

The Front Porch

Where The Tea is Sweet and the Talks Are Long

May/June 2024

Madison County Branch



25 Years



Taylor County Branch

**Madison County
Community Bank enters
25th year with new
division in Taylor County**

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Winding Through Time

A History of the Suwannee River Page 34





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The Front Porch

Where the tea is sweet and the talks are long

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Sittin' on the Porch with...

"Aunt Sarah"



Sarah June Higgenbotham

A beacon of love and legacy in Jasper

Story and Photography by Bea Coker

Sarah June Higgenbotham, affectionately known as Aunt Sarah to many, is not just a resident of the quaint town of Jasper; she's a cornerstone of its spirit and vitality. Born Sarah June Anderson on March 24, 1932, just a stone's throw from her current residence, Higgenbotham's journey has been one of unwavering dedication to community, education and love. After a life journey that took her through bustling cities like Brooklyn, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., Higgenbotham returned to her roots in Jasper in 2002. Little did she know, her return would mark the beginning of a new chapter filled with boundless energy and purpose.

Higgenbotham's day typically begins with a Zoom workout session, a testament to her belief that health and wellness are non-negotiable, regardless of age.

What truly sets Higgenbotham apart is her tireless commitment to volunteering.

With a schedule that would make most people dizzy, Higgenbotham manages to lend a helping hand to not one, but several organizations and schools in the community.

From city council meetings to school board sessions, Higgenbotham's presence is ubiquitous, her age failing to limit her level of activity.

A peek into Higgenbotham's home finds her in the midst of heartfelt correspondence, a habit stemming from her 35-year career as a teacher. Her dedication to her students echoes the influence of her childhood mentor, Minnie Brown Rutledge, instilling in her a deep sense of responsibility towards the younger generation.

Higgenbotham's journey hasn't been without challenges. From a humble upbringing to a diagnosis of severe paralysis prior to her high school graduation, she's faced obstacles head-on, never letting anything deter

her from her path. Graduating from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1953, she embarked on a journey that would lead her to meet her husband, Aaron Higgenbotham, and discover her true calling as an educator.

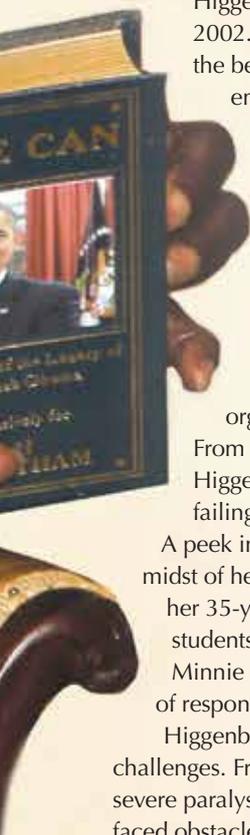
Though the couple didn't have children of their own, their home was always filled with love and laughter. Through her teaching career from 1961 to 1997 at Edgemeade Residential Treatment Center in Upper Marlboro, Md., and beyond, Higgenbotham became a mother figure to countless individuals, including Thomas Brockenberry, whom she adopted at the age of five. Today, Brockenberry, a preacher and father of three, attributes much of his parenting style to the lessons he learned from his beloved mom.

Higgenbotham's nurturing spirit didn't stop with him. From raising her god-daughter, Ayesha Brock, to caring for her nephew, Ba'Shan Rondell "Stump" Pinckney, her home has always been a sanctuary for those in need of love and support.

As she reflects on her life's work, Higgenbotham remains humble, cherishing the letters from former students like Willie Phillips, whose lives she's touched in ways she never imagined. For Higgenbotham, the true measure of success lies not in accolades, but in the impact she's had on others.

"Being blessed is evidenced by the way others view you, and being victorious is evidenced by the value placed on you," Higgenbotham reflects. "I have lived and will continue living, believing I hold an obligation to teach young men to live a life of principle and purpose."

Whether she's at Mt. Olive Church, passing out inspirational material or cheering on her favorite teams at local games, Higgenbotham's presence in Jasper is a beacon of warmth and love. In the heart of Jasper, Higgenbotham's legacy shines bright, illuminating the path for generations to come. ■





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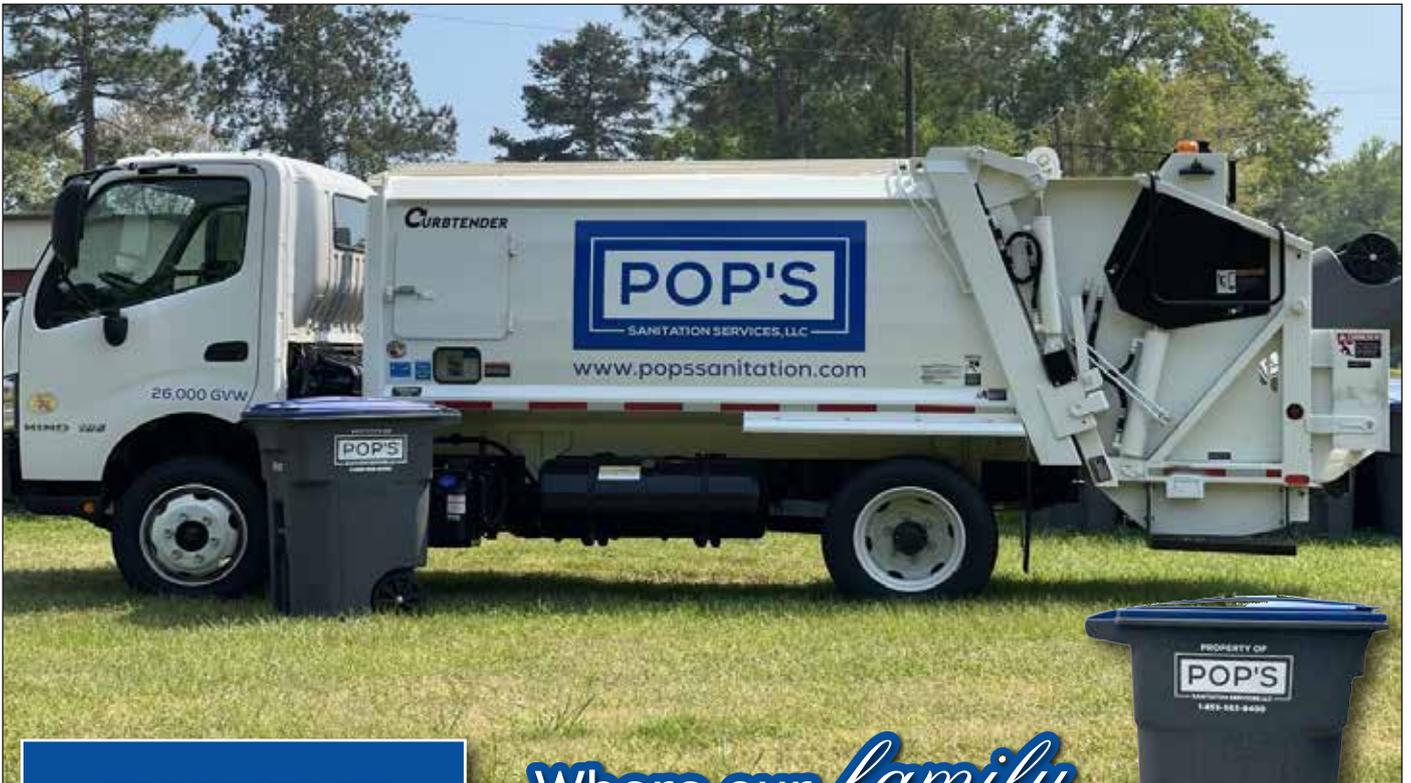


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Madison County Community Bank enters 25th year with new division in Taylor County

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Story by Laura Young

A new century was on the horizon when Madison County Community Bank (MCCB) first opened its doors in 1999. Twenty-five years later, the bank's leaders and employees are as dedicated as ever to bringing personal service to local citizens and businesses while at the same time offering all the latest technological advantages of a modern banking institution. As MCCB celebrates a quarter century of success in Madison County, it also enters a new phase of growth this year with the opening of a division in neighboring Taylor County. In both locations, customers find a hometown team focused on meeting their banking



The hometown team at Madison County Community Bank currently includes, left to right: (back row) Genie Gallaher, Darren Webb, Diane Payne, Edward Meggs, Don Ashley, Bill Primm and Bryson Jones; (front row) Amy Duffield, Sherry Burnette, Sheri-lyn Rode, Patricia Cain, Christina Kolstad, Lindsay Evans, Lindsey Galloway, Jodi Phillips, Kirsten Clardy, Linda Thigpen, Debra Epifanio, Sue Chapman and Connie Shipley.



Ground was broken in Perry, Fla., in 2023 for Taylor County Community Bank on South Jefferson Street..

needs.

Throughout its history, MCCB has been guided by a “community first” philosophy. From the highest ranking decision makers to the tellers who regularly handle customers’ transactions, person-to-person interactions are valued and grounded in the belief that every customer – big or not so big – is worthy to do business with.

President/CEO Edward Meggs, Sr. has been there from the start. As Meggs was gaining experience in the world of national banking, he found himself yearning to give all depositors and borrowers the same personalized service. He brought together other MCCB founders, all of them determined to establish just what the name clearly spells out: a bank centered on the communities of Madison County. Every person involved, he emphasizes, has always had a vested interest in nurturing the community, because they work where they live.

“While we’re concerned about what’s going on around the world,” says Meggs, “our primary focus is what’s going on right here in our back yard.”

MCCB officially started business on May 6, 1999. A ribbon cutting ceremony followed soon after at a modular office on May 20. Interestingly, the ribbon was made of one dollar bills rather than the traditional red material. Jackie Johnson, then Mayor of Madison, and Ernestine Kinsey, then Mayor of Lee, held the scissors. Among the original board members and staff joining them for the historic photo were Rendall E. Barfoot, Chip Beggs, Bill Brown, Allen Cherry, Carson Cherry, James Coleburn, Cary Hardee, Alvin Henderson, Kin Johnson,

John Lewis, Ed Meggs, Bob Mendheim, Charlie Moore, Thomas F. Ozburn, Jr., Donna Poole, Robby Robinson, Bill Rutherford, Clay Schnitker, Fred Williams and Jimmy Williams.

A *Madison County Carrier* story from the time reported that “[t]he bank began with capital of \$4,917,000 and, from its opening day until May 25, had taken in over \$2,800,000 in deposits.” Eighty-seven percent of the bank stock had been sold in Madison County, with the remainder sold to people with close personal ties to the community. Staff included Larry Tucker as chief financial officer, Marcia Webb as loan officer, Judy Steen as assistant vice president, Barbara Driggers as cashier, Joyce Bethea as administrative assistant, Susan Porter as head teller, Sue Matthews as the drive-in teller, and Kim Bass and Stacy Ryan also as tellers.

Just eight years later, MCCB broke ground on the columned brick-and-mortar building from which they still conduct business today. With the move, MCCB also “brought Wall Street to Main Street” by adding retirement planning and investment

services.

“New Building – Same Commitment” was the slogan at the ribbon cutting ceremony on July 16, 2007, as reported by *The Madison Enterprise-Recorder*. Face-to-face relationship banking with “people you know at a bank you can trust” still formed the heart of MCCB. The grand opening doubled as a Customer Appreciation Day, and Meggs reiterated in his welcoming remarks that the bank would continue to nurture the local community through “hometown atmosphere, community involvement, modern full line of banking services, integrity and character.” Boy Scouts, Chamber of Commerce representatives and local clergy contributed to the hometown celebration. Two days later, the bank invited everyone to a Community Day of Hospitality that included a hotdog cookout, burying of a time capsule and drawings for prizes.

Over the intervening years, community involvement beyond banking has remained a hallmark of MCCB. Not content to simply lend its logo to sponsorship banners, the bank is hands





The hometown team at the newly opened Taylor County Community Bank includes, left to right: Mandy Pullum, Carmen Dorman, Tammy Plourde, Lorie Russell, Barbara Bonner, Mandy Willoughby, Kim Cone and Cindy James.

on in its support of local happenings. Meggs says that MCCB is involved in every single community organization that exists in Madison County, including business groups, schools, civic clubs, sports programs and so on. For example, they are sponsors of the local Babe Ruth baseball and softball program; for the annual Down Home Days festival they have a float in the parade and a booth among the vendors; they buy animals to support the local youth who participate in the North Florida Livestock Show and Sale; and they enter the Forest Festival parade in Perry. The list

could go on and on.

In times of crisis, the bank has had the back of local residents as well. MCCB Business Development Officer Darren Webb recalls that when the pandemic caused widespread closures in 2020, MCCB facilitated the federal treasury's PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) for many small businesses who were having trouble getting the help they needed from larger banks. When Hurricane Idalia hit in 2023, they were the only bank in Madison County that was open the next morning, using generators to power essential



operations. The line for their ATM went through the whole parking lot and out onto the road, even as linemen and road crews were clearing downed trees and restoring power across the hard-hit area.

