rhoden was the longest-running Sheriff in Florida, having served for 32 years. Because of Rhoden's legacy, Reid understood being Sheriff would bring forth enormous responsibility, along with a standard of excellence. He understood the best way to honor his predecessor was to strive to live up to the responsibility bestowed upon him by the citizens of Hamilton County.

As his tenure began, Reid slowly and quietly began building a resume that no one would rival. Then, in 1991, just three years after being elected Sheriff, he was hand-picked to attend the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) National Academy. This 10-week program prepares those in leadership roles to better understand how to use the local resources that surround them. It also helps teach those in leadership roles how to delegate



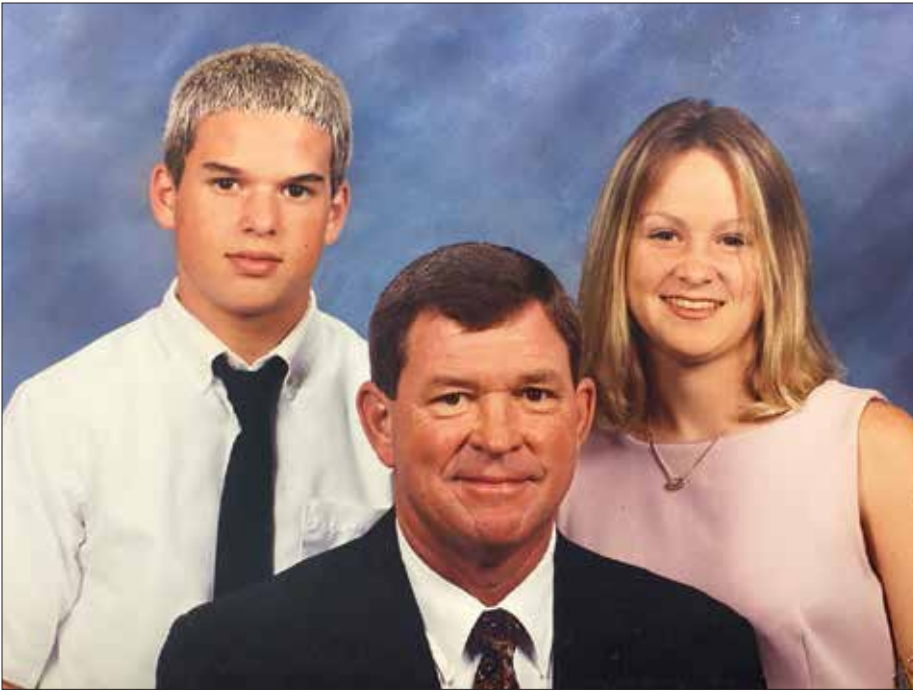
responsibilities when dealing with multiple incidents or situations of such magnitude that would require managing outside sources to work together.

In honor of his predecessor, Sheriff Reid has built his own legacy. Although he now owns his family's business, Reid has carved a new generation's path in his family, as both his son and daughter have chosen to follow law-related careers

"I catch 'em, my daughter puts them away, and my son makes sure they stay there," Sheriff Reid said with pride. His son currently works for the Department of Corrections, while his daughter is an attorney.

In 1994, Sheriff Reid also served as a board member for the Florida Sheriffs Risk Management Fund. His active role on this board ensured sheriffs were protected with





Hamilton county Sheriff Harrell Reid with his children.



their own self-insurance fund. He has also served with distinction as a member of the Florida Medical Examiners Commission. In addition, he has continually been appointed to this commission since 1997 by three different Governors, including Lawton Chiles, Jeb Bush and Rick Scott.

In July 2010, Sheriff Reid became the 99<sup>th</sup> President of the Florida Sheriffs Association. During his year as President, he led efforts to combat the state's

prescription drug epidemic. Due to his fortitude and leadership, law enforcement was given the tools to address Florida's deadly "pill mill" epidemic by ensuring Florida's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) was not abolished. While former Governor Scott was initially hesitant about it, Sheriff Reid remained true to his convictions and played a significant role in the success of HB 7095, which passed during the 2011 legislative

