

The Front Porch

Where The Tea Is Sweet and the Talks Are Long

Mar/Apr 2026

Keeping Things Local with **ALL REALTY SERVICES**

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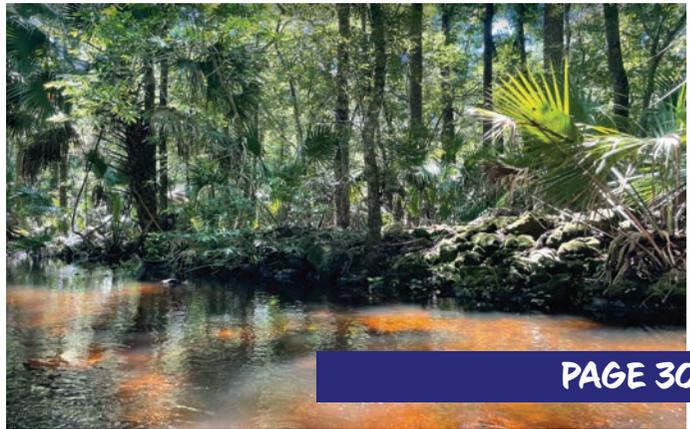
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The Front Porch *Meet Our Staff*



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SITTIN' ON THE PORCH WITH...

CAPT. CHRIS COOKS

Story and Photograph by Hailey Waldo

By the time you sit down with Madison Police Department (MPD) Captain Chris Cooks, you quickly realize you're not just talking to a law enforcer. You're talking to a man shaped by faith, family, sacrifice and a deep love for his hometown.

Born in Jacksonville, Cooks' story truly began when his father brought the family back home to Madison.

"My dad originally was from Madison, so we moved back here," he said. "Ever since then, I've been in Madison my entire life, and I love Madison."

He doesn't hesitate when he says it.

"A lot of people say it's a small town or whatever, but I love the closeness of Madison," Cooks explained. "Sometimes you get aggravated and leave for vacation for a little while, but when you see that sign that says 'Welcome to Madison,' you feel that 'I'm home' feeling. And everybody is like family here."

That closeness, that sense of family, would go on to shape his life's work. As a young boy, he watched his uncle serve as a deputy in Madison County.

"I remember seeing the work he was doing and I liked that," he said. "So, I thought maybe I'd give it a chance."

Even earlier than that, he recalls something that feels like destiny.

"When I was in high school years ago, I had a dream where I became a law enforcer, not realizing it would come true," he said.

His professional path began with the Department of Juvenile Justice, where he worked on and off for nearly 19 years, helping young people in need of therapeutic assistance. He later spent time with the Department of Corrections, but it was a simple ride-along that changed everything.

"When I came home, Officer Joe Alexander, a friend of mine, offered for me to ride with him," he recalled. "I rode with him and next thing I know, I needed to be a police officer. I enjoyed that experience."

In 2003, he officially joined the MPD, the beginning of what would become a nearly quarter-century career.

He worked patrol for two years before being promoted to corporal and serving as a school resource officer. He later became parole sergeant for more than a decade, then moved into investigations as a sergeant, then lieutenant of patrol and eventually captain. He's held this role for the last three to four years.

"It's been an interesting career.

I've held every position in the police department," he said, adding that his favorite chapter was investigations.

"Overall, investigations," he said eagerly. "I got to figure out the unknown of what people were hiding. Every day was different. Every day had a new case. The workload was tremendous. There's no such thing as working investigations and having nothing to do."

Now, as captain, his responsibilities are broader and heavier.

"I basically handle all operations of the police department," he explained. "I oversee patrol, complaints, investigations. It's very busy dealing with administrative stuff. Very seldom do I get to go out into the public and do things I like, such as patrolling."

Patrol, he says, allowed him to truly know the community.

"You get to meet everybody," he said. "Anybody comes to town, you say, 'Hey, how are you doing? Are you from here?' Most of the time, people will talk to you, especially during the holidays."

The holidays remain some of his favorite memories on the road.

"Everybody is coming home to visit. People you haven't seen in 10 to 15 years, classmates, family – there's nothing like it."

Still, Cooks is quick to point out that law enforcement is not about recognition or wealth.

"The thing about this career, you need a heart," he said firmly. "A lot of people don't last because they don't have the heart for this career. You're not going to get rich. I'm not here to get rich. Most officers have had extra jobs to take care of their obligations and families. We don't do this for fame. We're here for the heart to help people."

He often shares a saying that has stayed with him: "We don't get paid for

what we do. We get paid for what we might have to do."

In 2005, he received the statewide Lee McGee Police Officer Award, recognition that made him proud but didn't change his perspective.

"I worked my way through the ranks," he said. "It wasn't given to me."

More important than awards are the life lessons the job has taught him.

"The biggest life lesson I learned as a law enforcement officer is don't be so quick to judge people," Cooks said. "I've seen some people down today and six months later, with our help, become great citizens."

His service to others doesn't stop when the uniform comes off. Around town, many know him as the "grill master," a title earned not through competition but compassion. It started by simple acts of kindness.

"I started off by helping people that were sick, so I'd grill to raise money for those people," he said. "The goal was to help people pay medical bills and stuff like that."

Encouraged by others, he eventually opened a part-time barbecue food truck business, but the mission always remained to help people. He hosted countless fundraisers and community meals, including one in Greenville, where he and a small group fed the entire town.

"Not just hot dogs and hamburgers," he added proudly. "We gave them real food – ribs, chicken, chicken and rice, green beans and rolls – a full course meal. If you're not going to do it 100%, don't do it at all."

He believes in the power of people, especially in a small town.

"People are all you need," he said. "Sometimes the only thing you gotta do is put something in play, and if it's something to help others, people typically don't mind giving a helping hand. That's what's amazing about people and amazing about Madison. There are so many resources around here."

Often, the giving is done quietly.

"I walk up to people and say, 'Here, don't tell anyone where this comes from,'" he shared. "Just to see people's faces when you do that, that's enough for

me.”

He even donated his own salary on multiple occasions, choosing not to publicize it. One fundraiser especially meaningful for him supported Tammy Fletcher, the department’s longtime administrative assistant.

“She basically raised all our officers,” Cooks said. “She trained more officers than anyone I knew. She took care of us all.”

Faith is the thread that runs through everything he does. In addition to serving as captain, Cooks is pastor of St. Matthews A.M.E. Church, in Greenville. He has attended North Florida College, St. Leo, Baptist College of Florida and completed seminary coursework in theology.

“Maybe after I retire I’ll finish a degree in theology,” he said, “probably pastor full time.”

Eligible for retirement in January 2027 after nearly 24 years with the department, he approaches the future with steady faith.

“We’re taught not to worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will hold its own,” he said. “I don’t worry about death because it’s guaranteed. I worry about not being able to take care of my family.”

Family is at the center of everything he does, a wife of 31 years, three sons and 13 grandchildren.

“When people say ‘best friend,’ that’s my best friend,” he said of his wife. “She’s a nurse and I’m a police officer, but we rarely talk about work at home. I don’t want to relive what I encountered, and she doesn’t either.”

Cooks sleeps with two phones, always available.

“My wife will say, ‘Do you realize what you were telling those officers in the middle of your sleep?’” He laughed, “I can police in my sleep.”

To him, leadership means sacrifice.

“I’ve worked part of my guys’ shifts during the holidays so they could be home with their families,” he said. “You can’t be a good leader if you can’t be a good follower. A leader cares for all the people he has out there. That’s why I will always be available.”

The job has brought stressful moments, cases that weigh heavy on the heart, especially those involving children and the elderly.

“You really want to get me fired up, you mess with a kid or elder,” he said. “This job ain’t for the weak of heart.”



You’re going to see some stuff.”

And yet, after the long days and sleepless nights, peace awaits at home.

“No matter how hard the day was, when I pull up to my house, I know there’s peace,” he said with a smile.

Additionally, to help with the stress, Cooks expressed his love for bass fishing: “I enjoy helping people, but in my leisure time, I enjoy bass fishing. That’s the focus point of everything, just to get away from the things I encountered during the week. So, every other week, I try to go fishing to relax.”

When asked what he hopes remains long after the badge is set down, his voice softens.

“When people get up at the funeral and talk about the things someone did, I want my kids and wife to hear that I helped people,” he explained. “Some

things I do, I don’t even tell them, but I want to leave a legacy.”

He paused, reflecting on the decades of service.

“It’s not about the rewards or being seen,” he said. “It’s about helping somebody along the way and smiling at them, knowing you took the time.”

To finish off, Cooks recalled a saying he abides by.

“One of my favorite Bible quotes: ‘Cast the bread upon the water, and in many days, it will return,’” he said. “I believe if I keep on casting, it will reward me. I don’t know how it will, but it’s going to return.”