One customer who has been with MCCB since it opened its doors is Charlie Norwood, owner of Sea Hag Marina in Steinatchee, Fla. He remembers his first meeting with Meggs, who made him feel important and worthy even though Norwood was at the time young and just starting his career as a small business owner. He didn't know anyone at the bank, walked in cold and ended up sitting down with the bank president.

"It was pretty neat! It was such a comfortable feeling," says Norwood. "I knew he was someone who could help me and meet my banking needs."

It wasn't long before employees were greeting him by name when he went to the bank, and he likes that.

"You get the feeling that they are there to help you," reflects Norwood. "Their questions created conversation about how they could help. It's amazing what you can do when you do what you say and they do what they say they'll do. The relationship grows."

Even though Norwood is sure he's not one of the bank's top 100 clients, he says they make him feel like he is.

Meggs and his staff want all those who bank at MCCB to feel the same. Even as they've kept pace with the banking industry by providing services like internet banking, electronic bank statements and mobile deposits, it's all offered with a personal touch. They do not have a "call center" like a bigger bank might, but rather a live human answers the phone when someone calls the bank.

MCCB already had some customers from nearby Taylor County, and in 2021, it established a footprint there by opening a loan production office in Perry, Fla. When



From its opening in 1999 until 2007, Madison County Community Bank operated from this modular office on Duval Street.

the community bank there was sold, it created a void that MCCB could fill.

“That’s when we decided to go down there and replicate what we did up here,” explains Meggs.

As MCCB approached its 25-year anniversary, it expanded by establishing Taylor County Community Bank (TCCB), a division of MCCB, which opened on Jan. 17.

TCCB President Cindy James says that this division also embodies the concept of community involvement. All TCCB advisory board members, bank officers and staff are from Taylor County. They know their market and are vested in the success of local residents and businesses.

“TCCB has the same type of presence in Taylor County as MCCB has in Madison County,” says James. “We have local decision making and are very involved in the community. TCCB is currently doing great, and we have received positive feedback from our community.”

Meggs points out that he sees new people in his bank every day. They are coming to North Florida, converging from up north and farther south onto the available land in the Big Bend. This migration is another source of the bank’s continued growth. From its original 10 employees, the bank now provides jobs for 38 people across both Madison and Taylor counties. Still, whether a customer is longstanding or new, MCCB and its division TCCB remain determined to deliver outstanding personal customer service coupled with all the modern conveniences.

In a changing world, their original motto still works: “People You Know... A Bank You Can Trust.” ■



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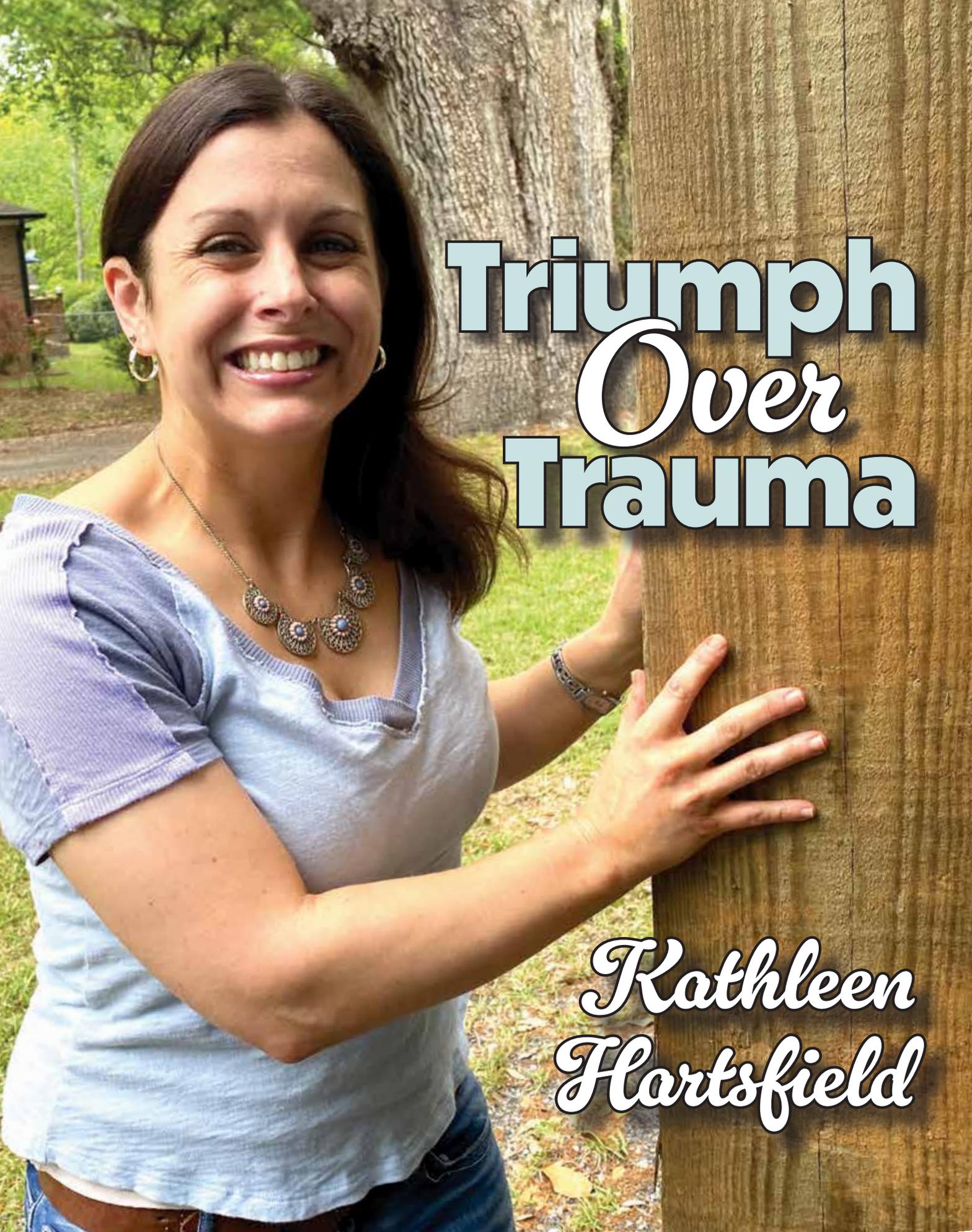
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**Triumph
Over
Trauma**

*Kathleen
Hartsfield*

Story by Robin Postell

Photographs Courtesy of the Hartsfield Family

Although she has no memory roughly three months before and after the boating accident that nearly killed her, Kathleen knows it was a pretty March 21, 2004, afternoon. Twenty years later, she reflects on what her life has been like, and what it means after all these years to be able to live on her own now.

"I'm sorry I don't remember that day at all," she says. "Thankfully, it has been taken from my memory."

Sitting at her dining table at her cute little house, you can see her mother's house out the window across the street. The two have been through more than a single interview can possibly capture, but they have photo albums and artwork and journals to help.

Kathleen was only 18 at the time, having graduated the previous May from Aucilla Christian Academy where her mother Mary taught Science.

Teenagers just having some fun, they had already dropped off some of their crew, leaving three on the boat – including Kathleen. Her date had gone to grab some food and drinks, and Kathleen fatefully decided not to ride with him.

Presumably, the propeller hit a submerged log and ejected her from the bow, her head striking a cypress knee directly on the brain stem. The boat's driver and the other female passenger were not injured critically.

"The driver of the boat saved my life," Kathleen points out. "I was face down and he pulled me up even with his broken rib and nobody knows how long I was like that. I had pneumonia from the lake water in my lungs."

Friends were already at the ER when her parents and brother got there. An attempt to have her Life Flighted was futile due to the helicopter being already in use.

"Bill and I, and Kathleen's brother Will, who was around 15, were playing catch in the front yard," Mary recounts. "We live close enough to Ashville Road to hear the ambulance go by. We had no idea for what."

Around 4 p.m., Mary received the call and they rushed to the hospital but could



"Me with my brother, Will. He's helped me a TON!!! He's actually younger than me, but he has been there for me & really acted like my guardian, things I never would have thought he'd have to accomplish!!!" - Kathleen Hartsfield

not see Kathleen right away. The emergency room staff were not hopeful, saying her chances were slim for survival, her mother Mary recalls.

"They did not expect her to survive," Mary says. "Not even a day."

Kathleen had contusions everywhere. For weeks she was long gone from life as she knew it, remaining in a coma for several weeks. The brain stem injury required a bolt hole in her skull to reduce the pressure from her brain swelling.

The community mobilized, showing support in many ways, including changing lettering outside to read "PRAYERS FOR KATHLEEN."

People would come up to family members and tell them they were praying

"One of my doctors told me I would never be able to eat, drink, sit up, or do anything by myself. I had to relearn everything, even how to brush my teeth."

- Kathleen Hartsfield



Kathleen is pictured with two of her dogs: Rose and Mabel.

for Kathleen. Because of the severe brain injury, she was highly sensitive to any kinds of noises and would become extremely agitated by them. Her physical impulses would react violently. Visitors had strict rules about any kind of sounds.

For three weeks in ICU she remained comatose and hooked up to 13 IV bags. One nurse stayed in her room for an entire 13-hour shift to make sure her vital signs were okay, according to Mary.

Those first days in the hospital were devastating for the family due to the negative prognoses from doctors. They told her even if she did survive, she would most likely be an invalid needing constant care.

"They could not say how much improvement she would be able to make," Mary remembers. "It's called a Rancho scale, done after a TBI [traumatic brain

injury], using a scale of 1-10. As the patient develops more physical and cognitive abilities and can understand instructions, the scale goes up. She was a Rancho 4 – barely above functional. If she had been any lower, she would not have been in rehab. She barely made the cut."

Once she came out of the coma she could breathe on her own and was moved to the main floor for another two weeks, followed by four months in-patient at the neurological rehab facility connected to the hospital. While there, bumpers were put inside the bed rails for several weeks because she would flail her limbs - creating bruises.

"One of my doctors told me I would never be able to eat, drink, sit up, do anything by myself," Kathleen said. "I had to relearn everything; even how to brush

my teeth."

The healing had begun with Kathleen more determined than her doctors gave her credit. At the end of the four months of rehab, she still couldn't feed herself without assistance, but at least she didn't have the feeding tube anymore. There was still lots and lots to do, but Kathleen finally returned home at the end of August.

"That Thanksgiving was a very happy day for her because she had her final swallowing test and passed. She could finally eat normal food again," Mary says. "She could also speak actual words and sentences by now."

"But I could do this," Kathleen laughs, demonstrating her sign language skills. Mary nods. "I had to teach everybody!"

"First there was home health physical and occupational therapy three or four times a week for a couple of months, then outpatient, which lasted for about two years," Mary says.

"When people say an accident can happen anywhere at any time, it is absolutely true," Kathleen writes me.

Her speech impaired by the TBI, she still struggles to speak clearly – although she does not let that hold her back.

"Even a day spent relaxing," Kathleen says, "just hanging out and chilling can end up being a life changer. If you don't already have/know the Lord as your Savior, you better jump on it, because your whole life can change in just the simple blink of an eye."

"You did not lose your looks, sweetheart," Mary tells Kathleen.

Everyone chuckles and nods, because it's true. Looking at her senior portrait and photos prior to the accident, she looks identical.

Kathleen continued therapy, but the drives to and from Tallahassee twice a week were difficult. Eventually they found Gulf Coast Neurological in Destin, where she remained in-patient for an extended period over the summer of 2005. During this period, she went from needing assistance full-time to being able to live on her own.

"She was improving so much," Mary says.

Though she was only supposed to be there six weeks, they had a fairy godmother on their side who was advocating for her

through the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) and kept finding funding to keep her there.

"By the time she came out, everything was different," Mary remembers. "I had been helping her get in and out of bed, put in her contacts, put on her eyeliner. Destin was a salvation."

Two years later, in 2007, she was able to live on her own in her grandmother's home, next to her mother's house.

"Too bad we didn't have step trackers back then," Mary says of all the phone calls from Kathleen needing mama's help.

Kathleen did equine therapy in Thomasville, Ga., at Hands and Hearts for Horses, an accredited equine therapy facility that works with veterans, those born with congenital conditions (including Autism) and others who have suffered trauma. She even participated in the Georgia Special Olympics and won a couple of medals.

Between Destin, the Shepherd Center in Atlanta and equine therapy, Kathleen continued having periods of physical therapy at different places to continue improving. Less therapy through the years led to Kathleen's sovereignty.

In 2018 the family moved to their current home where Kathleen lives in her sanctuary, directly across the street from her mother's home.