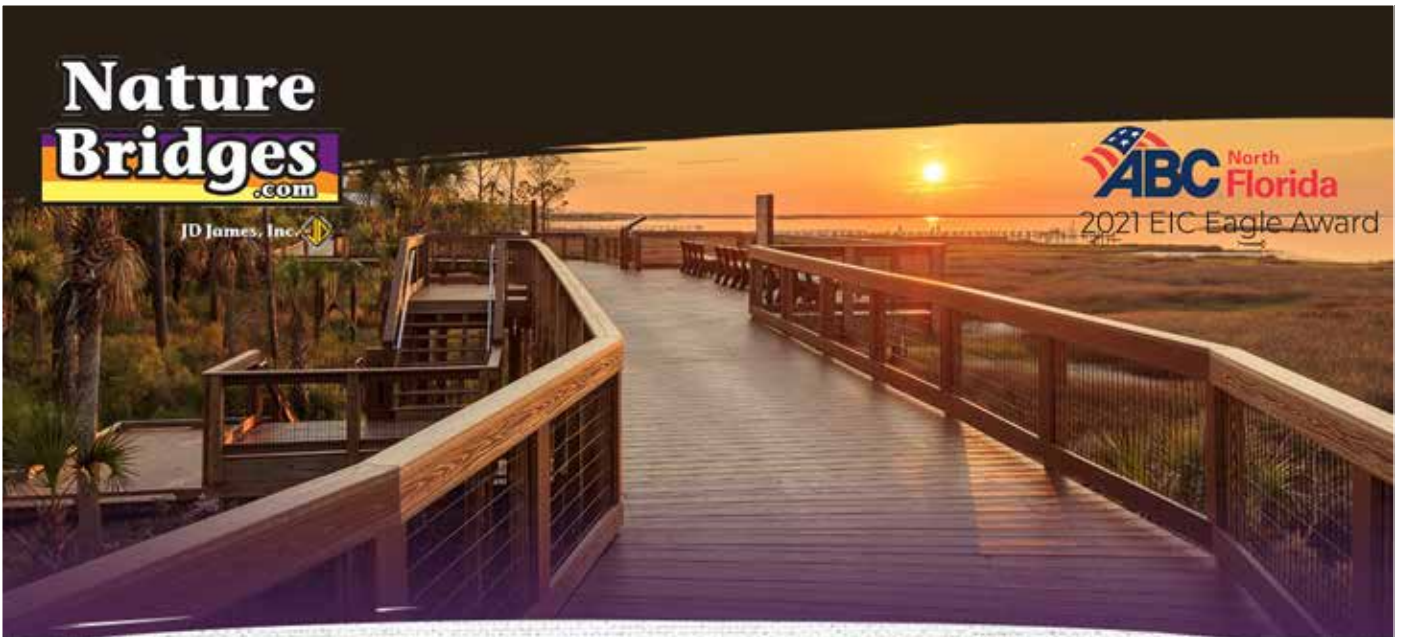
session.

Despite his long and decorated career, Sheriff Reid still considers himself a farmer. He loves being on his 200-head cattle farm, where he also grows peanuts and spinach. He takes pride in and has the most significant gratitude for the residents of Hamilton County for entrusting their safety to him. Today, Sheriff Reid has beaten cancer three times, been shot at during a high-speed chase and has stood on the front lines longer than anyone in Florida, having been in the role for 35 years.

When talking about his career and the longevity he longevity with which he has been blessed, surprised. He looks over his deputies today and thinks back to how he once worked with their grandfathers on the force. While many may focus on his long career, for which he is grateful, Sheriff Reid's career has been dedicated to building a law enforcement agency the of which the residents of Hamilton County can be proud.

He was on the path of returning to the family business when he decided to make a gamble by creating a path to the unknown. Today, that gamble has paid off. The name "Reid" will forever be etched into the hearts and minds of Hamilton County, and will stick with those in Florida who are involved in law enforcement. ■





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# Jeff Sturms & Jay Roberts-Sturms:

*Jeff and Jay are enjoying their peaceful life in Madison.*

## *Music and mixology make a perfect pairing*

**Story by Mickey Starling**

*Photography by Mickey Starling and  
Courtesy of Jeff Sturms and Jay Roberts-  
Sturms*

Around 2001, Madison resident Jeff Sturms was already an established guitarist whose skills landed him a dream job as a member of George Strait's band. Strait was

on tour in Columbus, Ohio, and Sturms noticed an attractive lady on the front row while tuning his guitar.

"She's cute," thought Sturms as he shot several smiles in her direction.

The young lady, Jay Roberts, didn't seem to notice, but her mother certainly did.

"That guitarist keeps smiling at you," said the observant mother.

"Oh, he's just doing his job," said Jay.