On the porch, in a patrol car or behind a grill, Captain Cooks has built a life rooted in heart. In Madison, that kind of legacy feels right at home. ■



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COVER STORY

Staying local with **ALL REALTY SERVICES**



The All Realty Services team includes, left to right, Alicia Radtke, Catherine Hope Sorenson, Lynette Connell Sirmon, Rachel Sparling, Blake Burnett and Benjamin Marinelli.

Story by Hailey Heseltine

Photographs Courtesy of All Realty Services

With 48 years of real estate experience, Lynette C. Sirmon, owner of All Realty Services in Monticello, knows a thing or two about what it means to serve your community.

Sirmon grew up in rural Jefferson County, where she spent her days gardening and learned how to drive a tractor before a car. She was raised by her mother, Jeanette Connell, and step-father, Winston Connell, a seventh generation Jefferson County resident. Jeanette, who is originally from Jacksonville, found her way into the community, and Winston's heart, during a visit.

"She had family in Greenville, Florida," Sirmon says. "When she came to visit them, there were not any gas stations in Greenville, and the nearest gas station was here in Monticello. She came here to buy gas and met my stepdad, who was a gas station attendant at that time."

The rest was history, as they say, and Jeanette became an involved citizen and member of the Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce. She also founded and owned North Florida Abstract and Title, which she created in 1974 after learning the ropes from a friend and local attorney. It was there that Sirmon had her first job as an abstractor researcher, and there that she became acquainted with working with property and its legacy.

"My mother loved the historical nature of it, and she gave me the love for it as well," she says. "It's a history of landownership. You look at the heritage and genealogy, so to speak, of who's owned property. So that's what my mother did, and that's what I did first, when I was 14. To this day, I remember reading about monetary and financial records, in that old handwriting, every word ... It was very intriguing. That feeling of wanting to help in my community, I got it from my mother."

Meanwhile, it was Winston Connell who was the first in the family to decide to pursue a career in real estate. He was an engineer with the Department of Transportation in Tallahassee when a friend introduced him to real estate around 1977. After becoming involved in developments in Havana, Florida, he realized that there weren't many real estate companies in Monticello at the time, and he could be among the first to offer a service that wasn't easily accessible there. He decided to get a real estate license. In 1978, he attended the Bert Rodgers School of Real Estate in

Tallahassee, and after passing the course, took the state exam. The same year, he opened his own business.

While Sirmon was attending high school at Aucilla Christian Academy (ACA), she dreamed of becoming a nurse to serve other people full-time. Her parents, however, had their own plans for her. Though she had no interest in the real estate at the time, both of her parents heavily encouraged her to get her license anyway – so strongly encouraged her, in fact, that they signed her up for classes. At 17, while still in her senior year at ACA, she went to North Florida College (then North Florida Junior College) three nights per week to study real estate. After graduating from ACA in 1978, she had to wait until she was 18 to take her real estate exam.

"Truthfully, I just went along with the flow," recalls Sirmon. "You know, your mom and daddy tell you that this is what you're gonna do, and I was still at that level of being a good child and not bucking the system, so I just did what they told me to do whether I liked it or not. In my mind's eye, real estate was just gonna be a sideline."

Of course, real estate didn't end up being just a sideline. It became her lifetime career, resonating with her in ways she didn't expect.

"I learned that the real estate business is a service, and just as meaningful as nursing, too. I feel like the thing that I've enjoyed the most about my real estate life is the lives that I've touched and the lives that have touched me," explains Sirmon.



All Realty team members Benjamin Marinelli and Blake Burnett.



“Whenever someone passes away, and the family realizes they don't want the home anymore, or they can't afford it, or there's been divorces, then they have big decisions to make, because it's a big life change, I'm involved. Then there's inheritances,

and the excitement of seeing someone purchase their first home ... Those are the things that have intrigued me the most through the years. It's like being sort of a legacy, a living legend to see the generations. I've sold to people three and four different times, three and four generations of life I've been involved

with.”

She started as a sales associate for her father's business. In 1979, she became the youngest female real estate broker in the state of Florida, serving as a broker associate for many years. What changed her mind about real estate? She started seeing the difference that she



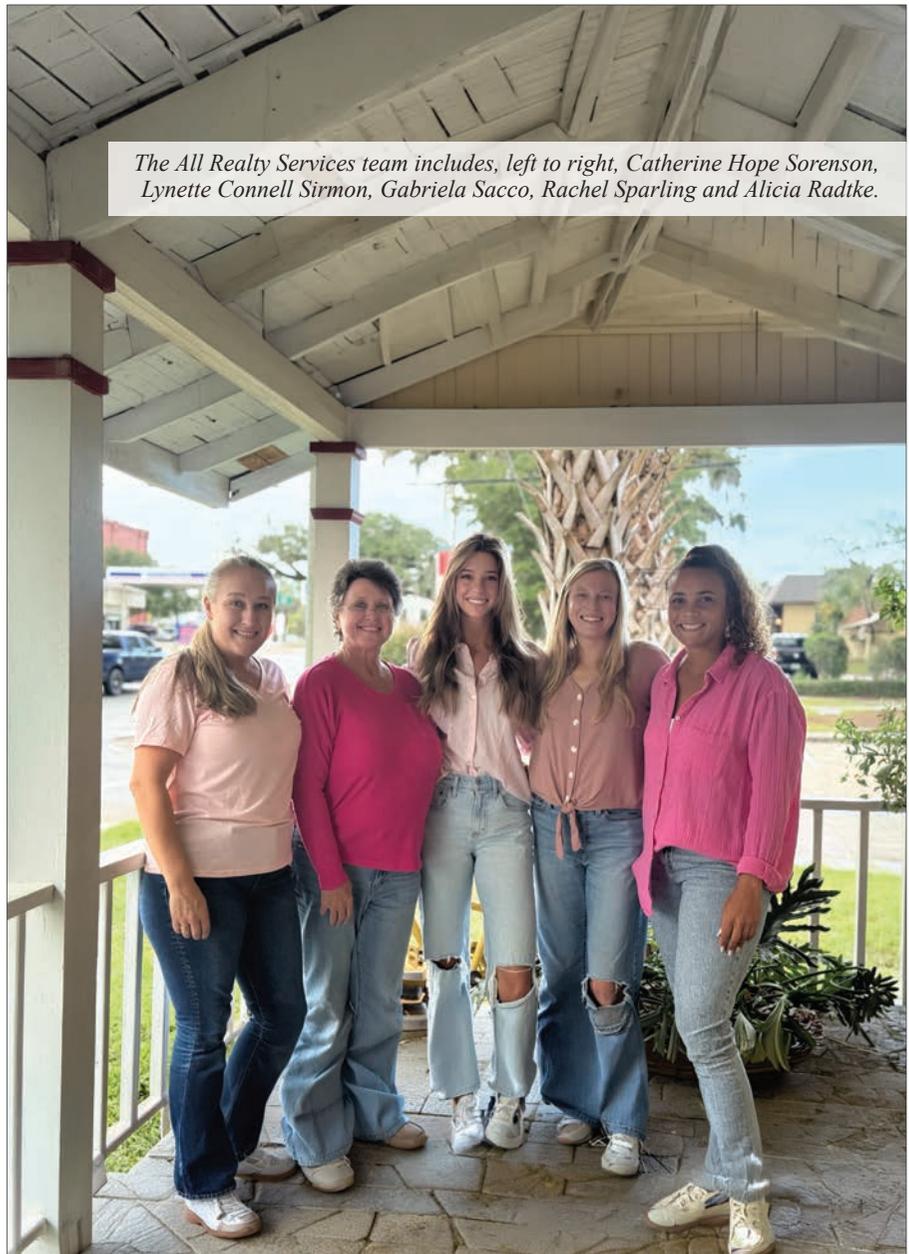
could make in other people's lives as "a trusted steward of land, homes and people, who guides families through life's transitions with integrity, knowledge and a deep respect for community and legacy."

"When clients need someone, they need somebody they can trust. They need to know that somebody's listening, and is gonna watch out for them and help them and hold their hand," she explains. "When it's after a loss, and there's an estate, you need to have somebody you can trust. You can just say, 'I'll handle it, I'll take care of it.'" She continues, "I help people during the most volatile times of their lives. Whether it's their first time home buying, whether somebody's died, whether somebody's got a divorce, it involves the biggest decision making. It soon became something that I knew I was so good at, because I was so good at listening. I was so good at hand holding. I was so good at caring."

In a field where trust and reputation are so important, Sirmon had an advantage in growing up locally and building multigenerational ties from a young age. She attributes much of her success to her upbringing and faith.

"Having a rural upbringing was fantastic, because it gave me perspective, a great work ethic and the ability to understand walking a mile in another man's shoes," she says. "Because I was raised a Christian, I was trustworthy and honorable. And it came easy, being honest and trustworthy, because there is just no other way. It's the only way. Besides, I already had respect for the land and family farms, because we had land and a family farm ourselves, and I understand the hard work of picking up pecans and feeding the baby calf that lost its mother. So, I already had the respect that goes along with it, and so to speak, to be on both ends, to understand the respect that's needed, and then to be able to give it."