"My home is my safety place," Kathleen beams proudly. "God gave me a really good wake up call, which I did need. It has really brought me to see who my true friends are. I have gotten closer with many people I probably never thought I would get close to."

Kathleen's life is full, like her heart. She has three rescue dogs she loves to bits.

"Having my dogs around me giving me unconditional love makes me happy," she says. "And they don't judge! I can always see that look on their faces, though!"

She still loves creating art, same as before the accident – her paintings displayed all around her house and in her art-dedicated room.

Kathleen's father, Bill, passed in 2022 of Lewy Body disease. Her brother, Will, with whom she shares an especially close relationship, and his wife Carolanna, recently welcomed a baby boy. "Aunt K"

loves him enough to hang photos of him all over her house.

"I am so loving him and being his Aunt K!"

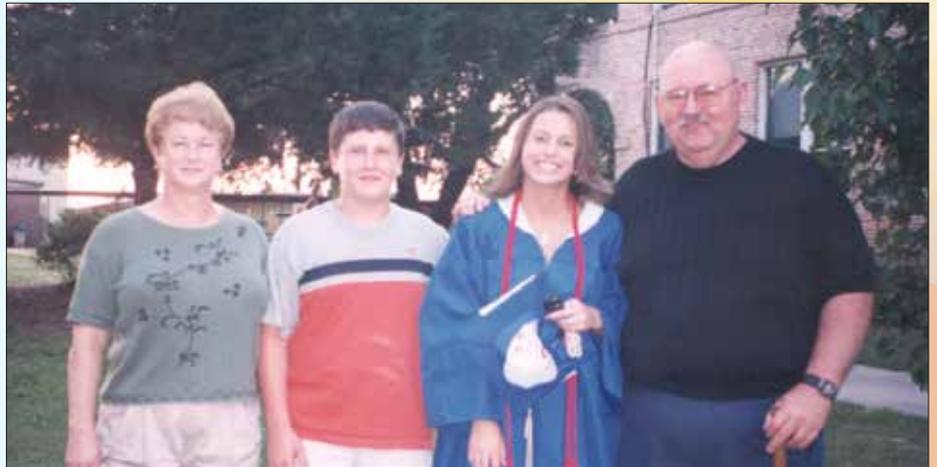
Glad to be done with the past now, Kathleen is upbeat.

"Family and friends say I haven't changed at all, that I'm still the same sarcastic, stubborn, yet sweet and kind person I've always been. That's a huge blessing. It could've gone the complete opposite way. Nobody knew the answer to that."

She's also on her golf cart a lot, although she misses driving.



2003 ACA graduation picture



Mary, Will, Kathleen and Bill Hartsfield - 2003



Kathleen was in the Tallahassee Memorial Hospital Neurological ICU Unit for three weeks.



Kathleen is pictured holding a puppy from the Tallahassee Mall pet shop, during one of her first outings during physical therapy.



Kathleen regularly walked on a treadmill during her physical therapy sessions.



Kathleen is pictured surrounded by her physical therapists and caregivers on the day she was released to go home, after four months of therapy.

"TBIs affect every person differently because they affect different areas of your brain. Many TBI patients aren't as fortunate. My injury did leave me with lack of coordination, which is why I have to use a walker, but by far, the absolute worst part is having to depend on others to drive me to and from places!"

Life does indeed go on. She's suffering from a back issue, requiring more doctor's visits to figure out a remedy. There are still plenty of challenges, like having dry eyes and labored speech.

"I still have to deal with lack of coordination," Kathleen explains. "I'd love to just be able to walk without a walker, even with a cane."

Kathleen started rehab to address coordination in April at a physical therapist facility in Monticello with Dr. Marcus Roberts but had to stop due to back issues she's trying to work out now. She will be having an outpatient procedure soon to have a screw placed in her left sacroiliac joint.

"I have silly 'oops' falls once in a while with the walker," Kathleen admits. "Anything like making too sharp of a turn or not locking the wheels and it runs away from me...I usually get bumps and bruises, and my dogs are all over me while I'm on the floor. That's why I always have my cellphone on me."

"What I learned from the accident is quite a lot, actually," Kathleen writes. "Every day of the last 20 years, I have really

learned who's there by my side, always and forever. People I never expected to be, either – not that I didn't expect them to, but the extra lengths they've been willing to go for me, I've really been shown that. I've learned to persevere and not give up, which has been a hard thing to accomplish."

Being in her situation has given her insights, which she is more than willing to share.

"I can't do things as simple as they should be. You'd think that space needed for a bathroom can be a small area, right?" Kathleen points out. "Shower, toilet, sink, just a hole in the wall. Nope, not here. For me to bathe, period, I have to have something I can put in the shower to sit on. I don't have balance to bathe and stand up at the same time. Bathrooms have to be big enough for my walker to fit in as well. I have a formed bench as part of the shower, so it all works out. I had never realized how many adjustments handicapped people need to deal with."

And she's got some advice for all of us who aren't handicapped: "It makes me SOOO mad when people who can walk fine park in handicapped parking spaces. Especially when it's raining. I totally understand that nobody wants to get soaked, but people need to think outside of the box. It takes much longer to have my driver get them get out, get my walker, help me get out and then hurry back to me after parking to make sure I don't fall."

And while she's at it, she's got some words of wisdom regarding handicap restrooms in public places: "I bet a lot of people have no reason to use them, please reconsider before using a handicap bathroom!" she begins. "Some of us need the handrails to steady us and need the bigger space to fit our wheelchair or walker. Use your mind people! Handicapped people do go out and eat and go shopping, too!"

"As you can tell, I'll tell you how I see it," she reflects. "That's never been an issue for me. I love telling people how I do things – or manage to get things done. I amaze myself, but mostly I crack myself up at the way I get some stuff done – seriously. I think to myself, wow, I'm glad nobody saw how I accomplished that!" ■

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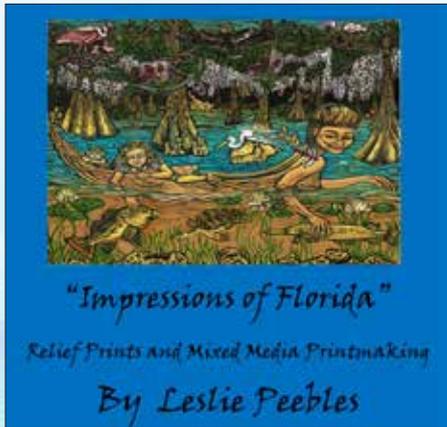
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WHAT'S HAPPENING

May 3 - 5

The Rendezvous 2024

Join the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park and Campground (3076 95th Dr. in Live Oak) for a weekend-long experience of amazing art, cutting-edge music and delicious food in a Rendezvous under the Spanish moss. Enjoy live music from various genres, including rock, pop, hip-hop and EDM (electronic dance music). Visit visitsuwannee.com/live-oak/tipper-and-friends to purchase tickets and view the full lineup of performers.



May 4 - June 1

Impressions of Florida at JAG

This art exhibit showcases the relief prints and mixed media printmaking of Gainesville artist Leslie Peebles. Jefferson Arts Gallery, 575 W. Washington St., Monticello, Fla., is open Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and by appointment by calling (850) 997-3311.

May 5 - 8

Ralphie Dares You Weekend at Ragans

Cardboard Boat Race and more! For reservations, call (850) 773-8269, email info@ragansfamilycampground.com or visit ragansfamilycampground.com.

May 9-12, 16-18

Enchanted April

Theatre Guild Valdosta presents this play by Matthew Barber, adapted from the

novel by Elizabeth vonArmin. In the rush of 1920s post-war society, four London women pool their resources to rent a villa in Italy for a ladies-only holiday under the Mediterranean sun. All performances take place in the historic 'Dosta Playhouse, 122 N. Ashley St., in Valdosta, Ga. For showtimes and reservations, visit www.theatreguildvaldosta.com or call (229) 24-STAGE (247-8243).

May 11

Monticello Second Saturday

Downtown merchants embrace a Classic Cars and Greasers theme this month as they offer extended shopping hours, karaoke, arts & crafts vendors and other fun in downtown historic Monticello from 5 to 8 p.m.

May 11 - 12

U-Pick Flower Fest

The Branford Farm Stand (27687 U.S. 129) will be kicking off the u-pick flower season during Mother's Day weekend. Attendees will be able to pick flowers and enjoy live music, vendors and more. Admission is \$10 per person and \$10 per flower holder for picking. Individuals are encouraged to bring their own clippers and a vase. For more information, visit branfordfarmstand.com/u-pick-flowers.

May 11, 17-20

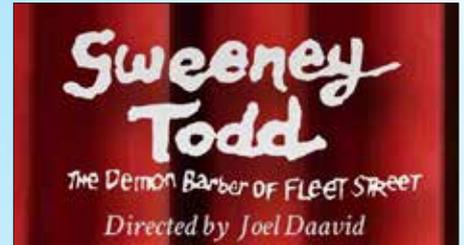
Madison's 20th of May Celebration

Madison County has five days of celebration for the 20th of May: a youth event on May 11, a banquet on May 17, a parade with festival on May 18, a worship service on May 19 and a laying of the wreath ceremony on May 20. For more information, call Donna Mobley at (850) 491-8168 or Tamara Johnson at (850) 464-6227.

May 13 - 14

Mother's Day Weekend at Ragans

Make mom feel special with a fun getaway and pancake breakfast (free for mom). For reservations, call (850) 773-8269, email info@ragansfamilycampground.com or visit ragansfamilycampground.com.



May 17-19, 24-26, 31

June 1, 2

Sweeney Todd at MOH

The Monticello Opera House presents *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, a musical thriller based on the book by Hugh Wheeler. For this production, award-winning Los Angeles designer and director Joel Daavid has come to Monticello! For showtimes and ticket information, call the Monticello Opera House at (850) 997-4242 or visit www.monticellooperahouse.org.



May 20

Growers Market @ the Circle

The Courthouse Circle in downtown Monticello becomes an open-air market on the third Monday each month from 3 to 6 p.m. in the parking lot of The Social. Expect vendors like Ashwood Homestead, Blue Sky Berry Farm, Florida Georgia Citrus, Florida Line Nursery, Full Moon Farm & Apiary, Rocky Soil Family Farm, UF/IFAS and Under the Oaks. Interested vendors should text or call Theresa Sterling at (352) 514-7655.

20th of May Events in Monticello

An Emancipation Day parade, sponsored by the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, takes place in the morning; for more information call (850)

WHAT'S HAPPENING

997-3760. A 20th of May Celebration, presented by Jefferson County Community Friends, Inc., takes place at the Rec Park (1380 Mamie Scott Dr.) from 1 to 6 p.m., with Attorney Derrick McBurrows as the guest speaker, food, drinks, live music, vendors and more; for more information, contact Franklin Brooks at (850) 509-7506.

May 21 - 22

Super Hero Weekend at Ragans

Lots of super hero themed fun plus 15 percent off overnight rates for all military, law enforcement, first responders, educators and nurses – because you all are our heroes! For reservations, call (850) 773-8269, email info@ragansfamilycampground.com or visit ragansfamilycampground.com.

May 24 - 26

Florida Folk Festival

Celebrate the diverse culture, food, music and arts that make Florida unique with the 71st Annual Florida Folk Festival, set to take place at the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park (11016 Lillian Saunders Dr. in White Springs) along the banks of the historic Suwannee River. Named a "Top 20 Event" in the Southeast, this festival has activities for everyone. In addition to a full schedule of performances, visitors may also participate in jam sessions and workshops, enjoy local eats, see educational exhibits, visit with various vendors, take a dance lesson and hear stories from all over the state. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit stephenfostercso.org/Florida-Folk-Festival.

MEMORIAL DAY



A Time to ☆
Remember

May 26 - 29

Memorial Day Weekend at Ragans

Let's remember those who gave their all for our great country with fireworks, a golf cart/bike/ATV Parade and much more! Main events are on Saturday and Sunday. For reservations, call (850) 773-8269, email info@ragansfamilycampground.com or visit ragansfamilycampground.com.

May 27

Memorial Day Picnic

The public is invited to a Memorial Day Picnic at American Legion Post #49, located at 1065 S. Water St. in Monticello. The event includes a guest speaker at 11:30 a.m., a service at 12 noon and a chicken lunch with sides afterwards.

June 1

Watermelon Festival Pageants

The Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce will select its royalty for the 73rd annual Watermelon Festival. The pageants will take place in the old Jefferson County High School Auditorium on South Water Street. For details about categories and pageant times, visit www.monticellowatermelonfestival.com.

June 2 - 3

Pirate Weekend at Ragans

Ahoy! For reservations, call (850) 773-8269, email info@ragansfamilycampground.com or visit ragansfamilycampground.com.

June 7

Watermelon Festival Kick-Off

The Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce kicks off the 73rd annual Watermelon Festival with an exciting line-up that includes the Watermelon Crawl, Kick-Off Dinner, Bed Race and Kids Ride-On Parade. For dinner tickets and further details about the activities, visit www.monticellowatermelonfestival.com.