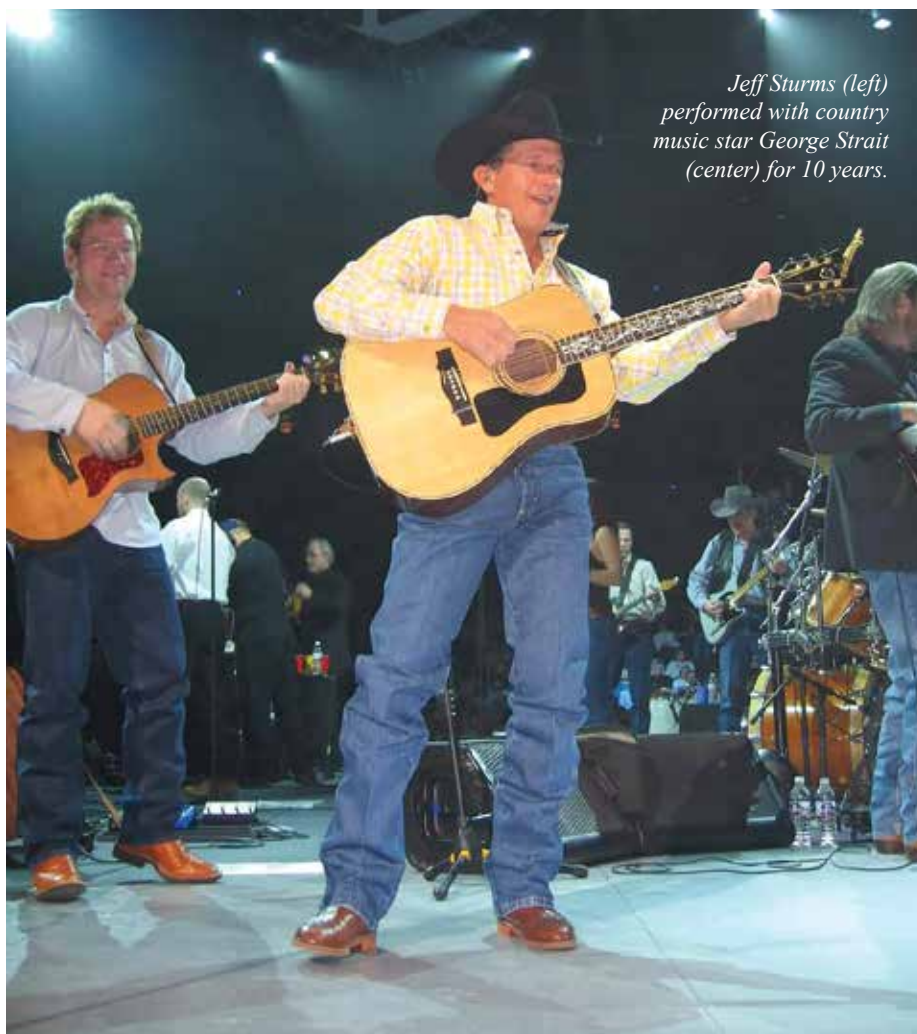
As the concert ended, it was time to sign autographs. As fate would have it, one of the band member's pens ran dry, so Sturms noticed that Roberts happened to be waving a Sharpie at him. She politely



*Jay demonstrates why she was in high demand as a flair bartender and mixologist.*



*Jeff Sturms (left) performed with country music star George Strait (center) for 10 years.*



loaned him the pen just before the security team began ushering the fans out of the building. Sturms quickly spoke up.

“They are with me,” he announced.

Afterwards, Sturms invited his new friends for drinks and a chance to meet the rest of the band. Roberts describes her mother as George Strait’s biggest fan, so accepting the invitation was an easy choice.

Roberts and Sturms became long-distance friends over the next 15 years. Roberts lived in Indiana and Sturms was based in Texas, but they met up on a few occasions, once at the Country Music Association Awards (CMA) in 2005 and again in 2013 at a George Strait concert in Knoxville, Tenn. They began dating a couple of years later and eventually married in 2017, to which Roberts’ mother responded, “It’s about time!” The couple had a “lights out” kind of wedding, tying the knot during the solar eclipse, in Hopkinsville, Ky.

Soon, the newlyweds desired a more relaxed pace and decided to move to Pensacola, Fla., where they remained for four years. They decided to move eastward, with about six homes on their radar between Crestview and Jacksonville. Their first stop was in Madison, where they spent some time at the former Wayne and



*This photo captured the first time Jeff and Jay met, at a George Strait concert, where Jeff was a member of the band. Fifteen years of friendship eventually blossomed into marriage in 2017.*

Gail Walker residence. They quickly fell in love with the home and its breathtaking scenery. They were hooked. Madison was their new home.

The couple enjoy the laid-back atmosphere and kind demeanor of the community, which is worlds away from the celebrity both of them had known previously. Roberts-Sturms is an accomplished mixologist, who worked at the top of her profession for about 16 years.