Though she had side hustles for most of her adult working life, real estate remained her priority. She stuck with it across decades, navigating shifts in technology from snail mail to fax machines to the internet to the modern cell phone, which has allowed her to be more flexible in her work. In 2003, Sirmon opened the first All Realty office in Madison while she was living in the city. Then, after Winston Connell retired in 2015, Sirmon purchased the family company and also renamed it All Realty Services. The name acknowledges every aspect of real estate, she says, from auctions to rentals to acquisitions and



The All Realty Services team includes, left to right, Catherine Hope Sorenson, Lynette Connell Sirmon, Gabriela Sacco, Rachel Sparling and Alicia Radtke.

“My mother loved the historical nature of it, and she gave me the love for it as well,” she says. “It’s a history of landownership. You look at the heritage and genealogy, so to speak, of who’s owned property. So that’s what my mother did, and that’s what I did first, when I was 14. To this day, I remember reading about monetary and financial records, in that old handwriting, every word ... It was very intriguing. That feeling of wanting to help in my community, I got it from my mother.”

- Lynette C. Sirmon

more.

All Realty Services is staying true to its roots as a generational business. Sirmon has been married to John Sirmon for 21 years, and they have two sons, Blake Burnett and Jacob Burnett. Blake works for All Realty Services, and Sirmon says that she hopes her grandson will someday join the business as well.

Today, the location of operations has shifted back to Monticello, following the recent closure of the Madison office. After the building suffered damage from back-to-back hurricanes and began to be difficult to maintain, she decided to move operations entirely to Monticello.

"I had damages at the Madison location, in Monticello, in my own home. The only way to save them was to repair them, so I had to spend a lot of money. It was the first time I felt the punch of spreading myself thin. It took more of me than I had. I needed to figure a way to lighten my responsibilities, and getting a 2,500-square-foot building off my plate was the first decision. The Monticello office has more blood, sweat and tears, and there's an apartment here that will one day be my home ... This office will probably always be an our office."

Even though the brick-and-mortar location in Madison has been shuttered, the company is still conducting business across North Florida, as well as in Georgia and Alabama.

"I don't want people to think I'm getting out of the real estate business because I've closed the Madison office," she clarifies. "I'm still answering the phone. I'm still selling land and homes. I'm still doing business in Suwannee, in Taylor, across North Florida. It's just that people don't do business the same way they used to. Real estate has changed from what it was when it was 1978, and I was a young girl, and you had to be in an office to get business done. Now you can do it on the fly." Sirmon says, "Everything's the same with the business. I'm just doing it from the car. From the soccer bleachers. From the front porch, and the woods, and the farms and the fields. Just because I don't have that brick-and-mortar location anymore doesn't mean that anything else has changed. If you call me and say, 'Come over and meet me at this house,' I'm on my way."

Aside from Sirmon, All Realty Services has six licensees: Rachel Sparing, Catherine Hope Sorensen, Blake Burnett, Benjamin Marinelli, Alicia Radtke and Gabriella Sacco.

Speaking of the All Realty team, Sirmon praises, "They have listened to



At age 21, Sirmon worked for the Century 21 franchise. Four decades later, she is still selling real estate but as an independent sole proprietor.

me and learned from me. They have honored my experience, and by that, they've taken the easy way instead of being hardheaded and trying to learn their own way. They want to learn everything I know, and to learn from my mistakes, because I've made them all. They all have a good work ethic, and they're all honest and trustworthy. They're good people who like helping others."

She encourages everyone to seek the services of local realty companies, even if they're buying elsewhere in the state. The benefits of working with someone local, she believes, even if you're shopping beyond your community, are too important to miss out on.

"The thing that's probably the most frustrating for hometown real estate

companies is when local people list with somebody who's not local," she says. "They don't know what we know about this area. If you're calling somebody from Miami to sell something in Monticello, maybe they'll do it for one percent – but the kind of service you'll be getting will also be one percent."

Looking ahead, Sirmon and her team at All Realty Services hope to continue to support North Florida communities for generations to come through their flexibility and dedication to community.

To support the company's mobile approach, All Realty Services maintains a social media presence on Facebook and Instagram at All Realty Services and @sirmonlynette, respectively. Visit myallrealty.com, or call 850-997-9994 or 850-933-6363 for more information. ■

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SPOTLIGHT

A NEW AWAKENING *in Wacissa*



Sarah Spagnola, executive director for Cody Church (left), is with “Miss Vera,” one of the many volunteers at Cody Church who stopped by one Wednesday for a “Community Day” and decided to help the church by volunteering to help others. / Photograph by Rick Patrick.



**Sponsored Content
Story by Rick Patrick**

*Photographs by Rick Patrick
and Cody Church*

When one steps onto the grounds of Cody Church, you can feel a spirit that is almost palpable. There is a loving and welcoming feeling in the air that immediately lets a person know that they are accepted, just as they are. This welcoming spirit was very evident during a recent Wednesday evening when members of Cody Church, in western Jefferson County, hold a weekly Community Night.

It is during these weekly gatherings that one can probably best feel the spirit that is working its way through this small, but growing congregation. Beginning at 4:30 p.m. and lasting until 6 p.m., or until supplies are gone, people of all backgrounds, races, belief systems, ages and every other thing that might otherwise separate people are welcomed with open arms. A community food pantry, clothes closet, fellowship, hot meals, games for youngsters and much more is available to all.

"We don't care what someone's income or residency is," said Sarah Spagnola, executive director for Cody Church. "We welcome everyone. We are a mixed bag of tricks."

Although the church has roots that go back over a century, the current church is relatively new. The church officially reopened as an Independent Community Church in September of 2025. Since then, several events and activities have been held, including a Homecoming Service that welcomed more than 200 people "back home to Cody." This event also included a potluck dinner and a Community Gospel Sing. In November



State Representative Allison Tant visits with members of Cody Church. / Photograph Courtesy of Cody Church

of 2025, a "Hallelujah Harvest Festival Weekend" was held. This two-day event featured games, a cookout/BBQ, a chili cook-off, a youth glow night party, revival services with SL Wade and much more.

A source of growth for the church has come from several people who have come to the food pantry on Wednesdays and have become "part of the family," serving as volunteers and helping the church serve others.

"We have witnessed an organic creation of support and community," added Spagnola. "Volunteers are joining each week, donations from patrons, finding what they have to offer, while still needing assistance and utilizing services here."

The church also provides a service to young people called "Common Ground." This is a space where youth and young adults can find a safe and supportive environment with free WiFi, school supplies, art supplies, sensory friendly activities, music, games and more.

The longer term goal of Cody Church is to grow and become an all-encompassing, all-inclusive community center.

"We have this big church sanctuary and building that traditionally may only be used for a couple of hours on Sunday and maybe for a little while on Wednesdays," said Joey Smith, assistant director for the church. "Why not use that space to provide help and services the community needs?"

The church leadership envisions a place that provides:

- Social services on site.
- A community garden and chicken coop. This youth-led initiative will provide sustainability, healthy food sources and project management experience for the young people, which is expected to provide a "full circle benefit" that will give back to the community.
- Mentorship, therapy services, physical activity/sports coaching.
- On-site remote work spaces with



Photograph by Rick Patrick.

free wi-fi.

- Classes led by local trades, such as art classes, cooking classes, etc.
- Online education services.
- Resume building.
- Health and support service representatives and resources.
- Plus much more.

“We believe the Bible calls us to care for people in need,” said Spagnola. “James teaches that genuine faith cares for those who are hurting, and Jesus says that

when we feed the hungry, we are serving Him. For us, the food pantry and clothes closet are simply ways to live that out. When families are struggling, the church is called to show up with compassion, dignity and practical help. This is not just community service; it is obedience to Christ and an expression of His love.”

Currently, the church is seeking community partners to help fulfill the goals and aspirations of the church. Anyone wishing to become

involved in Cody Church, either with monetary donations or donations of time and service, may email codyphcommunitychurch@gmail.com. The church can also be reached by calling 850-694-3095.

Cody Church is located at 3812 Tram Rd. Sunday morning worship services take place at 11 a.m. Wednesday food pantry and meal lasts from 4:30 p.m. until 6 p.m., or until supplies run out. ■



Joey Smith (left) and Josh Spagnola (right) enjoy a break during a Christmas event at Cody Church. / Photograph Courtesy of Cody Church



Cody Church Executive Director Sarah Spagnola shared her holiday cheer while helping to prepare gift baskets. / Photograph Courtesy of Cody Church



Joey Smith (left), assistant director for Cody Church, and volunteer Wendy Allender serve a meal during a Wednesday Community Night. / Photograph by Rick Patrick.