June 8 - 9

Watermelon Festival Pickle Ball Tourney

The 73rd annual Watermelon Festival includes Pickle Ball Tournaments from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Jefferson County Recreation Park (1380 Mamie Scott Dr. in Monticello). Mixed Doubles will take place on Saturday and Gender Doubles on Sunday. For further details, follow the event's Facebook page and visit www.monticellowatermelonfestival.com.

June 8 - July 6

The Joys of Summer at JAG

This exhibit is JAG's annual member show, featuring the creative work of local artists in a variety of mediums. Jefferson Arts Gallery, 575 W. Washington St., Monticello, Fla., is open Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and by appointment by calling (850) 997-3311.

The 25th Annual Putnam County SPELLING BEE

June 8, 9, 16 (and into July)

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee

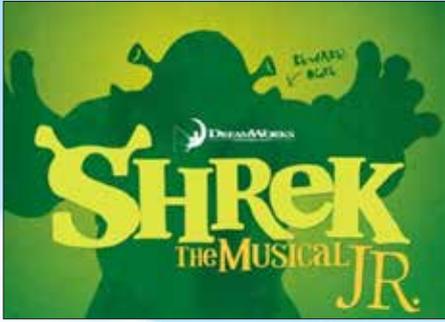
Peach State Summer Theater presents this fast-paced, funny and touching musical at Valdosta State University Fine Arts Building, 204 W. Brookwood Dr., Valdosta. For information or tickets, call the box office at (229) 259-7770.



June 9 - 10

Summer Olympics at Ragans

Prepare to challenge your opponents in fun games and relays. Who will win the gold? For reservations, call (850) 773-8269, email info@ragansfamilycampground.com or visit ragansfamilycampground.com.



June 11, 12, 14, 15

Shrek, the Musical Jr. at MOH

The Monticello Opera House presents Shrek, the Musical Jr., based on the Oscar-winning DreamWorks Animation film and Broadway musical. For showtimes and ticket information, call the Monticello Opera House at (850) 997-4242 or visit www.monticellooperahouse.org.

June 13

Watermelon Festival Fashion Show

The Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce continues the traditions of the 73rd annual Watermelon Festival with the Woman's Club Luncheon & Fashion show in the Monticello Opera House Perkins Hall at noon. For tickets, call Pam Kelly at (850) 510-8359. For information about other festival events, visit www.monticellowatermelonfestival.com.



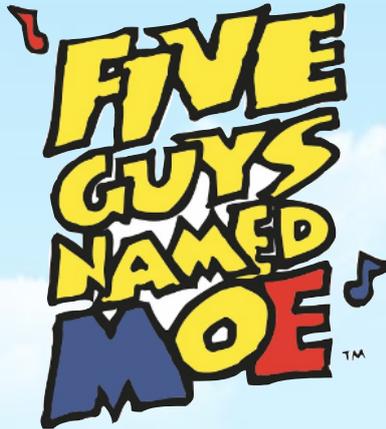
**WATER
MELON
FESTIVAL**

June 14 - 15

Watermelon Festival

The Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce presents the culminating weekend of its 73rd annual Watermelon Festival. Friday's festivities begin with the Vendor Village at 4

p.m., and evening fun lasts from 6 to 9 p.m. with Family Entertainment, Street Dance, Beer Garden and Kids Show. These repeat again on Saturday, with the addition of the Kiwanis 5K Run/Walk at 8:15 a.m., Watermelon Parade at 10 a.m. and Antique Car Show at 11 a.m. For further details, follow the event's Facebook page and visit www.monticellowatermelonfestival.com.



June 14, 15, 23, 29

(and into July)

Five Guys Named Moe

Peach State Summer Theater presents this exuberant tribute to the music of rhythm and blues pioneer and alto saxophonist Louis Jordan at Valdosta State University Fine Arts Building, 204 W. Brookwood Dr., Valdosta. For information or tickets, call the box office at (229) 259-7770.



June 16 - 17

Father's Day Weekend at Ragans

Celebrate Dad with a fun family camping trip and free (for Dad) pancake breakfast. For reservations, call (850) 773-8269, email info@ragansfamilycampground.com or visit ragansfamilycampground.com.



June 17

Growers Market @ the Circle

The Courthouse Circle in downtown Monticello becomes an open-air market on the third Monday each month from 3 to 6 p.m. in the parking lot of The Social. Expect vendors like Ashwood Homestead, Blue Sky Berry Farm, Florida Georgia Citrus, Florida Line Nursery, Full Moon Farm & Apiary, Rocky Soil Family Farm, UF/IFAS and Under the Oaks. Interested vendors should text or call Theresa Sterling at (352) 514-7655.



June 28, 29

(and into July)

Annie

Peach State Summer Theater presents the Tony Award winning story of little orphan Annie at Valdosta State University Fine Arts Building, 204 W. Brookwood Dr., Valdosta. For information or tickets, call the box office at (229) 259-7770.

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Normajean Harris

From tornado to testimony

Story by Mickey Starling

Photography by Mickey Starling and
Courtesy of Normajean Harris

Anyone living in Madison or Taylor counties can easily recall their memories of Aug. 30, in 2023. That was the day that Hurricane Idalia made direct landfall in Taylor County while making a direct path for Madison County. The category 3 storm was one of the worst ever to make its way into our region. Madison resident Normajean Harris has more than memories of the violent storm. Nightmares would be a better description.

Well aware of the approaching storm, Harris decided to sleep in her Florida room on the night before Idalia's arrival.

"I had prayed and felt sure of God's protection," said Harris, who kept the Weather Channel on all night so that she could stay aware of any developments.

Not long after daylight, a warning blast sounded through her television, alerting her to an approaching tornado in Madison County. Almost immediately, Harris heard what sounded like a train roaring in her direction. She grabbed her faithful companion, Pinky, an aging brindle bulldog, and headed to the dining room, which had no doors or windows.

The pair hunkered into a corner, using Pinky's bed as a shield against whatever



was coming next, and plenty was coming. Soon, popping and cracking noises could be heard as the Florida room's roof lifted and fell repeatedly. Harris was surrounded by the creaking of walls and ceilings as her home was surrendering to the howling winds that were about to make an entrance through her back door. As two roof panels over her nearby back door lifted, the tornado's winds came circling around Harris and her fear-stricken pet, shoving her halfway up the wall with enough pressure to make breathing impossible.

What happened next was literally out of this world. Harris reports finding herself

before the Great White Throne, described in the New Testament.

"I saw what looked like a crystal sea, and there were clouds resembling tiny feathers brushing against me," recalls Harris. "Then there was the sound of a sweet, gentle voice, saying, 'You cannot approach the throne with enmity in your heart.'"

Instantly, Harris was back in the tumultuous situation of the storm, sitting on the floor, with her phone ringing. Though her phone displayed her grandson's name, her sister was on the line saying, "I felt like I was supposed to get in touch with you right now."

Harris had not heard from her sister in almost a year, after the pair had a falling out over information that was taken the wrong way, causing relationship issues within the family. Though Harris thought she had forgiven her sister, her recent heavenly encounter concerned her, since something was blocking her access to God's throne.

As the violent winds whipped around Harris, gradually destroying her home, Harris told her sister, "I think this is my last day," as the two reconciled their differences during the call.

Her sister could hear the destruction through her phone, and the two began praying together. In the midst of praying,

part of the roof lifted even higher and crashed down, making an explosive noise.

"We began praying in the Spirit, and the wind and rain stopped," remembers Harris. "I basically had to crawl out of my house."

Not exactly as Harris had hoped, God had answered her prayers for safety.

"Even my truck was unharmed," said Harris.

As two roof panels over her nearby back door lifted, the tornado's winds came circling around Harris and her fear-stricken pet, shoving her halfway up the wall with enough pressure to make breathing impossible.

Phone service was mostly out for the following week, but she got a call very soon from her grandson, who came to assist her for a week. Her church members also came to help remove trees from her driveway. Wisely, her grandson brought groceries from Jacksonville, Fla., after leaving the airport. Harris' home generator, which seemed a great idea, proved useless as it restored power to a home with water pouring through the roof.

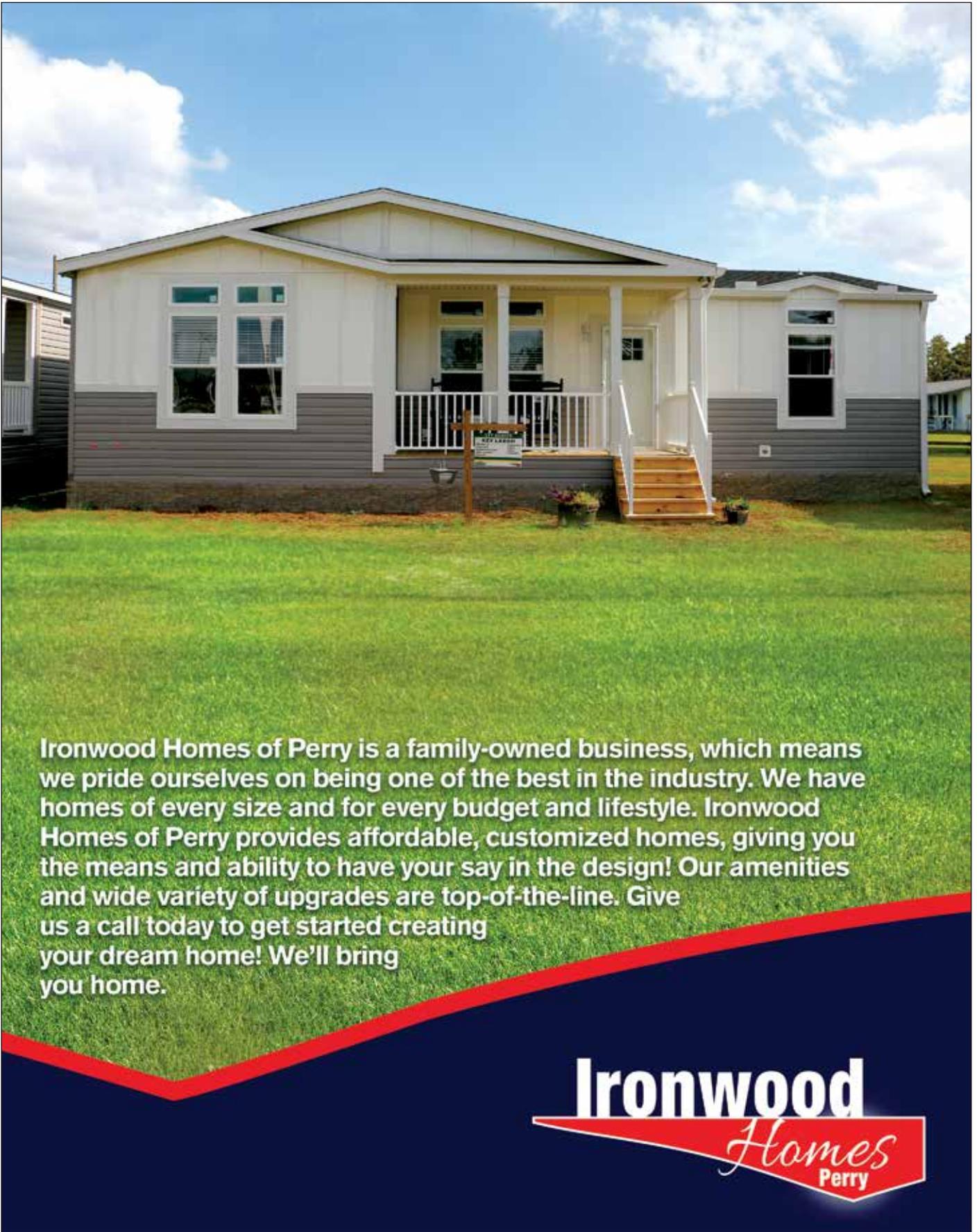
Months later, the recovery process continues for Harris, who was scammed out of thousands of dollars for roof repair from unscrupulous contractors. She currently resides in her barn, which has been gradually transformed into living quarters.

"I built the barn as a place of worship and fellowship for others, a safe place for anyone needing it," said Harris.

It turned out that she would be needing that safe place ahead of anyone else. Though her beloved Pinky passed away three months after the storm, Harris has never felt alone.

