

# The Front Porch

Spring 2020

## Kindred at Home

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Local stories of growth from the ground up

## Everybody loves Enos

Sonny Shroyer talks Dukes, Hollywood and lessons he's learned along the way



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## Living to work

Welcome back to our front porch. I invite you all to pull up a chair, sip on some sweet tea and sit a spell. We would love to share our new stories with you!

With this newest edition of The Front Porch, we pay special homage to our local homegrown businesses. Without our local small businesses, our

communities would just not be the same. It's these mom-and-pop businesses that make our communities softer, warmer and more inviting. These are our family members, our friends and our neighbors. The local people. Silly or cool, crazy or kind, they are your people!

I had the pleasure, and honor, to grow up in a home-grown business. My father founded the Madison County Carrier in 1964. I never had to wonder what I wanted to do when I "grew up." I grew up doing what I knew I wanted to do for the rest of my life – the newspaper business.

As children, my brothers and I, we did not receive an allowance at home. We got paid for working at the newspaper business. If we didn't work, we didn't get any money.

We began work at a young age. At age three, I was taught how to opaque the negatives. Red pencil, light table, and a negative – it's just like coloring. Picking up paperclips, pens, rubber bands, and such off the floor was my other "main" job (and of course I'm sure a "busy" job for my parents to give me.)

By age five to six (the age of being taught to read), I was taught how to type on the typesetter. I could type out the words for the advertising, take it into the darkroom and develop it. I was also taught how to proof-read ads. Other jobs included "busy work" like organizing the clip art books, proof sheet books and border tapes.

Each year as I grew older, so did my abilities to do more "important" things around the office. Making pictures in the darkroom, building ads, pulling tearsheets, stuffing newspapers, addressing newspapers, doing the newspaper route, making PMT's, selling advertising, working wrecks, developing plates, and plating up the press. Of course, back then we didn't have computers and one of my main jobs was typing the stories. By the time I entered the 8th grade and was put into a typing class, I was already typing 80 wpm correctly. When I was 19 years old, I became the main bookkeeper of all our businesses; accounts payable, accounts receivable,

payroll, and taxes. Of course, back then we didn't have computers; it was bookkeeping by hand, 40 column ledgers and everything done with pencils, copy machines, and adding machines. I learned everything from the School of Hard Knocks.

However, it seemed easier, sometimes, back then; and looking back it seemed a lot more fun. There was so much to do and you didn't just sit behind a desk and a computer all day, to do it.

We laid out the newspaper with wax and scissors. We used X-Acto Knives and rulers. We had border tape and clip-art books that we had to flip page by page by page to find 'just the right picture.'

There was no time to play on the computer or internet (even if those things had been readily available) for we were all too busy working. No email, no Facebook, no iPhones. We used typewriters, typesetters, film, and lots of 'good ole sweat.'

We worked until 3:00 am on press deadline nights, just to rush it to the press and rush back to stuff papers, run them through the Addressograph and get them to the post office before the mail went out. Tensions ran high at 3:00 am. But the next day we were all friends again and late-night attitudes were no longer remembered.

We pushed hard all day long and all week long to get the newspaper out. My Daddy never let us slack. Some of his favorite sayings were "Turn your hat around" (hurry up doing what you're doing and get back here to do something else), "10-18" (the law enforcement dispatch signal for hurry up) and "It Don't Rain On Harvey Greene Hill" (rain, snow, sleet or hail – we were going to get up and go to work – PERIOD.)

Newspaper ink gets in your blood, they say. My favorite newspaper jobs, back then, were burning plates, developing plates, plating up the press and running the press. Things I no longer get to do since we don't own a press anymore; and computers have taken a lot of that away from even the printing plants, now. But oh, how I love walking into a printing plant and smelling the ink. Brings back memories of days gone by.

Yep, a lot of things have changed in the last 56 years since my parents started the Madison County Carrier. I now have four newspapers and a magazine to print and my love for sharing what is happening in our readers' corner of the world, is even stronger than ever.

In life, always remember ... when it's all said and done... when you wake up each morning and dread the job that lies ahead of you, then it's time to change jobs. But, when you wake up each morning and find joy in what lies ahead of you, then you know you have the right job for you.