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Regional

Reads

By Laura Young

The interesting small towns that dot the landscape of Florida's Big Bend have produced a fascinating fusion of people, many of whom channel their experiences and interests into equally fascinating books. In this issue we're taking notice of a gripping detective thriller, a heartwarming children's bedtime story and a life coach's guide to understanding the influences that drive us. Quite a mix! If there's a local author whose work you'd like to see noted in a future issue of *The Front Porch* magazine, email emerald@greenepublishing.com.

All the Characters Inside Your Head

By Tami Lester
(Balboa Press, July 2025)

Tami Lester is a community leader in Monticello and operates Twelve Oaks, a horse farm that specializes in equine-facilitated learning and life coaching.

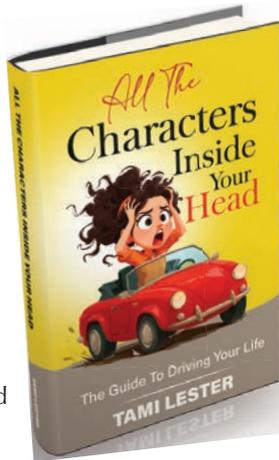
Her book, *All the Characters Inside Your Head*, provides guidance on how to be in the driver's seat in your life.

Drawing on real-life stories, metaphors and a deep understanding of the human experience, Lester

created the book to help readers recognize the voices influencing their lives and reclaim their power. Some of the voices express fear, doubt, blame, guilt, judgement and justifying. By the end of the book, readers are guided to draw hope, faith, joy and love back into their lives.

Lester's passion is assisting others to reconnect with their inner truth, establish healthy boundaries and live authentically. For those who feel like a passenger in their own life, this book is an invitation to take back the wheel and start driving with clarity, courage and compassion.

It is available from major online booksellers.



A Dog Named Cow

By Dr. MM
(September 2025)

Mary Martha Santerfeit, the former postmaster in Lee, was also editor of the *Mayo Free Press*, where she wrote a column for 20 years. Currently using the pen name Dr. MM., she has begun gradually releasing 14 children's books she's completed.

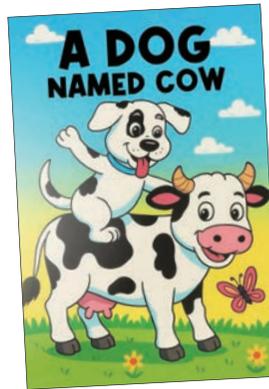
Last September she published *A Dog Named Cow* and *Butter the Butterfly* for children under 5; last December two more books became available, *Christmas Chains* and *The Magic of Christmas Night*, for somewhat older children.

This March she is releasing *Gracie's Beautiful Lilies* and *The Post Office Kitty Cat*. Santerfeit explains that all of her books connect to experiences in her life, for example, the lilies growing down her road and the real cat that hangs out at the post office.

In *A Dog Named Cow*, an unwell girl named Brejnah spends her lonely days looking out her window. One day, a spotted puppy shows up in the yard and, with a wag of his tail and a bark that sounds like hope, the pup becomes her new friend. She names him Cow, and soon her days begin to fill with joy, laughter and love.

This heartwarming story of friendship and healing aims to remind children that even in quiet, difficult times, companionship can bring light and strength.

Santerfeit's books are available from Amazon.



Echoes of the Past

By Bart W. Cassidy
(Twice Assassin Books, September 2025)

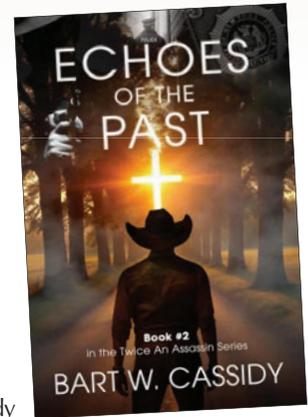
Bart Cassidy, a retired New York Police Department detective, has lived for 30 years in Madison County, the location of his wife's family's cattle operation. Cassidy has been running his own

software company all these years, but after recently selling the business, he's turned his attention back to writing. Previously, 35 years ago, Cassidy authored a book of 20 detective stories that he sold to a major television network to use in creating crime show episodes. Now he's writing thriller detective novels.

In 2023, Cassidy published the novel *Twice an Assassin, Book #1* in his *Twice an Assassin* series. This novel introduced the character Bart Sullivan, a detective whose hunt for a serial killer leads him to a choice that could turn him into an assassin.

Last September, Cassidy released *Book #2, Echoes of the Past*. In this sequel, detective Bart Sullivan has transitioned with his family to a peaceful life in the hills of North Carolina, thinking his past can't reach him there. When a mysterious letter arrives at this sanctuary, he is pulled back into the dark world that he wanted to leave behind. Ghosts from his past combine with heart-pounding action in the present to produce a gripping thriller about redemption, true love, revenge and the unbreakable bonds of family.

Books in the *Twice an Assassin* series are available at the author's website, bartwcassidy.com, as well as from BookBaby and Amazon.



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Dr. MM are available
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All books are written by Mary Santerfeit, a.k.a. Dr. MM.

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James Hutchings started doing site preps and excavations 22 years ago as a teenager. After pursuing a career in welding, James decided to move back to Madison in 2017 to do land work with his friend Paul Kinsley. In 2024, James and his wife Amber decided to start Rox & Rolls with hopes of enjoying land service work and have since been exceeding client's expectations. Rox & Rolls holds a great appreciation to many for trusting us with your land and vision. We would also like to extend our respect to others in our community who share our passion.

MADISON'S STANDPIPE STILL STANDING TALL

Story by Mickey Starling
Photographs by Mickey Starling and The Madison Enterprise Recorder

Water standpipes were a common sight across Florida's growing landscape in the 1800s and early 1900s. Communities had previously depended on water barrels to provide water to their citizens, but as the population expanded, so did the need for greater quantities of water.

Madison was incorporated in 1893, requiring a means of providing water to residents. Initially, water was supplied at no cost to city dwellers. Local officials were quick to hire Herbert and Sapeyne, a construction company based in Tennessee, to build the standpipe, provide a pump and the necessary pipes for the central portion of the city. The total cost of the project was \$13,700.

Keeping the water clean was a bit of an afterthought. There was no filtration system or chlorination. However, some protective measures were taken. At some point, a tarp was placed over the top to prevent the occasional bird droppings from contaminating the water. Also, the ladder was removed from the standpipe to stop the curious thrillseekers from climbing the 100-foot-high structure. At least, that is a common explanation for the removal.

Madison resident Carlton Burnette recalls a different explanation handed down by Walter E. Bunting, his grandfather's brother. Bunting was part of the team responsible for removing the ladder. He stated that the ladder was removed during World War II in an effort to prevent German or Japanese soldiers from poisoning the water supply.

Since cranes were not an option in 1894, an ingenious plan was devised for construction of the massive pipe. After pouring the foundation, the first five-foot section was built, and a raft was placed inside as water was added. When



filled, workers built the next section and repeated the process 20 times until the towering pipe was complete, with a water capacity of more than 133,000 gallons of water.

Eventually, residents were required to pay for their water service. Beginning on January 2, 1895, residents and local businesses paid six dollars a year for water. The standpipe remained in use for approximately 90 years before additional, modern water tanks were constructed.

Somewhere between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Madison County Commission began discussions to consider removing the standpipe, citing its lack of use and rusty appearance. Some referred to the pipe as an "eyesore." Wind of their deliberations reached the ever-listening ears of the late Willie Clare Copeland, who was one of Madison's

most devoted historians.

According to some, Copeland gave the commissioners a tongue lashing not soon forgotten, reminding them that the standpipe was a historic landmark and an important part of Madison's history. When all was said and done, no one suggested laying a finger on the pipe. It received a nice paint job and has been resting comfortably since.

However, the paint job and some renovations did not come easily. County commissioners complained of the expense involved with the project, which totaled about \$6,000. Madison County resident Elmer Spear took matters into his own wallet, donating \$4,000 to the cause, saying, "You can come up with the rest." Several other citizens donated the needed funds to complete the project.

Besides the renovations, another issue was raised about the stability of the tower, which was now empty. In 1996, Utility Services, Inc., from Perry, Georgia, was consulted about the safety of the standpipe. Their report indicated that the tower had no need for water because

of the quality and thickness of the steel used for construction. Since the pipe has now endured three recent hurricanes, stability doesn't seem to be a concern, even 30 years later.

Copeland was correct. Madison is now home to the only standpipe standing on courthouse grounds in the State of Florida and possibly the only one from its era still standing. Reports on that bit of history are conflicting.

According to some reports, there may be one other standpipe remaining, but most recent reporting indicates the Madison standpipe now stands alone, a bright, tall reminder of days gone by. Thanks to Willie Clare Copeland, the late Elmer Spear and other concerned citizens, the old pipe also reminds us of the importance of preserving history whenever possible. ■



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Story by Catherine Davis Ledyard

We have read and heard many stories about little girls and their ponies, how the love of a horse can transform the life of a person, and how some people devote their lives to horses and the miraculous things they can do. This story starts with a fox hunt in the deep South, where the hounds are known internationally for both their conformation and their performance, the Masters are world renowned and the community that surrounds the hunt is one best characterized as family.