"I know what was meant for my harm is being used for my good and God's glory," said an ever-cheerful Harris. "I just live one day at a time, sweet Jesus!" ■





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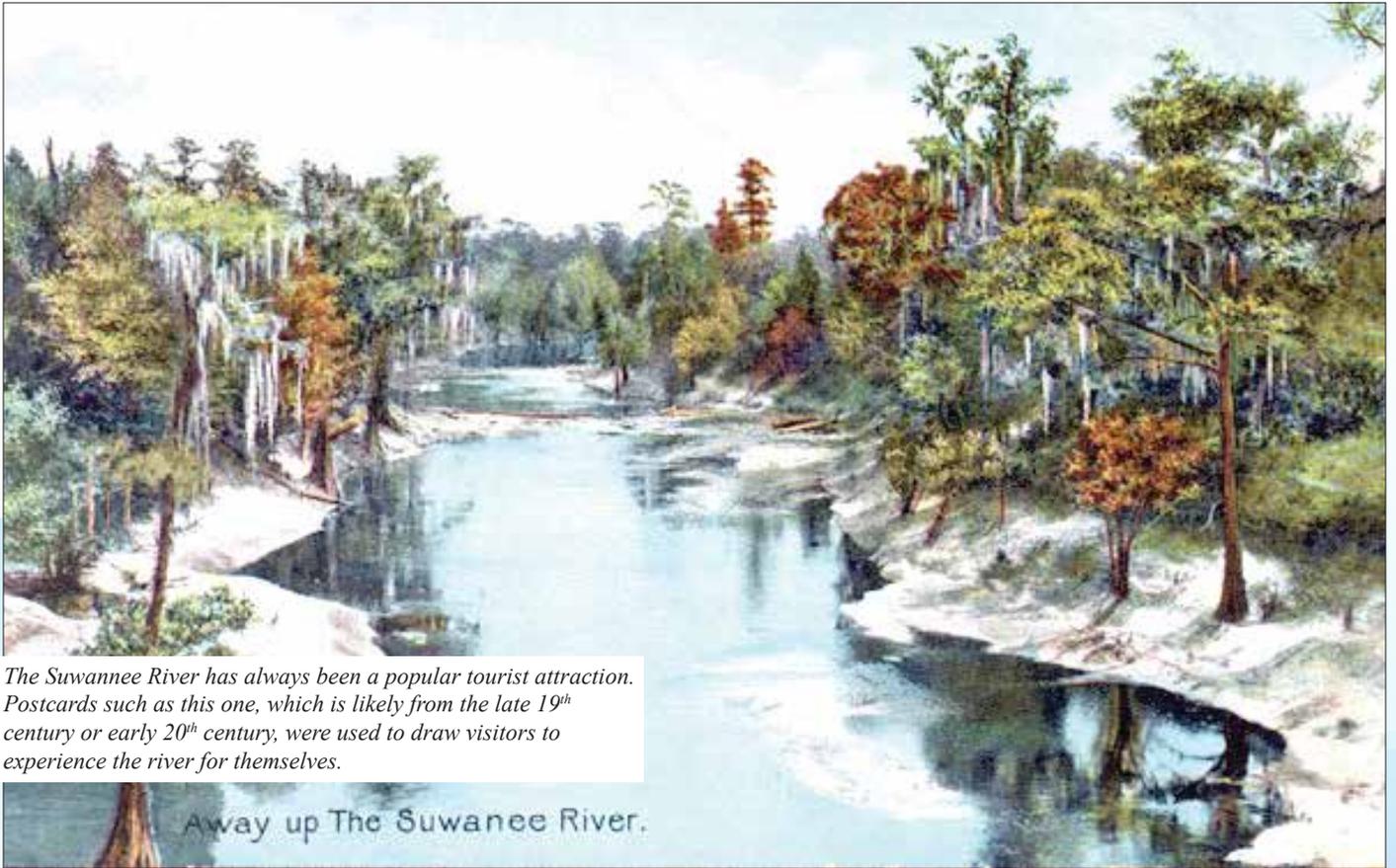
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The Suwannee River has always been a popular tourist attraction. Postcards such as this one, which is likely from the late 19th century or early 20th century, were used to draw visitors to experience the river for themselves.

WINDING THROUGH TIME

A History of the Suwannee River

Story by Hailey Heseltine

No trip to North Florida would be complete without a stop by the Suwannee River, one of the longest rivers in the region, and certainly one of the most iconic. It has been immortalized in the hearts of millions of Florida residents and visitors over thousands of years. It has even been immortalized in culture because of the “Old Folks at Home” song written by Stephen C. Foster in 1851 and later popularized by Bing Crosby, which is more commonly known as “The Swanee River.” It has been Florida’s official state song since 1935.

The Suwannee River is considered to

be one of the most pristine – unchanged by humans, that is – rivers in the nation. Most of it has remained untouched by development, unlike many other rivers, which gives the Suwannee a unique old-world character.

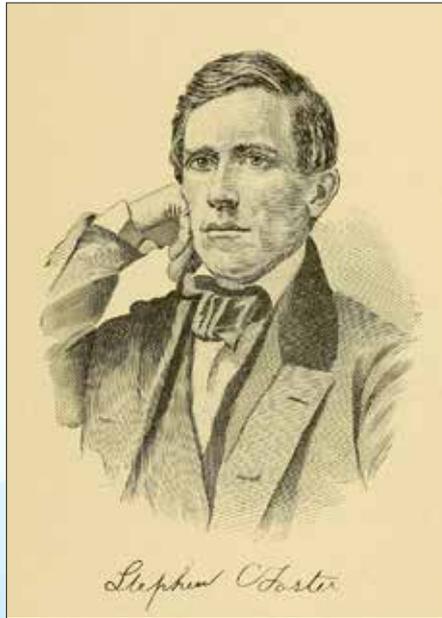
The Suwannee River has existed for thousands of years, during which it has always been enjoyed by humans. It begins in the Okefenokee Swamp near Fargo, Ga., and winds south for 246 miles, until it reaches the Gulf of Mexico near Cedar Key. Throughout its course, its waters appear dark with decayed organic material, which earn it the name of a blackwater river, and it is often flanked by limestone banks.

However, the freshwater river is just as diverse as the land it traverses over its vast journey. At times, its flow is calm yet firm, but in other areas, it shows characteristics of whitewater rapids, which are a rarity in Florida. It flows through swamps and marshes and cave systems, through high and low elevations, and is fed by more than fifty springs before draining into the gulf. It even changes according to the weather, as the river is particularly susceptible to water level changes due to rainfall. Throughout the entirety of the river’s course, however, it maintains the dark waters it is so famous for thanks to its origins in the peat-rich swamp. Toward the end of its course, it converges

with the Withlacoochee, Alapaha and Santa Fe rivers.

The natural wonders of the Suwannee River have always been appreciated by humans. Archaeological evidence suggests that areas surrounding the river have been inhabited for thousands of years. Around 1 C.E., much of the land along the river was inhabited by people of the Weeden Island cultures, among others, as evidenced by mounds and artifacts like pottery found at various sites, which tells researchers much about the different individual cultures. One of the cultures by the Suwannee River's run was the McKeithen Weeden Island Culture, which existed from around 200 to 700 C.E. and was primarily located the North Florida region; it was preceded by the Deptford Culture and succeeded by the Suwannee Valley Culture, which lasted for several hundred years – from around 750 C.E. until European contact in the 16th century.

The Suwannee River served as an important symbol culturally, as it divided land between different Native American tribes. On the east were the Timucua Native Americans, and on the west were Apalachee Native Americans. The river was a part of daily life for every living thing that resided beside it, as it nourished both the animals and the people. Humans found clay there and used its waters to catch fish, wash, boat and drink. It was also useful for hunting, gathering and trading with neighboring tribes. The river was



Stephen Foster, one of the most famous songwriters in the United States, was the composer and lyricist behind "Old Folks at Home," a song that is alive and well in the hearts of many Floridians.

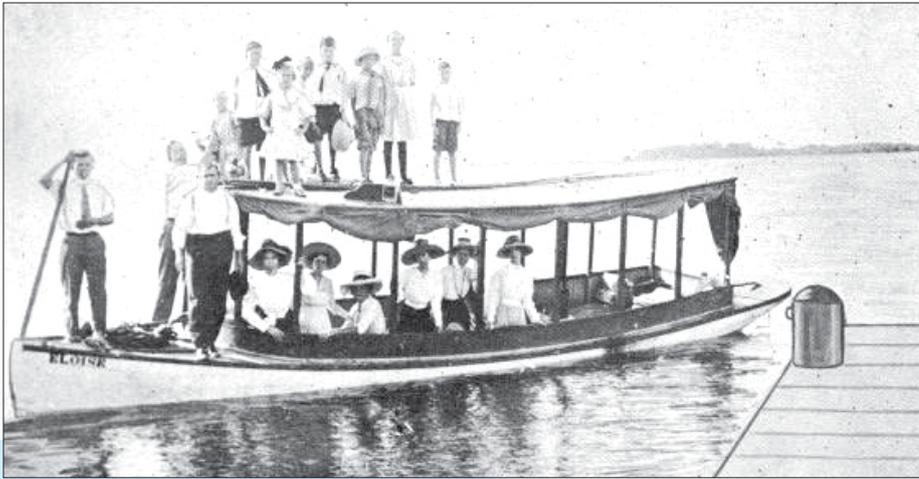
recognized as a life-sustaining landmark, and as such it was considered sacred by the Timucua tribes, who named the river Guacara and believed it was revered by even their sun god. Countless tribes set up villages nearby the river, as its waters were supporting of life itself. The river was more than just a landmark. It was a staple that defined much of the Timucuan world. Living by the river was a lifestyle, and the river itself was a friend and provider.



Tragically, European settlement brought havoc for many Native Americans. Hernando de Soto's expedition was a bloody one, and deadly diseases brought by Europeans ravaged the population. In less than a century, the population had been cut down to only one-fourth of what it once was. War, disease and slavery were a death sentence for the Timucua people. After another century's passage, in 1700, there were only about 1,000 Timucua remaining. A few decades later, in 1767, the tribe was formally considered extinct with the death of Juan Alonso Cabale. Some historians believe a few Timucua descendants may still live, with remaining



This arrangement of "Old Folks at Home" was published in 1894, and it seems to have been intended for piano and voice.



Get ready to set sail! Boating on the river has been a popular and enjoyable pastime for centuries, as the early-20th-century-crowd pictured would certainly agree!



A spring in the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia is the Suwannee River's origin point.

ones possibly having integrated into other tribes or in Cuba, but it is currently inconclusive.

Though the Timucua and many other Native cultures are tragically just a whisper of what they once were before, that whisper can still be heard in the name of the Suwannee River. It is often said that the word "Suwannee" is an anglicized version of "Sawani," a Creek Native American word meaning "echo," though there are some other theories about the name's origin, such as that it came from San Juan.

The first Spanish explorer in Suwannee region was likely Panfilo de Narvaez in 1528, who came with hundreds of others in



Children pose for a picture while wading around in the river.

a hunt for treasure. Though only four men survived the journey, they shared stories of their excursion. Cabeza de Vaca, one of the men who had gone on the journey, wrote a memoir that became immensely popular. Hernando de Soto followed only about a decade later and began his own expedition of the Suwannee area. In 1539, de Soto incited the Napituca Massacre, during which around two hundred Timucua were killed; the fighting was possibly in Suwannee County, though evidence of the battle's location has yet to be found.

By the early 17th century, Spanish occupation began to define the region as missions flooded into the land. Among them were San Juan de Guacara, San Augustin de Urihica, San Catalina de Afucia and others.

Most missions in the area were destroyed by British raids within the next hundred years as aggression between the two countries grew. Then Florida, and with it the Suwannee River, fell into the hands of the British after Spain's loss of the Seven Years' War in 1763.

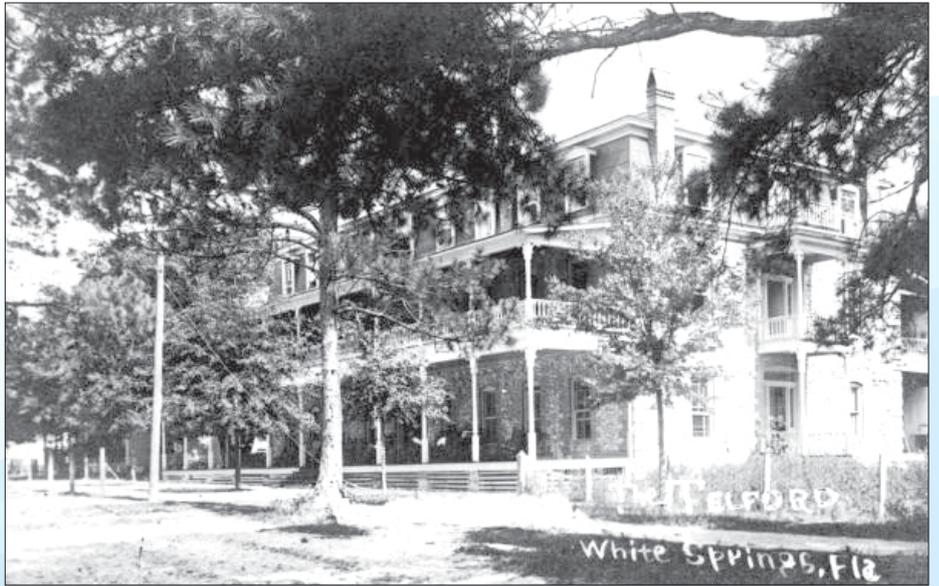
In the centuries to follow, the river continued to influence development of the region and its people. The Suwannee River's location and characteristics also played an influential role during the Civil War, especially during the Battle of Olustee. The river's natural resources were again utilized by settlers as towns sprang up – some survived the centuries, and others did not – all along the river. It was recognized for its potential especially in transport, as goods could be taken down the river. Prior to the Civil War, a mobile general store even occupied the river in the form of the *Madison*, a steamboat! It was operated by Captain James Tucker, and it sold all the conveniences a typical store would. It signaled its approach to potential customers through its whistle; the customers would then gather to purchase their goods. The *Madison* later played a small role in the Civil War, as it was used to deliver supplies and was later sunk in the river, where it still rests today.