I wake up happy each and every day!

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "Small Business". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.



## Praying for Rain

I'm a product of six generations of North Florida farmers. My family has grown everything from watermelons, to corn and tobacco. In fact, tobacco was our biggest crop. When I was growing up during the nineties, anti-tobacco ad campaigns began to pick up due to a rise in teen smoking and tobacco use. I remember being scolded by a teacher because

my father grew tobacco. But I knew, all too well, that the crop many were frowning upon put food on our table and clothes on our backs.

I rode in the passenger seat of my daddy's pickup truck countless times as he wearily traveled to check each of his tobacco barns located in counties throughout North Florida—Madison, Jefferson and Taylor, I remember for certain. Flue-cured tobacco requires heat—too much and the crop will burn, not enough and the crop will spoil and rot. Neither of these outcomes were good. Therefore, the barns required constant vigilance. When daddy wasn't in the fields during the day, he was burning fuel on the shadowy highways at night.

While daddy tried his best to control the things he could—such as the proper functioning of the tobacco barns that cured our crops—our income depended on many factors that were out of our control. For instance, I knew from the time I was a young child that rain was vital to our livelihoods. If the weather remained dry and hot, we knew what we

had to do ... pray for rain. Irrigation was never a dependable solution and the Florida sun could quickly turn into our worst enemy. A dry summer meant a definite shortage of income.

During the off season, Daddy ran a guided quail hunting business. This business also depended on uncertain variables. One season, I recall a shortage of quail due to disease. The deficit caused local dealers to raise their prices. Because of this, we were short of birds for our hunts and paid double to get them.

With every setback, my family banded together, worked harder and, above all, prayed harder. I was taught to have faith in God during good times and bad. I must say, He always provided. In addition, I've learned time and time again that when bad times arrive, our small, southern communities always come together, just like my family did.

Recently, we have been hit with a major setback and the world has had to make huge adjustments. A dry season has come in the form of a serious viral pandemic. Families across the planet are suffering. Consequently, our great homegrown businesses are suffering, too. Yet, people are banding together to help each other—just like my family did growing up. Community churches and volunteers are helping to provide kids with meals while schools are closed. Neighbors are sharing supplies with each other while stores are bare. The list goes on.

As I witnessed the good come from poor circumstances recently, I was reminded of the dry seasons of my childhood. I don't remember panic. I don't remember grief. I remember the hours spent tagging along with my daddy in his pickup. I remember turning on the radio and singing country anthems, loud and proud. I remember telling each other stories. I remember holding his hand—large, calloused and stained from grease, dirt and the labor of farm work. We may have been in sticky circumstances sometimes but we kept on driving and, all the while, we prayed for rain.

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# Everybody loves Enos

## Shroyer's character has stood the test of time

Story and photos by Mickey Starling, Staff Writer  
Submitted photos courtesy of Sonny Shroyer

Many of us grew up following the escapades of the Duke brothers in "The Dukes of Hazzard," which aired on CBS, from 1979 to 1985. This hilarious comedy had everything a Southerner could ask for: fast cars, silly antics and Daisy Duke.

While Daisy's million-dollar legs kept some viewers coming back, it was the ever-grinning Enos, deputy to Sheriff Roscoe P. Coletrain (James Best), who quickly became a favorite of fans. Actor Sonny Shroyer was perfectly cast as the deputy who was always at least one step behind the troublesome Duke boys and ever in romantic pursuit of their cousin, Daisy, played by Catherine Bach.

Stardom was never a consideration for the athletic young Shroyer, who was a stand-out tackle for the Valdosta Wildcats in the 1950s. His exploits on the field secured Shroyer a football scholarship to Florida State University, but a shoulder injury abruptly derailed those plans.

A degree in business became the next objective, as Shroyer enrolled at the University of Georgia (UGA), after attending Valdosta State College and Florida State University. Throughout his college years, Shroyer worked numerous jobs to pay for his education. By the time he graduated, Shroyer had cooked, delivered pizzas and worked in construction and several other jobs. His determination and hard work paid off and he landed his first job out of college with Ford Motor Company, in Atlanta.