A pony named **Domino**

Sending children to compete in the Junior North American Field Hunters Championship (JNAFHC) is a long standing tradition for the Live Oak Hounds, and Daphne and Marty Wood, Joint Masters of Live Oak, have been thrilled over the years as time and time again, the children who learned to hunt with their pack across the Longleaf pine woods of southern Georgia and northern Florida came home with ribbons and trophies.

The stewardship of the JNAFHC judges and the organization itself is a testament to the dedication of the parents of these children, the Masters (like the Woods who have sent Juniors to the competition for 12 successive years) and the passion that this sport instills. Liz Howard (who hails from three generations of Virginia fox hunters and has been involved in judging for more than fifteen years) speaks of it as “an honor to watch as their sportsmanship shines, their manners transform into perfect etiquette and their love for hounds and hound work becomes the driving force.”

This year was no different. Except it was.

Enter young Eliza Fisher, whose circle of friends are fox hunting girls who have captured the hearts of the seasoned members of the Live Oak hunt. They ride together on well-bred horses ranging from



Domino and Eliza are “leading the hound.”

18 hands, to 16 hands, to 14 hands ... and then there’s the little black and white pony.

He was an abandoned, neglected and forgotten animal, long left in a big field with a couple of other horses, seen by many locals driving to the Thomas County (Georgia) “solid waste facility,” more commonly known as the “dump.” The pony was nothing short of feral, having had no human contact for many years. Eliza and her parents rescued him with the help of longtime Live Oak whip Elmer West, who gave him the name Domino. Then the work began.

After a rough start with another trainer who unsuccessfully attempted to introduce Domino to hounds, it fell to Eliza to transform this pony into a rideable hunt horse. She took weekly riding lessons and visited Domino about three times a week. In addition to

the lessons for Eliza, there was a strict protocol of homework assigned by her trainer, Autumn Clarke, who is known internationally for her ride in the Mongol Derby and admired broadly for her equestrian skill, having whipped in at Live Oak for ten years prior to heading to the other side of the world for the hardest horse race imaginable. To say the least, in addition to entering the school of a little girl’s love and determination, Domino was faced with a very new and very strict regimen.

Eliza’s parents were happy to support her chosen activity, but they required Eliza to put in the time and energy. And she had to help pay for his expenses. Eliza’s mother said it was truly a journey of perseverance, dedication and a heart that grew steadily in love with a pony who somehow understood how important he had become to the little girl in his life.



With training and perseverance, Eliza was able to transform Domino into a rideable hunt horse.

Riding Domino several times a week and hunting at every opportunity, Eliza impressed everyone with her diligence. Autumn remarks that, as a professional, she put a total of one training ride on the pony herself; every other ride over more than two years was with Eliza Fisher in the saddle. Autumn said that when Eliza is assigned homework, she does it in full. No shortcuts for this kid.

Domino is boarded with Donna Nunnally, a Thomasville, Georgia, native who has hunted with Live Oak for decades. Donna had a front row seat to the transformation of the scruffy little horse whom she describes as a diamond in the rough. And, it amazed her again and again how the two of them, Eliza and Domino, positioned themselves to compete at the national level in just a couple of years.

Their first lesson with Autumn was a group lesson with Catie Rae Crane, Catie Rae's brother Henry and their mother Janna. It was a pretty wild event. Autumn assessed the situation, and decided the best move was to separate the group for individual lessons. She didn't think Domino was a very nice pony; he was stubborn, spinning, bolting and ignoring Eliza's requests. Autumn believes Eliza is one of the bravest riders she has ever seen. A "free horse" is not often a "good horse," and Autumn thought Eliza had her work cut out for her. Fortunately, her work ethic was incredible.

"Crazy!" is how Catie Rae described their first horse show with Eliza on Domino. Ada Watt, who was at the time riding the "most broke horse ever,"



Domino was an abandoned, neglected and forgotten animal before being rescued by Eliza.

couldn't believe how wild Domino was. Eliza chalked it up to "he was camera shy and a little afraid of the gates and he was nervous and tried to escape." Her dad stepped in as a barrier to keep Domino where he belonged.

In the first two years of their journey together, Domino somehow grasped that his early behavior was unacceptable. A bond of trust developed between horse and rider and, as long as Eliza stuck to the methods that Autumn taught her, Autumn could see that Eliza would prevail. Eliza paid strong attention to the details, and everyone was amazed at her sheer grit. In recalling the process, Autumn emphasized that she would never recommend for most green riders to try to tame a feral pony or horse. However, watching Eliza taking it one step at a time, riding as completely and correctly as she could, over and over again, week in and week out, truly impressed her. The next step? Fox hunting!

It didn't take long for Eliza and Domino, along with Ada and Catie Rae and their mounts, to capture the hearts of the Live Oak field. They began in the back of the third flight, crept their way up to second in no time at all and were often welcomed to join the staff up front for the long hacks back to the meets. Once they became regulars, the only guidance they needed was simple etiquette pointers or guidance on the likelihood of the hounds getting up a pig, a fox, a coyote or a bobcat!

Then, last fall, when Eliza and Domino were out hunting with Live Oak under the judgement of Liz Howard and her team of dedicated JNAFHC evaluators, they and three other young hunters from Live Oak qualified for the championships in Virginia. Catie Rae shared with the Live Oak members the details of the final round for the Hill Topper Division, where three of the top 10 contestants were Live Oak riders.

Catie Rae explained that, after the first day of hunting in Virginia, those



Competing in the Nov. 15 JNAFHC finals as the Live Oak Hill Topper Team were, left to right, Ada Watt, Catie Rae Crane, Eliza Fisher and Coach Autumn Clarke.

who were selected had to follow an established hunting course, jump a fence, open and go through a gate, dismount and then lead a hound with their hound whips. In the Hilltop Division, Catie Rae (age 13) and her horse Nitro took home the championship ribbon and friend Ada (15) came in fourth with her mount, Root Beer. Thirteen-year-old Eliza Fisher and Domino placed ninth out of an original field of 36 riders.

Emma Watson (19), an older and more experienced Live Oak rider, took seventh place in the First Flight Division. She had previously received significant accolades from Liz Howard this past fall for her horsemanship and empathy when she readily came to the aid of a fallen rider at this year's qualifying event. In doing so, she quickly dismounted her enormous horse, Finch, untangled the double reins from the legs of the cropper's horse, gave the fallen rider a leg up and then managed to remount from the ground without holding up the field.

So, as people from Thomasville drive down the old County Farm Road, they may wonder what ever happened to the little black and white pony who lived out there in the middle of that big empty field. Thanks to the love and dedication of Eliza Fisher, he has become a very nice pony, created by a young girl achieving little goals every day, becoming an inseparable team who brought home a national ribbon to the acclaim and applause of the entire Live Oak family. For Eliza, it felt perfectly natural. She is certain Domino performed so well just for her. One girl's love for her little black and white pony and years of kindness repaid. When asked if Domino, who is now 23 years old, will move on to another rider once she has outgrown him, she said, "I hope he'll be mine forever." ■



NEW PROTECTION SECURED FOR *Jefferson County gem*

- Nutall Rise spring.

Story by Karl Etters

Photographs Courtesy of Tall Timbers

The site of the oldest evidence of humans in Florida – Jefferson County’s Page-Ladson Site – is now permanently protected by a conservation easement with Tall Timbers.

Finalized in December 2025, the conservation easement encompasses 1,834 acres in Jefferson and Taylor counties and includes an impressive 2.4 miles of the Aucilla River, 1.8 miles of the Wacissa River and the Slave Canal and the first magnitude spring, Nutall Rise.

Tall Timbers, a land stewardship research station and accredited land trust, now holds the easement purchased with funding from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Springs Grant. The property is surrounded on three sides by public land – the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Aucilla Wildlife Management Area and the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area, making it a key connector in Jefferson and

Taylor counties and the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Tall Timbers’ Land Conservancy Director Shane Wellendorf lauded the State of Florida, the Governor’s Office and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for their support of the Ladson Conservation Easement acquisition through their Springs and Watershed Restoration Program. Additionally, the Knobloch Family Foundation and the Ladson Family were generous supporters of the project, and much of the project’s transactional costs were supported with a grant from the Gulf Partnership for Land Conservation.

The Aucilla River running through the property disappears underground and reappears in several places creating numerous sinkholes and springs, while the Wacissa is a publicly accessible waterway popular for kayaking, birding, fishing and outdoor recreation

John Ladson, whose grandfather bought the land in the 1940s, said the

property has fascinated him since he was a boy and still does today.

“Besides being historically and ecologically important, it is a mysterious piece of property,” he said. “I’m 79 and I still remain just as fascinated by that property as I was when I was 9 years old.”