Countless towns sprang up alongside of the river because of its convenience. White Springs, Branford, Old Town and Columbus were some. Though many of the towns along the Suwannee thrived,

others were lost to time. The town of Ellaville is one of the most well-known examples. It was located in Suwannee County, just near the intersection of the Suwannee River and the Chattahoochee River. George Franklin Drew, a Governor of Florida, founded the city of Ellaville by building a mill and a grand mansion to be his own residence in 1868. The town was mostly inhabited by people employed at the mill, and it remained a booming town until the early decades of the 20th century – reaching about 1,000 residents at its peak – when a slow downturn began. The Great Depression crushed what was left of the town, after which it was inhabited by few and later abandoned. The beautiful Drew Mansion was vacated early in the 20th century, but it stood until in 1970, albeit in a state of extreme deterioration, when it finally burned. Ellaville now consists of a few empty buildings and a historical plaque that commemorates its existence. Such was the fate of the other ghost towns along the river, including Columbus and Luraville.

However, many towns survived. Among them, White Springs was one of the most populous, and it quickly became one of Florida's first tourist attractions. Visitors clamored to see the famous sulfur springs, the waters of which were rumored to have properties that would benefit the swimmer's health. As such, tourists who were both ill and able-bodied alike came from far and wide to visit the town of White Springs. To accommodate the visitors, at least fifteen hotels sprung up in the city. The Telford Hotel, which was built by W.B. Telford in 1902, is the only historic hotel that remains standing in White Springs today. The sulfur springs remained a popular destination until their decline in the 1950s.

The Suwannee River became beloved nationwide. Florida and Georgia residents and tourists alike cherished its unique characteristics and ample opportunities for adventure. It has even received worldwide attention through the work of Stephen C. Foster, one of the United States' most famous songwriters, by the notes of a song most known as "Way Down Upon Swanee River" but formally titled "Old Folks at Home." Despite the song resonating with so many people who live by the Suwannee River, surprisingly, Foster never visited the



The Telford Hotel, built in 1902, is the only historic hotel remaining in White Springs. White Springs was famous for its Suwannee sulfur springs, which were believed to have a healing effect on the swimmers.

area! The story is that, while writing the lyrics, Foster was searching for a southern river which had the correction amount of syllables to maintain meter. He simply happened to see "Swanee" on a map and decided it was perfect for his song. He completed the composition in 1851, and over the decades, it picked up popularity, until it eventually became one of his most popular out of the two hundred he composed during his lifetime. In 1935, "Old Folks at Home" became the official state song of the State of Florida.

Today, the Suwannee River is known worldwide because of its line in "Old Folks at Home." It is cherished by many locals

and tourists alike for its beauty, practicality and fun. The river and its surrounding areas are now a place where people can boat, fish, swim, hike, camp and simply enjoy the wonders the river has to offer.

We are not the first to do those things. We are not the first to traverse the river, to cherish it and to celebrate it as part of our lives. It has been beloved since ancient times; countless people before us have walked that same path we walk today. Even as months turn to years, and years turn to decades, the Suwannee River is timeless. It continues to flow on, winding its way through time, and winding its way through the lives of everyone around it. ■



This picture, from around 1907, shows swimmers enjoying the White Springs sulfur water at the bathhouse, which was a major tourist attraction. Portions of the bathhouse continue to stand today.



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JUNE 13

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JUNE 14

Vendor Village | 4 - 9 pm
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 Kids Show | 7 pm
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ALL DAY EVENTS | 9 am - 3 pm
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 Family Entertainment
 Watermelon Oasis
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Kiwanis 5K Run & Walk | 8:15 am
 Watermelon Parade | 10 am
 Beer Garden | 11 - 4 pm
 Kids Show | 11:30 am & 2 pm

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Beyond the headlines:

Shirley Hatch, former editor and publisher of *The Branford News*

Story and Photograph by Danny Federico

In the quiet corners of Suwannee County lies a town that time seems to have embraced with open arms. Branford, with its gentle atmosphere and kind-hearted citizens, stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of community. At the heart of this tranquil haven resides Shirley Hatch, a woman whose influence has been woven deep into the fabric of the small town's identity.

Hatch's journey in Branford began more than 60 years ago. Despite relocating to Branford from Gilchrist County while she was in the sixth grade, her connection to the town was already deeply ingrained, nurtured by summers spent with her maternal grandparents, Dr. I.P. and Minnie Philpot.

Her life took a pivotal turn when she met Leon Hatch, a kind-hearted young man who had just returned from military service at the age of 17. Their connection grew stronger, and in April 1954, they embarked on a journey that would define their lives. Together, they raised three children: Lee, Shawn and Chuck.

The Hatches' influence extended far beyond the walls of their home. In 1967, they embarked on a new venture, founding the *Branford News* alongside a group of like-minded businesspeople. What began as a humble endeavor soon blossomed into a cherished community institution under Hatch's stewardship.

Through the pages of the *Branford News*, Hatch became the voice of the community, spotlighting local events and milestones. For 41 years, she poured her heart and soul into the publication. However, writing for a news publication was hardly something she was unfamiliar with, as she had been writing columns for the now-defunct *Suwannee Democrat* for years.

"I learned the newspaper business by 'hard knocks,'" Hatch said. "A couple of people who worked at the *Suwannee Democrat* at that time taught me all the ins and outs of the newspaper business."

After approximately 20 years of working for the paper, in the early 90s, Hatch decided to purchase the *Branford News* from Tommy Greene, founder of *Greene Publishing, Inc.*, the parent company of the *Madison County Carrier*, *Madison Enterprise-Recorder*, *Monticello News*, *Jefferson County Journal*, *Riverbend News* and *The Front Porch* magazine.

Initially stationed downtown where the Law Office of Heather McInnis currently sits, Hatch stated the *Branford News* moved several times as it grew. Eventually, it settled at one of Branford's well-known locations – the building where Studio B Dance and Twirl (formerly Patrice's School of Dance)

Shirley Hatch stands with the Dec. 11, 2008, edition of the Branford News, which featured a front-page story of her retirement from the newspaper.



now sits.

"That's where the paper was for the last five years," Hatch said.

While well-known for her position as publisher and editor of the paper, Hatch's impact transcended the boundaries of journalism. A dedicated member of the First Baptist Church of Branford, she lent her voice to the choir for over five decades and actively participated in various church committees. Her involvement in community activities, including her service as chair of the Branford River Reunion, her participation in the former Woman's Club, and serving as one of the first two women to receive an invitation to join the Rotary Club – initially an all-men's organization – reflected Hatch's deep-rooted commitment to making a difference in the lives of others.

In 2008, Hatch officially stepped down from her role at the *Branford News* to savor the joys of retirement. She now enjoys life surrounded by her growing family, including eight grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren.

As Branford continues to evolve and thrive, her legacy will remain etched in the town's history, an echo of her hard work, dedication and commitment to the community she holds dear to her heart. ■



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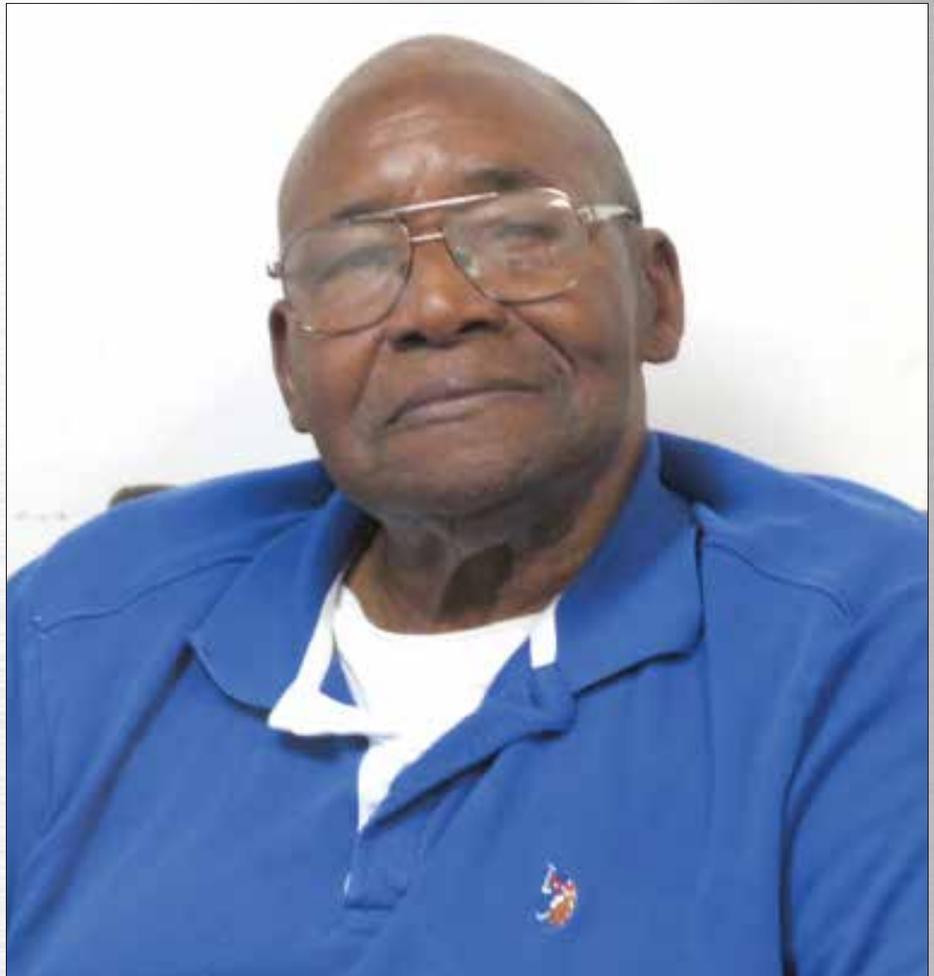
Madison native Sam McGhee grew up in a time when attending technical school or college wasn't always an option. As a young man, he was given the opportunity to work for Lester and Jimmy Register at their machine shop. McGhee recalls the good advice given by his mother: "Learn everything you can in that shop because I can't afford to send you to school." He was faithful to heed her wisdom and learned as much as possible, eventually owning his own machine shop in 1968.

For the next 50 years, Sam's Machine Shop was a fixture in Madison County, servicing a variety of needs that often required some creative thinking on McGhee's part. From branding irons, trailers, truck bodies and more, McGhee could build just about anything. Even designing and building hydraulic gates for Madison Stockyards was a relatively easy task for McGhee. Other notable creations include a boat made from two car hoods welded together.

"I fished on that boat many times," said McGhee, who also once equipped a trailer with the engine from a Cadillac that had airplane propellers attached to it. "It was made to help cool loads of chickens while they were being transported," said McGhee.

Though building things was his occupation, what McGhee enjoyed most was talking and listening to customers. One day, a customer came in complaining about his newly purchased tractor. The man had farmed many years, relying solely on the services of a horse or mule for doing the plowing.

"I came to the end of a row the other day," he said. "I told the tractor to 'whoa,' but it just kept going, right through the



Sam McGhee is a life-long resident of Madison County who loved talking to his customers and serving the community in a variety of ways.

fence and into the next field."

McGhee is certain the gentleman eventually learned to use his brakes, without the need for verbal commands.

Besides his occupation, McGhee has served his community in a number of ways. He has been a lifelong member of Pineland Missionary Baptist Church, serving in practically every role, except for pastor. He was the church treasurer

for 40 years. McGhee also served on the Madison County School Board from 1982 through 1986. With his sponsorship of Little League baseball teams, he enriched the lives of many men.

At 89 years old, McGhee now enjoys his retirement with his wife of approximately 67 years, Lola, and their five adult children. ■



Earl, center, plays with his last band, The Mercy Mountain Boys.