Yet, acting seemed to be pursuing Shroyer from early on, as he kept landing in the right place at the right time. While living in Atlanta, Shroyer met an advertising representative who lived in the same apartment complex. He told Shroyer he needed a model to wear a football uniform while drinking a coke. The ad was for a football program for an upcoming Georgia vs. Georgia Tech game. The simple job would make Shroyer \$25 and give him the opportunity to model in the future, including a multitude of Coke ads over



*Sonny Shroyer is best-known for his role as Enos on "The Dukes of Hazzard."*

*At 84 years old, actor Sonny Shroyer, a Valdosta resident, is still going strong.*

the next seven years.

Shroyer's unexpected success in modeling prompted a friend to suggest that he get himself an agent. "What's an agent?" replied Shroyer. The friend's suggestion turned out to be a wise one, because the numerous modeling gigs opened the door for two movie roles in 1972, starting with "Like a Crow on a June Bug," followed by "Payday," starring Rip Torn. "I learned not to mention too much about modeling because a lot of producers don't think models can act," said Shroyer.

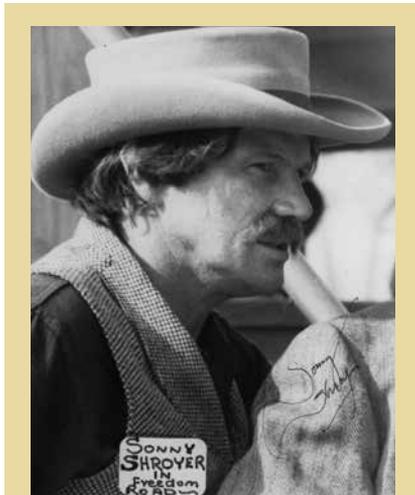
From 1974 to 1977, Shroyer was featured in three of Burt Reynolds' films: "The Longest Yard," "Gator" and "Smokey and the Bandit." Though his impressive film credits continued to grow, Shroyer had yet to work in Hollywood. That big break came in 1977, when Disney tapped him for the role of Luke in "The Million Dollar Dixie Deliverance."

"That was one of my favorite roles," said Shroyer, who again worked with Disney in 1978, appearing in "The Young Runaways," starring Gary Collins.

Fate continued working in Shroyer's favor in 1978, when a college friend from UGA asked Shroyer to be the first actor to audition for a part in a new television series that he had created. That friend was Gy Waldron, the creator of "The Dukes of Hazzard." Waldron was certain that Shroyer's natural Southern charm would be a perfect fit for the role of Deputy Enos Strate, the gullible young sidekick to Sheriff Roscoe P. Coletrain.

Shroyer auditioned for the part and went back to work on the miniseries, "Freedom Road," starring alongside Kris Kristofferson and Muhammad Ali. Shroyer was cast as a sinister slave owner in the series. He asked for a photo with Ali, who grinned and said, "You're not so mean, after all, are you?" Playing the bad guy seemed to be becoming a niche for Shroyer.

Two months after auditioning for "The Dukes of Hazzard," Shroyer got the call informing him that he won the role of "Enos." Shroyer was already busy with "Freedom Road," so he figured he would have to pass on the role. However, the producers worked out



*Sonny Shroyer as Jason Hugar in the 1979 television miniseries, "Freedom Road," with Muhammad Ali and Kris Kristofferson.*

a plan to write him out of the script. With that hurdle cleared, Shroyer left for Atlanta, Ga., to begin filming for "The Dukes of Hazzard." The first five episodes were shot in the Atlanta suburb of Covington, before the show was moved to Burbank, Calif.

Shroyer initially resisted leaving a sure contract for a new show. Someone asked Shroyer if he was excited about the possibility of becoming a star. "Not really, I'd rather be a paid actor than a broke movie star," said Shroyer.

Within a few episodes, Shroyer no longer had to worry about becoming broke. "The Dukes of Hazzard" was an overwhelming success and Shroyer had a lot to do with that success. In fact, it wasn't long before Shroyer was offered a spin-off series called "Enos." He did not take to the idea at first. Over time, Shroyer agreed to do the show, with the condition that he could return to "Dukes" if the show failed.