The journey to permanent protection through a conservation easement has taken several years, but the significance of the property comes with a sense of responsibility to see it remain undeveloped.

“It’s just a beautiful piece of property and we all love it and cherish it and want to see it protected as it is today,” Ladson said. “This is something the family has considered for a fairly long period of time, but we were looking for the right partner to work with. We found that partner in Tall Timbers.”

Ladson said his family uses the area today mostly for fishing, but they also love to explore the deep swamps and Native American mounds across the



Bill Ladson Jr.

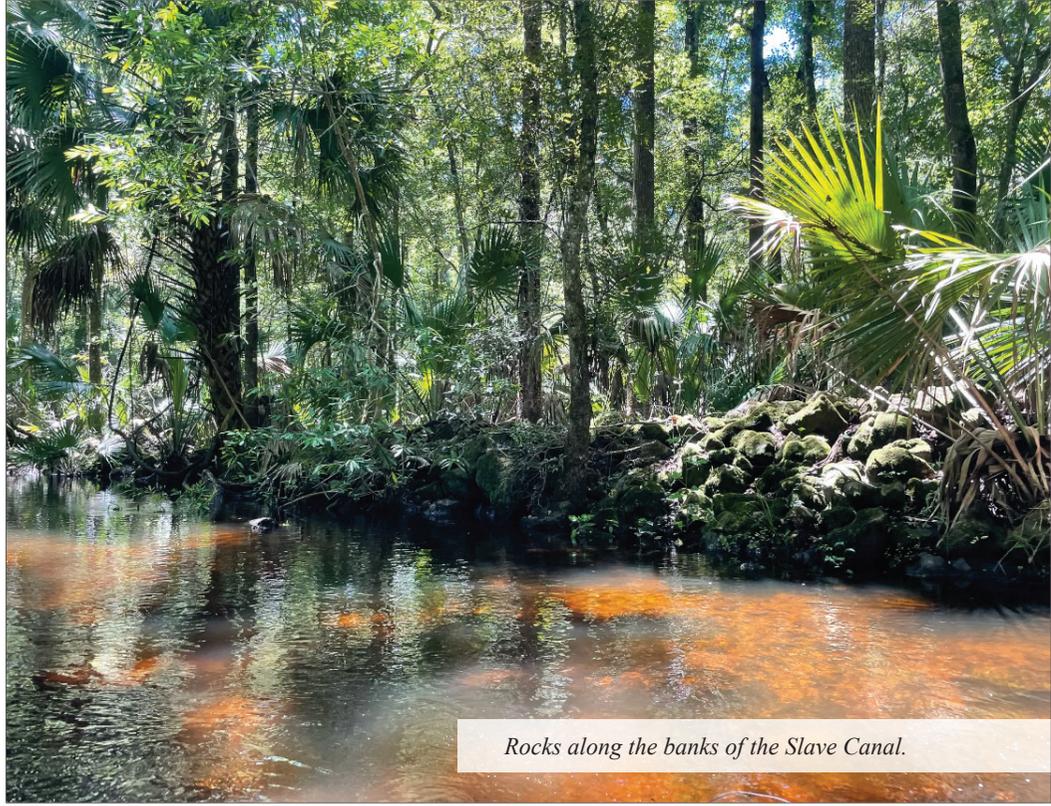
property. Mix in the archeology, limestone sinkholes and first magnitude springs, and the Ladson Tract is a unique treasure.

"The family feels that the Nutall Rise property is the gem of the lower Aucilla River," Ladson said. "I think that's a fair statement."

The new conservation easement on the Ladson property will prohibit residential, industrial and commercial development on the property while protecting natural areas. Permanent conservation of the Ladson property will also provide protections for water quality in the lower Wacissa and Aucilla rivers, both listed by the state as Outstanding Florida Waterways, as they meander toward the rich Gulf estuaries they feed with fresh water. The Ladson conservation easement means the entirety of the Wacissa River and its tributaries will be protected from future development.

The state of Florida's commitment to conserving the property with public dollars provides an invaluable connection within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and existing, permanently protected private and public lands in the region, noted Tall Timbers' Wellendorf.

"The Ladson Conservation Easement is an amazing conservation win for Florida and highlights the value that can come from Florida's investment in conservation easements," Wellendorf said. "Critical lands surrounding Nutall Rise, the Wacissa River Slave Canal and the Aucilla River are permanently conserved as natural floodplain forests and coastal hammocks, never to be developed or converted to other land-uses. In addition to conservation of critical ecological areas, the easements also preserve one of the most important archeological sites on the planet."



Rocks along the banks of the Slave Canal.

Since 1968, fossils from mastodons and Colombian mammoths have been found on the property as have clay pottery and tools showing early evidence of humans in the region. A complete mastodon skeleton was excavated and is housed in the University of Florida's Museum of Natural History.

Tool marks on bones found at Half Mile Rise in the 1980s, near the confluence of the Aucilla and Wacissa rivers, provided the earliest evidence of people in the United States dating back around 14,550 years ago.

The history of the region, both

pre and post-European, is important to understanding how people have utilized the unique landscape. A Wacissa tributary known today as the Slave Canal may have been used by indigenous tribes to transport goods to the Gulf and later by the Spanish in the 16th and 18th centuries.

In the early 1800s, attempts were made to widen this thin stretch of river to create a trade route for timber, agricultural goods and livestock that connected with the Aucilla River and eventually the Gulf. Work halted during the Second Seminole War but the initiative was renewed by local plantation



J.E.Ladson, Sr. with Queen.



Manatees in the Aucilla River.



John Ladson and his family use the property for fishing and outdoor recreation.

owners who forced enslaved Africans of Jefferson County to deepen the canal, hence the name Slave Canal. Work stopped again at the start of the Civil War and further attempts to restart the project ended with the construction of railroads throughout the region.

Today the Slave Canal remains a popular paddling destination.

The Ladson property is valuable for the protection of water resources and natural habitats such as floodplain forests and coastal hammocks.

These forested areas help to minimize flooding impacts by reducing water flow and holding vast amounts of surface water before it makes its way to the Gulf. Additionally, numerous wildlife species thrive on the Ladson property, ranging from wading birds like the little blue heron, to Florida black bears. In the spring the forests are alive with migrating birds, like the prothonotary warbler and swallow-tailed kite.

This conservation easement will guarantee those coastal forests remain for



Tall Timbers staff paddling the Slave Canal.



The rapids at Half Mile Rise.



John Ladson in 1954.

future generations, Wellendorf said. "For the many adventurers that have paddled the Wacissa River-Slave Canal and been able to experience wild Florida, the Ladson Conservation Easement ensures this unique opportunity will remain forever wild," said Wellendorf. "We will be eternally grateful to the Ladson family and the State of Florida for this perpetual commitment to conservation." ■



John Ladson and Wrennie with Priscilla.



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EVELYN CHANCY

58 years of helping Madison's high schools run smoothly

Story by Mickey Starling

Very few graduates of Madison High School (MHS) or Madison County High School (MCHS) are unfamiliar with Evelyn Chancy, who has served as school secretary since 1968. She took the job soon after graduating the year before.

Chancy took a few courses at North Florida Junior College before working as a substitute teacher at Madison Primary School. Soon thereafter, she was offered the secretary position at MHS by Principal Mack Primm.

Since those early days, Chancy found more than a job; she found a home. Her position allowed her to fine tune her many talents and people skills to perfection, causing the day-to-day operations of the school to hum

seamlessly from one task to the next.

"At first, I was doing pretty much everything, from bookkeeping, accounting, reception and more," says Chancy. "Plus, it was all handwritten in ledgers."

Shortly after Gene Stokes became Superintendent of Schools in 1973, he tasked her with doing the books on a computer. Remembering those days brought a chuckle to Chancy as she recalled that "it took less time to learn than expected." Her reflections are characteristic of a woman who doesn't draw attention to herself or seek attention or praise.

Yet, when you've served exceptionally and faithfully for decades in the same position, someone is going

to notice. In Chancy's case, thousands of students and staff members have noticed and appreciated the work she has quietly continued doing for what seems forever. She has served 14 principals at MHS and MCHS, making each of them more successful because of her extraordinary memory and organization skills. Chancy has gone from having a secluded room to having a front-row seat to everything in the office.

"Sometimes, I feel like I am directing traffic," says Chancy, who has directed or located just about everything.

For instance, when Principal James Ray served during the late 1970s and early '80s, a student pranked him once by releasing thousands of crickets in his office. It was Chancy who first located



the vacuum cleaner and went about removing the multiple sources of the swamp-like melody that was filling the office.

"That's one of the strangest memories I have," says Chancy, laughing.

Though the times have changed during her tenure, with staff turnovers taking place more often, enrollment declines and a greater assortment of disrespectful students, Chancy still has many students who refer to her as "Meemaw," a fitting description of one who has been a mother and grandmother to countless students who are the better for their time with her.