"Just call me Earl"

Story by Robin Postell

Photographs Courtesy of Earl Green

If you are a deeply southern North Floridian, it could be said that anything good starts in a church. The same could be said for Earl Green of Lake City, Fla. Making his churchgoing debut at Watertown Congregational Holiness Church when he was seven drew him closer to that mysterious moving spirit roused through Holiness worship. The Holy Spirit filled both church and flock to the brim.

"I wrote a song about it, called 'Old-Fashioned Way,'" Earl says, mentioning he also has a book of poetry coming out soon.

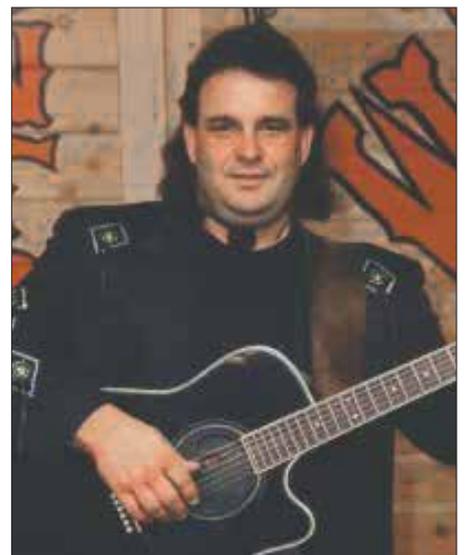
"I doubt it would seat more than 30 people," Earl says, his memories beginning to flood back. "It was in an old white wooden building right next to a railroad track. Every time the train would come

by, the windowpanes would get shook so bad they'd fall out of the frames. And the wood-slatted benches would always pinch my rear end when I sat down. Even the floorboards were wearing out and I'd spit down through the cracks between them."

What the church lacked in fancy it made up for in an abundance of the Holy Spirit's electric presence swooning through everyone.

"My daddy always played guitar and sang with the men at the church," Earl says of Earl Sr. "It really kicked in because our church was full of musicians. It infatuated me. I started hearing about groups like Happy Goodman Family, The Hinsons, Inspirations..."

"When I was 10 years old something happened that changed me," Earl confides. "We'd gone up to the church one night and



Earl at the Orange Blossom Opry in Weirsdale, Fla., in 1994, where Granny White Pike performed.

Windy Johnson, a well-known Jacksonville radio DJ dropped in out of nowhere. His gospel group, The Messengers, were not booked that evening and Windy asked Watertown's preacher, Pastor Ullis Taylor, if it was okay if they performed for them. This lively serendipitous night was one Earl would never forget. Afterwards, he had an epiphany.

"It lit my fire," Earl says. "On the way home that night in the car, I told my mom and dad that that was what I was going to do one day – and I ended up doing it for 45 years."

One decade into living and Earl already had his future mapped out from a chance encounter with gospel rock stars. Earl and his family moved to Live Oak, joined another church, and in November 1975, Earl gave his life to Jesus at Suwanee River Community Church. Gaining some agency as a late teen, he began thinking about music.

"I started a little group out there down where we lived called The Gospelites," Earl says. "I was one of the singers, and it was my first group. We would go down to Ft. Myers and other places in Florida to play, which was about all we did, but we wanted to do more music and started a group, The New Horizons. From there I became the lead singer for a well-known group, The Singing Reps. That was my first major group."

After Earl decided to disband it, he transitioned into the country music genre. Enter his new country invention – Granny White Pike. The name exceeded "catchy," with a startling history nobody would ever guess involving a road in Nashville where a Madame ran a "house of ill repute" but turned it into a hospital where she tended to wounded Confederate – and Union – soldiers.

Earl liked the story, and the name. And of course, the Civil War connection was not lost on him.

"We played a lot of clubs and evolved into an opening act band," Earl says of Granny White Pike's development. "It was more than what we were used to, I can assure you. A whole different level of doing things came with it. The advantage we had was we weren't starstruck. We respected the artists – and were in love with them



– but when we opened a show, we didn't bother the major artists and never asked for a picture. That ended up making us friends with them."

The band's very first time out with country music star Vern Gosdin, he shared a story of his first time on tour with George Jones and Willie Nelson, both of whom treated him right and included him in their sophomoric tour bus antics that involve bare butt cheeks and "pyramids," and Nelson's bus that was well stocked with Willie's favorite smoke. The boys were filled in about life with a country legend, and gained bragging rights to stories they couldn't make up.

Granny White Pike stayed busy, opening for many big, in-demand country stars like Charlie Daniels.

"Working with Charlie Daniels twice was unbelievable," Earl levels with me. "First time, we got a phone call and a buddy of mine said Charlie needed a band to open, and the pay was \$100 – of course, we would've done it for nothing. Those were the nicest guys. They treated you like you were as big as they were."

Granny White Pike was turning up

steam as they continued opening for the headlining country icons. They were shocked when invited to a "Country Fanfare" in Nashville to sign autographs. Since they were up-and-comers, they got the star treatment including a chauffeured arrival to the coliseum where they received the coveted credential allowing them backstage (and beyond) access.

"We were sitting there – and there's Trace Adkins," Earl says. "We hung out and talked to him – nicest guy, and huge."

Country artist Terry Clark leaned down and said, "How are you guys doing?" to which Earl and bassist John Paul Kirby returned, "We are doing real good right about now."

Earl still marvels over that sensation – being measured up by strangers who decide you are special, famous and worth having a copy of your signature.

"They figured you were up and coming if you were there," Earl expounds. "They took us to sign autographs at a booth, and security told us to stay behind them. That was a big deal for Live Oak and Lake City boys. Instructed to stay in front of the security guard and behind the rope, Earl



Earl at a hotel in Nashville, Tenn., during his *Granny White Pike* run.

and the rest of the band walked out of there and people lined up and down both sides.

"They were grabbing our clothes and taking our pictures," Earl half-titters. "It was crazy! We'd never had anything like that happen. We figured that they assumed if we came from the back door, we must be somebody."

"We had been in the recording studio in Nashville," Earl says. "After a couple of days, the studio owner told us, 'We got an artist who needs a band.'"

As Earl puts it, they knew the system, but little did he know what was about to happen. They would be given extra studio

time if they would go play for an artist they managed.

"Our manager brought us a cassette tape and the music that afternoon," Earl says in prime storytelling mode. "That's when he told us to chart the show, so he put the cassette in...and it was Vern Gosdin."

Gosdin, one of the prime country stars of his era, was considered a genius stylist whose lyrics were delivered in a direct, raw and brilliantly simple way that music elitists the world over tend to swoon when hearing it.

Earl, drummer Donny Weatherford and bassist John Paul Kirby shared a similar upbringing, as did Gosdin, inspired by churchgoing childhoods. Gosdin's mother played piano at their Alabama church, and Gosdin found his voice singing during every service. Gosdin and his brothers sang gospel on a weekly Birmingham radio show, eventually spending the '60s playing in various bluegrass bands. The show went on.

Until it didn't. Gosdin hung up his stagecraft and moved his family to Georgia, but music was still a calling he could not ignore. Nashville embraced Gosdin during the late '70s and through the '80s. Gosdin's legacy is distinguished by an untouchable, heart-heavy genius earning him the widely known label as "The Voice."

"Vern was big on harmony with Curtis Young on all his albums," Earl starts. "It was

like a dream for us. Vern picked us up in his bus and we went to Jasper (Ala.) to do a gig with him. We left Nashville that morning. This was probably one of most profound experiences of my songwriting. Vern was a songwriter like Willie Nelson. According to Earl, Gosdin said to him, "I hear you're a songwriter." For once, Earl was bashful before his idol.

"He said, 'Let me hear one of your songs,' and I said, 'No way I'll sing for you – you're Vern Gosdin!' 'You a songwriter or not?' Gosdin drawled. 'Let me hear one of your damn songs.'"

Earl manned up and sang him an original.

"That isn't bad," Earl recalls Gosdin saying bluntly. "But do you want to learn how to write a song?"

The next several hours Gosdin schooled Earl in songwriting.

To this significant event, Earl says, "All things work together for those who love the Lord. When I went back to gospel music after country, my songwriting had hit a new level through that experience with Vern. Greatest compliment we ever had was Vern saying we were the best band he'd ever worked with, not as far as music but because we knew how to do our job and make an artist look good."

Gosdin called upon *Granny White Pike* whenever he was around and needing backup, impacting the band in ways they are probably still parsing.

"That really impacted us a lot," Earl says in simple, Gosdin style.

There are more stories, but Earl doesn't like to gossip, so you didn't hear it from him. But there is this one irresistible Florida tour bus story he cannot help but relay.

Gosdin, he tells, would never get off the bus, but one time he did. Wearing only his PJs, he headed towards the truck stop's more spacious restrooms. His bus left without him, headed to Texas where they were playing the next night. The story goes, Gosdin walked around without a cent on him, having to ask people for money. Nobody believed he was Vern Gosdin.

"It was the beatingest thing," Earl smiles. "Somebody finally believed him and drove him all the way to Texas to make the show."

Fun as it all was, *Granny White*



Earl began his first group, *The Gospelites*, in 1976 while living in Live Oak, Fla.

Pike began to put a hurting on the band members. Earl had gotten a bellyful of the bar scenes and was troubled by the turns his life had taken. There was too much defeat and sadness in them. Earl felt a shift. He knew he had strayed from his spiritual path, and something had to give.

"I walked out of a club on July 4, 1996, and said I wouldn't be back," Earl states.

The idea of putting former group The Reps back together came and went.

"It didn't feel right," Earl says, shaking his head. "I put together a new group, Highway 7, a Christian-country band, which evolved into The Mercy Mountain Boys."

And away...they...went. Earl had a knack for creating successful groups throughout his life, and The Mercy Mountain Boys did not disappoint. The time was right. Earl was ready to get right with Jesus, grow closer once more. He felt freshly baptized, purposefully committed to the Mercy Mountain Boys that gained recognition in the right kind of way.

Earl was back on the road, decades sprawling out behind him. To the untrained eye it might have appeared Earl had fallen off faith's wagon and let the bar crawling lifestyle corrupt him. Earl sees it differently. The teachable moments, Earl knows, are precisely what tune you back up to be in good standing with yourself, and with God. Without the lows, he knows he wouldn't have reached the Mercy Mountain Boys highs.

"Mercy was the last and biggest success," Earl concedes. "We started in 2009 and disbanded in 2021."

Health issues had made touring increasingly intolerable for Earl and another band member. The Mercy Mountain Boys' days grew shorter, but they still managed a number one hit song in 2018, "Come on Back."

Born June 7, 1959, Earl was a rolling stone for 45 years of his life. Suddenly back on solid ground, Earl had successes, once-in-a-million experiences, but he and his bandmates had all kept their day jobs and built families back home in the real world. Earl looked back over the decades and various eras, and groups, sizing himself up and what God had in store for him next.

Another divine appointment came when Lighthouse Christian Center in Mayo, Fla., came up short a pastor and asked Earl if he would take over. He insisted he didn't want to pastor, but they must have done some praying because he gave in, with the understanding it would be as interim until they found a permanent replacement. Four years later, Earl still holds court at Lighthouse, "telling it like it is" and doling out his "Earlisms" to a devoted, growing congregation.

He is happily grounded at Lighthouse Christian Center with his wife of 29 years, Wanda, and Sammi, his granddaughter who lives with them.

Earl has had the privilege of baptizing a lot of folks in the past four years. He doesn't complicate Sunday with a prewritten, prepared sermon. He prefers winging it, letting the Holy Ghost lead. Listening to his sermons on YouTube I found some enlightenment and witnessed his boldness.

"There was a time that I really needed someone," Earl says. "But folks..."

His voice trails off.

Going to a pastor today, Earl says, can end up making things worse. He puzzles over the judgment he has experienced firsthand with church leaders whose own biases inhibit church members from reaching out.

"You might go talk to your church leader and become ostracized," he says, "and then your business is all over town."

Trust and honesty, Earl preaches, are sorely needed and missed. Earl has found a new performance, and a venue that does not require bus traveling, smoke-filled bars that wreck his health, or sad stories of humanity's bottom-of-the-bottle despair that he witnessed during Granny White Pike's run.

Now he shows up with a scripture God has chosen for him through his studies, and he shares the message with his brothers and sisters and friends in the Kingdom of God. He's not preaching or judging or pastoring in the sense some think of. Storytelling fits, as it did for Jesus in his ministry. Earl's way is different, willing to address the toxic hypocrisy that churches can become infected with and estrange their members.

"I'm not religious," Earl says in one of his sermons. "I'm spiritual."

He is conflicted about being labeled. His Easter sermon was entertaining, open-minded, forgiving and loving – a five-star way to spend an Easter Sunday hour.

"Don't call me pastor," he says, ever so flustered. "I'm not... I just don't think of myself... I am...oh..."

I wait to hear his final say.