A mixologist is a highly-skilled bartender who does much more than serve drinks. They create drinks, using

their extensive knowledge of what flavors pair well together. They are also often entertainers, if they have learned the art of flairing, who juggle bottles and glasses with great dexterity, and they are known for setting some of the most mesmerizing fires a bar counter has ever seen.

One of the traits these two share is a passion for what they do. For Jeff, it began when he was 12 years old. His family was living in Italy, and Jeff had already honed his skills on the trumpet and piano when he set his sights on the guitar. He was a natural with many instruments and the guitar was no exception. He and

members of his family began playing in bars and nursing homes, along with many other locations. Always seeking to improve his skills, Jeff attended Webster's Conservatory, in St. Louis, Mo., for two years. He later joined the U.S. Army, playing in the Army Band for three years. Jeff then transitioned to the Air Force Band. During this time, he made music-industry connections in Nashville, Tenn., later moving there with only \$75 in his pocket and his truck. He ended up taking a job with a telephone answering service at Opryland.

Two weeks later, his talents were discovered after auditioning for Merv Griffin's Players, where he was offered a position as a band leader. Jeff left this position after 15 months, becoming the band leader for a show called "Rockin' at Rockville High," which was located in a park in Austin, Texas. The park was soon purchased by Six Flags. Company executives took a liking to his talents and hired Jeff as their music director. He left that job a year later and began writing shows on his own for the next 10 years, which is where George Strait comes in.

In 1998, Jeff got a call from an associate of Strait's, asking if he would be willing to be a guitarist for Strait if the need arose. Not aware that he was being set up, Jeff agreed to be available. Within about a week, he found himself on George Strait's bus, headed for a concert in New Orleans. Strait approached him during practice and thanked him for coming aboard.

"Hope you enjoy the ride," said Strait.

Jeff enjoyed the ride so much that he remained with the band for 10 years.

In 2010, Jeff moved back to Nashville to be near his ailing father. A touch of fame found him again as he received a call, this time requesting his services on the keyboard, playing about seven gigs with Eddie Money, while on tour in South Florida. "Eddie was a great man, extremely passionate about music.

"You have to be on your game at this level," said Jeff. "Mistakes were grounds for getting fired."

Currently, Jeff does remote sessions, building complete songs from digital pieces that are sent to him.



"I'm often asked what I play," said Jeff. The answer is always "anything that pays."

Jay began her path towards mixology as an entrepreneur. She was a partner in an auto detailing business when she had an opportunity to open a restaurant in Frankfort, Ind. While working there, Jay developed a passion for recipes related to both food and beverages. That passion eventually got her hired as a bar manager at a nearby country club. Somewhere along the way, Jay watched the movie *Cocktail* and was fascinated with the art of flair bartending. She enrolled at Midwest Bartenders School in Indianapolis, Ind.

"I was good with mixology, but I wanted to learn how to flair," said Jay.

It didn't take her instructors long to realize that Jay knew her stuff, so they asked her to begin substitute teaching at the school. When the country club she was employed with closed, Jay began teaching full time.

Her many skills soon got the attention of companies in charge of running bars at large venues.

"I think the fact that she was a talented, tall and beautiful blonde also helped," said Jeff, with a proud twinkle in his eye.

In one big event, a Justin Timberlake concert at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Jay was informed that the cameras were coming to her at some point, in order to showcase her flair bartending.

"They had me confined to a pretty small area," remembers Jay. "I was nervous, but the instincts kicked in, and it went great. My phone started blowing up as my friends saw me on TV."

Over the years, Jay did numerous Indy 500 races, Kentucky Derby races and Indiana Pacers games, as well as many concerts. At each venue, she was asked to provide signature drinks for those occasions. For instance, Jay created a blue and yellow cocktail, matching the Pacers' colors, called "Pacers' Pride." The drink is still on the menu today. Whether creating a new drink took a few hours or most of a weekend, Jay was up for it.

"I loved the challenge," said Jay. "I was always doing something different. It



was a lot of fun."

Today, Jay works from the comfort of home, providing online sales and services and helping businesses improve their social media presence.

"I still practice flairing so I don't lose my touch," says Jay.

This dynamic duo of talent has touched many people with their diverse abilities and they continue to do so, and folks like George Strait and Justin Timberlake wouldn't be the same without them. ■



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Family Entertainment | 6 pm      Beer Garden | 7 - 9 pm  
Kids Show | 7 pm
- JUNE 17** Kiwanis 5K Run & Walk | 8:15 am      Kids Show | 11:30 am  
Vendor Village | 9 am - 4 pm      Beer Garden | 12 - 4 pm  
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