Chancy retired in 2006, for an entire month, before Principal Ben Killingsworth asked her to return.

"I was going to stay maybe 10 years, but it's been 19," says Chancy. When asked why she has stayed so long, Chancy simply states, "I have always loved the people. They are like family to me."

A happy, well organized family it continues to be, almost 60 years since she began.

Perhaps, the longest-serving principal to work with Chancy, Lou Miller, has the clearest take on what it means to have a partner like Chancy by your side. Here are her memories of working with her for 18 years. Chancy was the secretary when Miller graduated from MHS in 1970.

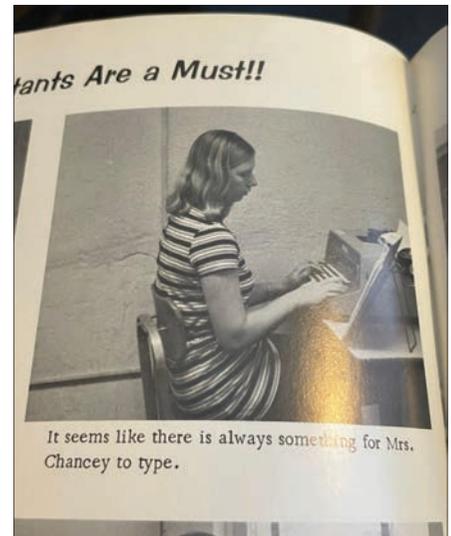
"I came to MCHS as Assistant Principal in the 1984-85 school year," recalls Miller, "The next year, I became Principal at MCHS. I can honestly say that Evelyn Chancy was an invaluable asset

to me in my new job. She had first-hand knowledge of how everything should and could be done; she knew all the history of how the two schools combined and was a great adviser to me in navigating a successful course.

"Evelyn has such a pleasant nature and is a calming presence in what can sometimes be a chaotic situation. She has a long list of job responsibilities as the school secretary, but the one she does best is 'all other duties as assigned by the principal.' Evelyn is a master at making the job of principal look easy because she keeps everything organized and is two steps ahead in preparation for the next week's events.

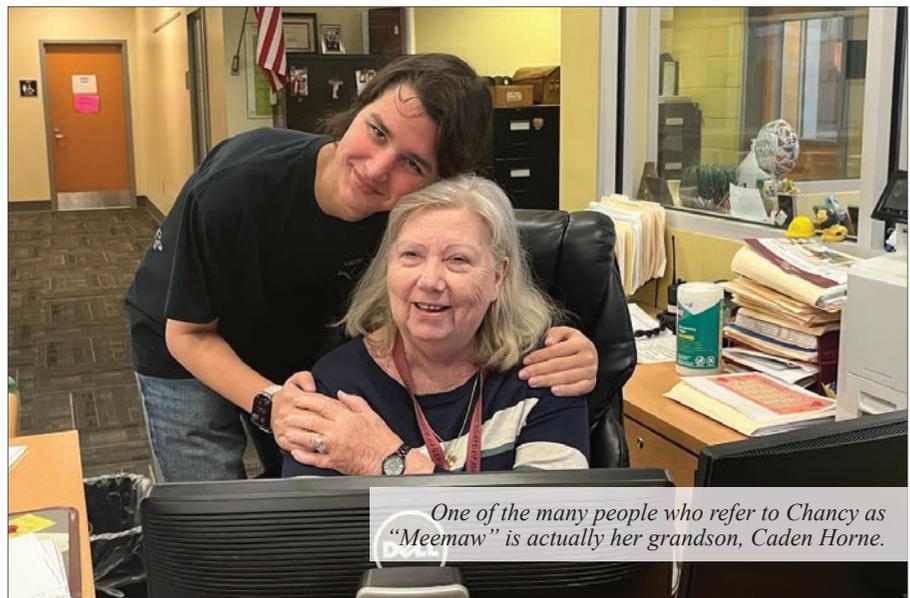
"One time, when the school had been burglarized, Evelyn was the only one who could identify exactly what was missing because she knew where everything was. She was always level-headed and a very confidential sounding board for any employee that needed to vent.

"One year, Evelyn needed to have leg surgery and had to be out several weeks. One of her duties was receiving funds, keeping the books and making daily deposits at the bank. I took over the job of preparing the deposits and taking them to the bank in the afternoon after school. I was very slow at counting money and not nearly as accurate as Evelyn was. One day, when I took the deposit in, the bank



Evelyn got back, it was in place in her office and she was very pleased with the new machine. I don't know how she did all she accomplished as the bookkeeper without it.

"I don't believe that MCHS could have ever pulled off an awards day, baccalaureate or graduation without Evelyn Chancy. She always had the program done, the awards lined up, the speakers notified, caps and gowns ordered and a million other small details that were necessary done to perfection. There are just no words that do justice to



teller opened the bag, turned and placed the stack of bills on a machine and it rapidly counted them and displayed the total. I was amazed and asked the teller if I could buy one of those for the school. She gave me the information and I fixed a purchase order to get one. By the time

the remarkable, efficient administrative assistant that Evelyn Chancy is. She is the epitome of the term 'support staff.' We worked together for 18 years at MCHS. She is simply the best!"

Chancy and her husband of 56 years, Marion, have two children, Jim and Cathy, along with seven grandchildren. ■

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- Virtual Planning Session

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- Premium Wedding Reception (up to 8 hrs)
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- Platinum Dance Floor Lighting (up-lighting included)
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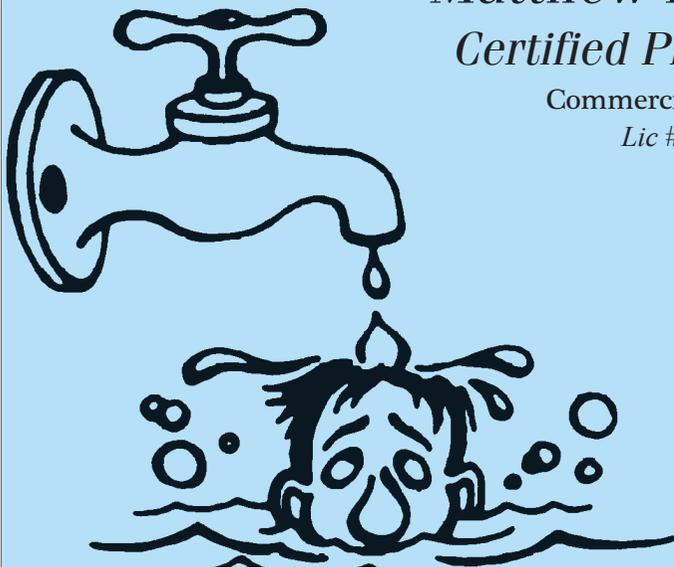
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WHAT'S HAPPENING



March 6-7

Second Annual Smokin' Country Jam Beer & Barbecue Competition

Get ready for a weekend that smells like hardwood smoke and sounds like live country. The Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park (3076 95th Dr., Live Oak) hosts this two-day event of live country music and a barbecue competition with cash prizes, trophies and plenty of bragging rights. For more information, visit www.smokincountryjam.com.



March 6-8

Florida Trail Fest

Join the Florida Trail Association for a weekend celebrating the outdoors. Connect with fellow hikers, trail runners and outdoor enthusiasts while camping, enjoying workshops, guided hikes, live music and more. The event is free to attend; however, registration is required for all participants. For more information or to register, visit www.floridatrail.org/fest.

March 7-28

"Two Highwaymen" Exhibit at JAG

This exhibit showcases the paintings of Curtis Arnett and R.L. Lewis, both original members of the renowned

group of landscape artists who came to be known as The Florida Highwaymen. Jefferson Arts Gallery (575 W. Washington St., Monticello) is open Wednesdays and Saturdays 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and by appointment by calling 850-997-3311.

March 13-22

"Tuesdays with Morrie" at MOH

The Monticello Opera House presents the autobiographical story of Mitch Albom, an accomplished journalist driven solely by his career, and Morrie Schwartz, his former college professor. Sixteen years after graduation, Mitch sees Morrie's appearance on a television news program and learns that his old professor is battling Lou Gehrig's Disease. Mitch is reunited with Morrie, and what starts as a simple visit turns into a weekly pilgrimage and a last class in the meaning of life. For showtimes and ticket information, call 850-997-4242 or visit www.monticellooperahouse.org.

March 14

Madison Local Market

Take your pick of fresh, locally grown produce and goods offered by a variety of artisans, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at Four Freedoms Park in downtown Madison.

March 14

United Way of Suwannee Valley Golf Tournament

Give where you live; golf with a cause! Join the United Way of Suwannee Valley for its fourth annual golf tournament at Quail Heights Country Club (161 S.W. Quail Heights Ter., Lake City). Registration opens at 7:30 a.m., and the tournament will begin with a shotgun start at 8 a.m. There is a limit of 25 teams. Call 386-752-5604, ext. 103, or email dawn@unitedwsv.org for more information.