"Just call me Earl." ■



The New Horizons, Earl's second group, was comprised of Letrisha and Penny Brown (front), two girls he had been friends with all his life, along with (in the back row, left to right) Dale Taylor, John Paul Kirby, Randy Lamb and Earl, with what he refers to as his "afro."



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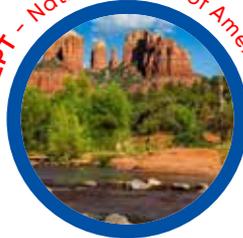
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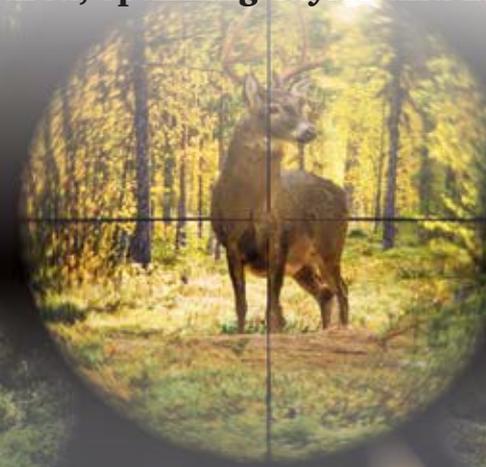
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Steve Green



A S.H.O.T. at something new

Story by Heather Ainsley

Photographs Courtesy of Steve Green

For many Americans, growing up in the suburbs means summer bike rides and trips to the mall. For Steve Green, growing up in rural Florida meant a childhood enjoying activities that would take him deep into the impressive Florida wilderness. Raised in a family of avid hunters, he gained a lifetime of extensive hands-on knowledge about hunting, camping, fishing and the importance of wildlife conservation.

As a youth, Green took a job with the family tractor business, a job that enabled him to be outside a great deal. In 1996, he hesitantly accepted a part-time position at a local funeral home, at the request of a friend who was a licensed funeral director and needed help. There, he saw the relationship that a local funeral director built with the families they served, and the impact that the care provided by the funeral director could have on those who were in one of the most difficult times of their lives.

Following his graduation from Gupton Jones College in 1999, he served out his internship, and in April of 2000 went to work at Burns Funeral Home as a Licensed Funeral Director. Green and a fellow employee, Tommy Murrow, saw an opportunity to buy the business back from a company that Mr. Burns had sold it to in 1993, and the pair became owners. It was important to them that the business regain local ownership, rather than being owned by a large, indifferent company. Today Green owns not one, but three Burns Funeral Homes that serve the needs of several North Florida counties.

While his work serving his communities is rewarding, working at a funeral home can often be heavy and exhausting, both physically and mentally, and for Green, it takes a significant emotional toll.

"The funeral profession can be really heavy," he says. "You're serving people through some really hard emotional moments in their lives, and after a while it can start to really weigh

on you – you need a way to rebuild yourself, to find your footing again. As a lifelong outdoorsman, I have always loved being out in nature, and that's where I go to rebuild myself."

For Green, it is easy to see the benefits of spending time out in nature, whether it is through hunting, camping, fishing or hiking. When he isn't serving individuals at the funeral home, he finds repose and emotional fortitude in the forests, woods and wetlands of America. In 2023, he founded Southern Grown Hunting (SGH) as a way to share his experiences with others who enjoy similar activities. Through his website, social media and podcast, he shares stories of experiences he has had, provides advice and information about wilderness activities, and educates the public on land and habitat management techniques that he implements. Through SGH, he is able to connect with fellow enthusiasts and partner with like-minded individuals who have a passion for the great outdoors.

Creating SGH not only enabled him to share his passions with a like-minded audience, it also allowed people to reach out to him with questions and concerns about how to get started in outdoor activities themselves. Green began to receive requests from individuals who wished to accompany him on hunts or nature hikes, eager to learn more about the activities without knowing exactly where to start. Seeing the awe and impact that these tag-along trips brought to people was deeply inspiring to Green.

"I saw people's reactions to simple things," he stated, adding that it wasn't always the immediacy of the hunt that impressed people. "I saw people's reactions to just being in the woods, hearing the quiet of being in nature, seeing the sunset or sunrise, and how much those things moved them – it created a passion in me to keep taking people."

"I kept getting these requests," continued Green, "and one day my wife said to me, 'I don't think you

realize what it's like for people who don't get to be raised up in this, how overwhelming it can be to start some of these activities without knowing where to begin.' And she was right – I grew up in the woods, this is just what I know. I never really thought about what it might be like for people who didn't grow up camping or fishing or anything. That realization is what led me to create The S.H.O.T. Academy."

The S.H.O.T. Academy was founded in 2023, and stands for Southern Hunting and Outdoor Training. It provides a way for Green to share his love of the outdoors with anyone who is interested in accompanying him in outdoor activities. While many of these trips come in the form of hunting trips, he is happy to lead individuals in a variety of outdoor activities, including hiking, camping or fishing. His goal with S.H.O.T. Academy is to introduce kids and grown ups of any skill level to outdoor activities so that they can discover what they enjoy doing most. While they discover their outdoor passions, Green is able to offer his expertise, tips and lifelong experience to help them explore the activity in a guided manner, rather than a stressful (and often unpleasant) "trial-and-error" method.

While The S.H.O.T. Academy helps individuals find and build on their own personal preferences and outdoor hobbies, Green has continued to build his Southern Grown Hunting (SGH) presence, and says that SGH is geared more towards what he specifically enjoys doing. Through SGH, people can join him in his personal hobbies, which primarily consist of hunting and habitat/wildlife management.

"The S.H.O.T. encompasses everything, so people can figure out what they like to do," says Green, "while Southern Grown Hunting is all the things that I personally like to do."

While hunting makes up a part of his outdoor enjoyment, Green says his biggest passion lies in habitat and wildlife management, which is



a method of improving a plot of land to benefit native wildlife. By being a mindful steward of the land, it is possible to increase the amount of wildlife that lives on that land, by making it hospitable and beneficial to the local fauna. This also can significantly impact the quality of life and health of the local species, which is an important part of conservation efforts and maintaining strong, environmentally conscious practices. This in turn can increase the potential harvest for hunters and enable enthusiasts to be able to enjoy not just the hunt, but a thriving ecosystem for generations to come. Out of the 12 months that make up a year, Green says he spends an estimated nine of those months tending to the land in this way. During hunting season, he enjoys guiding deer and turkey hunts.

For Green, there is something special about watching a first-time hunter get their first harvest, sometimes after years and years of trying without success. Even so, it isn't the most critical part of his work; for all of his guided hunts, hikes, camping trips and fishing outings, safety is paramount above all else.

"When I take anyone, young people especially, out into the woods," he states

"The way I see it," says Green, "the Creator made all of this for us. If you read the Bible, it talks about when Jesus often withdrew himself into the wilderness to pray"
- Steve Green

firmly, "safety and ethics is most important. I try to teach them about the outdoors, and how to be out there safely. I teach them to be present – to get re-attached and re-acquainted with nature and reality. To connect them with something that isn't virtual, that isn't artificial. The reality of having to take an animal's life is never pleasant, but it is important for people to remember that our food comes from somewhere, whether you buy your burgers at the grocery store or harvest them yourself from the woods. I want to teach people to have a true understanding about the animals they hunt – their behaviors, their biology."

Green says there is something special about seeing a kid provide their family

with food that they hunted and harvested themselves, as he has seen an increase in responsibility, self-pride and confidence in their capabilities that he finds deeply rewarding.

One of the second most important topics he teaches is the concepts surrounding the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, which is the world's most successful system of policies and laws dedicated to restoring and safeguarding fish, wildlife and their habitats through science and active management. Since the turn of the 1900s, it has been the cornerstone of modern wildlife conservation across all of the United States.

1. The model was founded as early American settlers began to realize the irreversible damage being done to North American wildlife at the hands of early unrestrained market hunting. To prevent additional damage from taking place and costing future generations the ability to enjoy activities like hunting and fishing altogether, a system of responsible stewardship and regulations was established. Today, the model consists of seven basic principles:

2. Wildlife resources are conserved and held in trust for all citizens, which

means that wildlife belongs to everyone. Natural resources and wildlife on public lands are managed by governmental agencies that protect them, like state parks.

3. Commerce in dead wildlife is eliminated. Commercial harvesting and hunting of wildlife is prohibited. This protects wild game species from being mass-harvested by companies for profit, which would lead to a lack of sustainability and corporate restraint.

4. Wildlife is allocated according to democratic rule of law. This means that owning land does not mean you are the sole owner of the wild animals on that land. Hunting and fishing laws are created through public processes, giving everyone the opportunity and responsibility of conserving and using wildlife. This is also why you are not allowed to feed animals like bears even if you are on your own land; there are laws every citizen must abide by in regards to taking care of the environment and the wildlife in it. It also ensures every citizen has access to land that can be used for hunting or fishing (why, for example, you can own a house on a river, but you do not own the river itself, nor can you prevent people from fishing in said river).

5. Wildlife may only be killed for a legitimate, non-frivolous purpose. The killing of wildlife must only be done for food, fur, self-defense or protection of property. This is why there are laws preventing people from casually killing animals for antlers, horns or feathers.

6. Wildlife is in international resource. Animals migrate freely across land and sea boundaries. By cooperating with other countries, states and provinces, humanity as a whole can be more effective at conserving critical species.

7. Every person has an equal opportunity under the law to participate in hunting and fishing, as long as they are within good standing of the law.

Scientific management is the proper means for wildlife conservation. Research and informed management is crucial for developing the best conservation practices. By tracking species and recording up to date scientific data, we can increase our understanding about our impact on the environment and change policies





as needed to help protect wildlife and important habitats.

By educating new outdoor enthusiasts on the North American Model, Green hopes to help them realize that they are entitled to the use and care of wildlife. As he puts it, they “have skin in the game.” It is the responsibility of every citizen to be a good steward of our land, and is the right of each steward to responsibly utilize wild resources in a way that is personally enriching and externally sustainable. Hunters, campers and fishermen should be aware and knowledgeable on the impact their activities have on local ecosystems, and be willing and able to adhere by laws that will preserve natural resources so these activities can be enjoyed for generations to come.

52 The Front Porch

Through his work connecting people with the outdoors, Green has been able to meet larger influencers like well-known hunter and “Turkey Man” Eddie Salter and pod-cast director Ronnie “Cuz” Strickland. It has also connected him to some everyday citizens like Jesse Fish, who after 10 disappointing years of hunting efforts was finally able to harvest his very first Osceola turkey while accompanying Green on a hunt. Green was even featured on the *Small Town Hunting* TV show, which is being released now on their Youtube spring series, and will be aired this fall on their Outdoor TV series.

Additionally, Green is a member of two conservation organizations, the National Wildlife Turkey Federation (NWTFF) and the Rocky Mountain Elk

Foundation (RMEF), and also is on the pro-staff with the following companies: Backwoods Premium Wildlife Products, Elite Archery, Moultrie-Mobile Game Cameras and Eddie Salter’s Team Turkeyman.

Green doesn’t just meet with people in person; he enjoys showcasing his knowledge and skills online, teaching people about outdoor activities through his own videos and, most recently, a podcast. His videos show real stories of individuals that have accompanied him on hunts and other excursions, and he talks about things everyone needs to know while out in the woods. His podcast, *The S.H.O.T-Cast*, is available on Spotify, and his videos are available on his social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook, by searching @*realshotacademy* and @*southerngrownhunting*.

There is an undeniable benefit to being outdoors, whether you are a hunter, hiker, camper or birdwatcher. To take a step away from cell phones, traffic and the general hustle and bustle of city life is largely beneficial and can help an individual feel more grounded and well-adjusted to life’s demands. While it can be intimidating for inexperienced people to get started in outdoor hobbies, Green encourages anyone to start small while exploring their interests and ask a lot of questions. His ultimate goal is to utilize his experience and love of nature to inspire anyone to get out there in the woods and reconnect. While he enjoys leading guided hunts and other trips, his biggest hope is that people who “don’t know anything about anything” can someday feel comfortable, confident and responsible being out there doing it all on their own.

“The way I see it,” says Green, “is the Creator made all of this for us. If you read the Bible, it talks about when Jesus often withdrew himself into the wilderness to pray, and He does this to get in an environment where He could pray, rest, rebuild, and hear from His Father, so that He could return, continue His work, and carry out God’s plan for His life. If the one who made it all went back there to rebuild and center Himself, shouldn’t we look at His example, and consider doing the same?” ■

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"BUILDING A STRONGER COMMUNITY"

MAY

SAT. 11

YOUTH EVENT

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2024

FRI. 17

BANQUET - 6 PM

Rec Center

SAT. 18

PARADE & FESTIVAL - 10 AM

Rec Center

SUN. 19

WORSHIP SERVICE - 11 AM

Demascus Baptist Church

MON. 20

**LAYING OF THE WREATH
CEREMONY - 12 PM**

Four Freedoms Park

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