"Enos" aired in 1980 and continued for two seasons before being cancelled. Shroyer proved to be wise in positioning his contract for returning to "The Dukes of Hazzard." Shroyer remained with the show until it concluded in 1985.

If you're interested in viewing "The Dukes of Hazzard," the entire series is available on Amazon Prime. The show was taken out of syndication due to the Confederate flag that was painted on the roof of the Duke boys' car, General Lee.

Judging by the attendance at a recent "Dukes" reunion, which saw over 54,000 fans, the Hazzard clan is as popular as ever. Shroyer, now 84, still makes regular appearances at these reunions. He was also recently cast on the popular medical drama, "The Resident," in season 2, episode 3.

What is most impressive about Shroyer isn't his long list of achievements from 50 years in show business. Although, his two People's Choice Awards nominations still bring out a big smile on his face. Above all, however, it is God and family that mean the most to Shroyer.

Shroyer gives credit for much of his success to Paula, his devoted wife of 56 years. "When we first met, I'm pretty sure she winked at me, but she says something just got in her eye," said Shroyer. In the months or years that passed when he wasn't acting, Paula was working diligently to help pay the bills and be a source of encouragement for Shroyer. "She kept marching when the band wasn't playing," said Shroyer. "She's a very special lady."

Shroyer is still a specimen of health, keeping himself in shape for future roles that may come his way. "I'd like to do some Christian films," said Shroyer. It is no surprise that Shroyer has held to his faith through all of the peer pressure and temptation that fills Hollywood. "You don't get invited to the big parties if you don't smoke or drink," said Shroyer. "I don't do either."

Much of his resolve to avoid trouble came from his mother's influence. Having been raised by an alcoholic father, she once told Shroyer, "I'd rather see you dead than drunk."

"I knew my mother loved me more than life, so I took that to heart," said Shroyer.

Shroyer's mother, Idona, did much more than teach her son what not to do. She enrolled him in multiple classes that exposed him to the arts, dancing, piano and poetry reading. "She must have wanted me to be somebody," said Shroyer, with an ever-widening grin.

You don't have to be in Shroyer's company long before you realize that he is a genuinely kind man who enjoys helping others. He has often used his fame to help raise money for worthy causes such as the Special Olympics and many others. "I try to live by the scripture that says, 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path,'" said Shroyer. "I haven't always done that, but God has always been faithful."

Shroyer has good advice for anyone interested in pursuing acting as a career. "Don't quit your day job because a lot of time can pass between opportunities. You must have a fire in your belly to be successful in this business." Shroyer also suggests that would-be actors have a tough skin. "If you want to be rejected, sell life insurance or go into acting," said Shroyer.

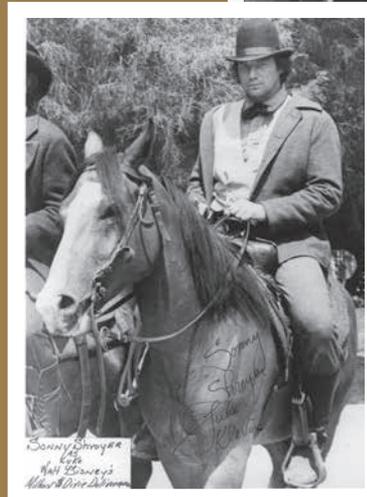
Though he certainly experienced some rejection through the years, his long list of TV and movie credits are surpassed only by the friends he continues to make wherever he goes. Much of the charm he brought to his beloved "Enos" had little to do with acting. It was often just Shroyer being himself.



*Sonny Shroyer as Enos in "The Enos Show."*



*Sonny Shroyer and Claude Akins in "Movin' On."*



*Sonny Shroyer as Luke in Walt Disney's "The Million Dollar Dixie Deliverance," a television movie which aired on "The Wonderful World of Disney" in 1978.*



*Sonny Shroyer stands with co-star Muhammad Ali on the set of "Freedom Road."*

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# PSST! ... South Georgia's cultural gem



*Peach State Summer Theatre Managing Director H. Duke Guthrie (left) and Artistic Director Jacque Wheeler (right) have been helping to bring professional theatre to South Georgia audiences for three decades.*

Story by Rick Patrick, Staff Writer

Photos courtesy of Peach State Summer Theatre and Julius Ariail

Perhaps it doesn't have quite the same glitz and glamor of New York's "Great White Way," but for three decades, theatre patrons in and around South Georgia have enjoyed high-quality musical theatre productions, courtesy of Peach State Summer Theatre (PSST). The roots of PSST go back even further than the last 30 years. PSST began near the warm Atlantic shores of Georgia's east coast on Jekyll Island, located between Jacksonville, Fla. and Savannah, Ga. There, the University of Georgia operated the Jekyll Island Musical Theatre Festival.