March 19-22

Eighth Annual Suwannee Spring Reunion

Gather at the Spirit of Suwannee Music Park (9379 C.R. 132, Live Oak) for a weekend of family fun featuring bluegrass, folk and blues music. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit suwanneespringreunion.com.



March 20-28

Suwannee County Fair

Celebrate the best of the county with food, rides, animals, games, entertainment, music, agriculture, art and more at the Suwannee County Fairgrounds (1302 11th St. S.W., Live Oak). For more information, visit suwanneecountyfair.com.



March 27-28

North Florida Pro Rodeo and Festival

Professional rodeo is making its way back to Madison for two exciting nights of family-friendly fun and food. Proceeds support local non-profits and community initiatives. For more information, please visit www.northfloridaprodeodeo.com.

March 28

Spring Fling Car Show

Enjoy classic, custom and modern vehicles, live music by The Untamed Band, food and craft vendors, and a great day 10 a.m.-2 p.m. in historic White Springs with Suwannee Hardware & Feed (10572 Bridge St.). General admission is free; vehicle entry is a \$20 donation benefiting the local food bank. Call 386-397-2551 for more information.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

April 2-4

Antique Tractor and Engine Show

The Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park (11016 Lillian Saunders Dr., White Springs) will host its 36th Annual Antique Tractor and Engine Show, showcasing farming equipment reflecting 200 years of rural American history. Compete in tractor pulls and watch demonstrations of shingle milling, corn grinding, home canning and more. Admission is \$5 per vehicle with up to eight passengers. For more information, call 877-635-3655.



April 10-26

“Live and Let Spy” at MOH

Enjoy an entertaining evening of interactive, espionage-themed murder mystery dinner theater at the historic Monticello Opera House. For showtimes and ticket information, call 850-997-4242 or visit www.monticellooperahouse.org.



April 4

Easter Eggstravaganza at the Wildlife Center

The North Florida Wildlife Center (1386 Cook Rd., Lamont) offers a special Easter-themed event, with a huge egg hunt, lively animal presentations, keeper talks, crafts, food trucks, vendors and more. For information on special event pricing, visit www.northfloridawildlife.org.

April 4-25

“World War I: Lessons and Legacies” Exhibit at JAG

This traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian presents images from World War I, including sections on medicine, post-war isolationism, making the world safe for democracy, women in The Great War, expanded industrialization and strategies for selling the war. Jefferson Arts Gallery (575 W. Washington St., Monticello) is open Wednesdays and Saturdays 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and by appointment by calling 850-997-3311.

April 12

Christian Jubilee

Allison Acres (9077 N.E. Colin Kelly Hwy., Pinetta) will feature the musical talents of Grace Graber. Gates open at 12 p.m. and the show starts at 1 p.m.



April 18

Down Home Days

Madison's biggest community celebration culminates with all-day activities, including a parade, food vendors, a frog hop contest, antique car show and much more. For more information, visit www.madisondownhomedays.com.

April 18

Community Day at the Farm

Visit the best-kept secret in Suwannee County – the UF/IFAS North Florida Regional Education Center's (NFREC) Suwannee Valley Farm (8202 C.R. 417, Live Oak). From 8:30 a.m. to noon, enjoy trolley, orchard, greenhouse, equipment tours, educational booths and appearances from the hit children's show, “Paw Patrol.”

April 25

Historic White Springs Antiques & Collectibles Festival

Suwannee Hardware & Feed (10572 Bridge St., White Springs) will host its inaugural antique festival 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Enjoy browsing through antiques and collectibles, listening to live music, and enjoying family-friendly fun. For more information or to register, vendors can call 386-397-2551 or email suwanneehardware@gmail.com.



April 11

Suwannee River Catfish Festival

Make your way to Branford for the annual Catfish Festival, now hosted by American Legion Post 59. At the Suwannee River Greenway, enjoy free live entertainment 9 a.m.-4 p.m., while perusing an assortment of vendor booths featuring locally made goods. Once lunchtime comes around, the festival will begin selling its famous catfish dinners. For more information or to become a vendor, visit www.alcfff.com or email alpost59cff@gmail.com.

WHAT'S HAPPENING



May 1-2

Wildflower Festival and Plant Sale

At beautiful Heritage Park and Gardens (1004 Helvenston St. S.E., Live Oak), Friday's activities include Chalk Art on the Heritage Trail 5-7 p.m., followed by an outdoor movie at

8 p.m. On Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. shop for spring plants and enjoy live local music, food trucks, children's activities, games and presentations on everything from bees and bugs to weeds and wildflowers. For more information, visit Suwannee Festivals on Facebook or email suwfestivals@gmail.com.



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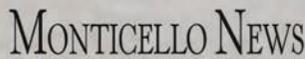
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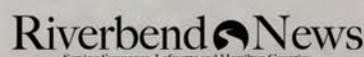
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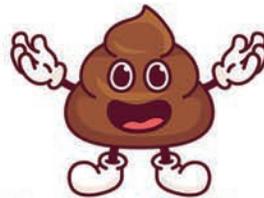
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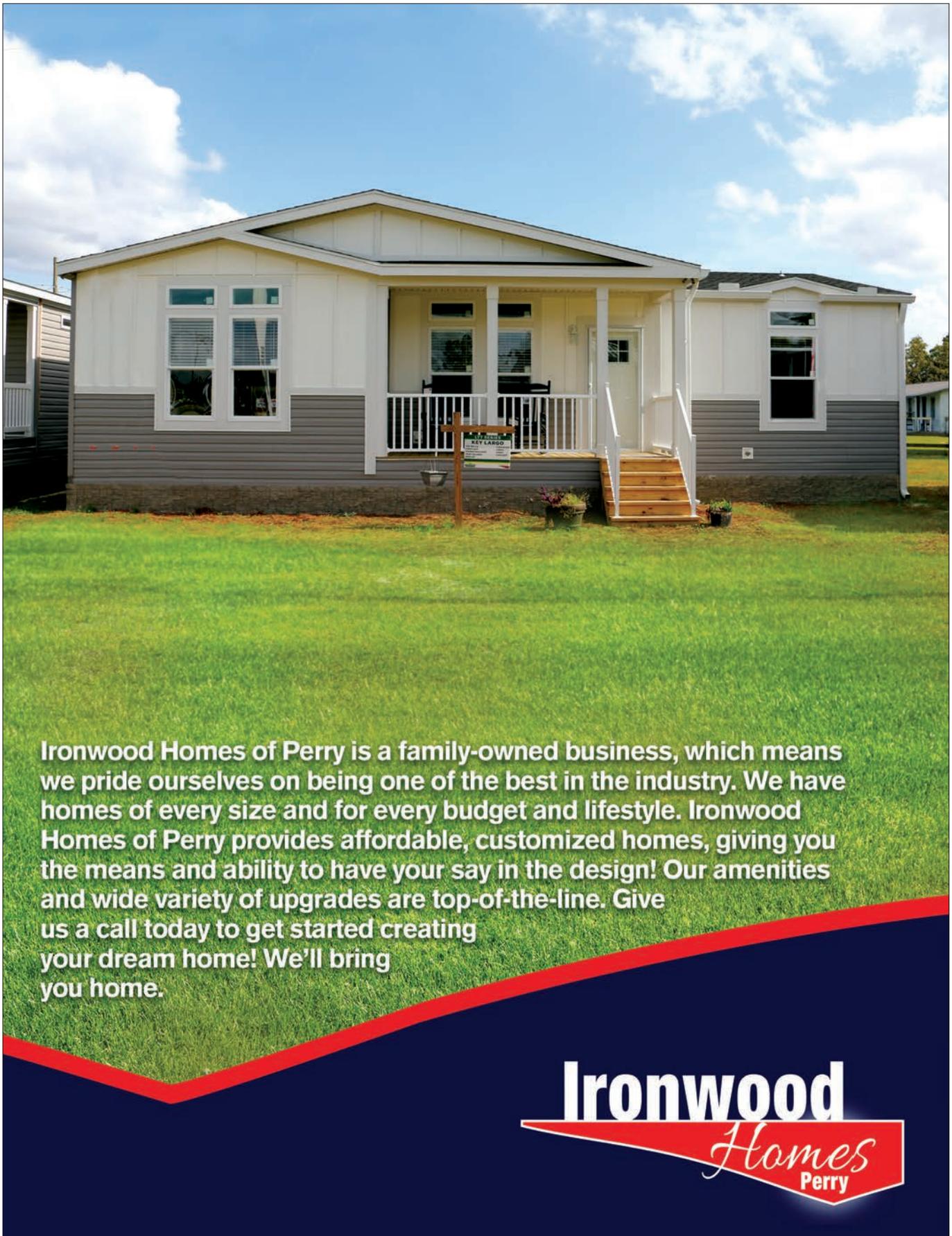
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