In 1990, the Theatre Department of Valdosta State College (VSC), later Valdosta State University (VSU), took over the Jekyll Island Musical Theatre Festival. At that time, VSC faculty member Vicki Pennington served as the Production Supervisor. That first season, three different shows were presented in repertory, which means three shows performed in rotation. Those shows, "The Roar of the Greasepaint, The Smell of the Crowd;" "Tintypes" and "The Robber Bridegroom" laid the groundwork for the next 30 summers of entertaining theatre audiences from across the country who vacationed on the historical island.

While at Jekyll Island, the shows were presented in an outdoor amphitheater. While the performance space offered a certain amount of charm when the weather was nice, it also had its own set of challenges, primarily nature-related. During those times, one could find mosquito repellent at the concession stand along with sodas and candy bars. There was also a "rain show" every season that could be performed indoors on a small stage, in case the regularly-scheduled show was rained out. "When it was lovely, it was really lovely," said H. Duke Guthrie, current Managing Director for PSST. "Fifteen years of outdoor summer theatre in Georgia is challenging!"

In 2004, the decision was made to move the Jekyll Island Musical Theatre Festival to the campus of VSU, in Valdosta. Beginning with the summer of 2005, Peach State Summer Theatre

(PSST!) was born. With the move, audiences could now enjoy top rate theatre performances in the comfort of air conditioning with no worries of inclement weather. That first season in Valdosta featured a new, original show called "The Tuesday Afternoon Regulars" along with the popular musicals "Chicago" and "Seussical." PSST has also been named Georgia's official musical theatre by the state legislature.

According to Guthrie, the 2020 PSST company will consist of approximately 70 people from across the U.S. Within the company will be 24 singers, actors and dancers who will keep the audiences entertained. The rest of the company consists of people who will cover the tasks of directing, music, choreography, technical production, set construction and front-of-house duties such as box office ticket sales, etc.

The 2020 PSST season begins with the Rogers and Hammerstein musical "Cinderella." Originally produced in 1957 as a television special starring Julie Andrews, it was later remade with Lesley Ann Warren, in 1965. It was remade again in 1997, this time with Brandy and Whitney Houston. The musical made it way onto the Broadway stage with a fresh new production in 2013. The show features some of Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II's most beloved songs, such as "In My Own Little Corner" and "Ten Minutes Ago." Rogers and Hammerstein's "Cinderella" opens Friday, June 5. The PSST production of Cinderella is sponsored in part by Wild Adventures.

The next show in the 2020 PSST season will be "The Marvelous Wonderettes: Dream On." The show is a sequel to "The Marvelous Wonderettes," which was produced by PSST in 2013. Set in 1969, the show follows The Marvelous Wonderettes as they return to their high school after 20 years to throw a retirement party for one of their favorite teachers. Featuring some of the greatest hits from the 1960s and 1970s, the show is sure to be a favorite of all ages. "The Marvelous Wonderettes: Dream On" opens Friday, June 19 and is sponsored in part by the VSU Langdale College of Business.

The third show in the 2020 PSST season is a musical theatre classic. Meredith Wilson's "The Music Man" follows the slick, fast-talking con-man Harold Hill as he attempts to swindle the good people of River City Iowa. The show features rousing musical numbers like "76 Trombones" and "Ya Got Trouble," in addition to the popular "Till There Was You." This is a show that will entertain the entire family. "The Music Man" opens on Friday, June 26.

The PSST box office opens Friday, May 22, at 10 a.m. The box office hours are Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. and Sundays, from 12 p.m. until 2 p.m. The box office is located in the Fine Arts Building on the VSU campus, 204 W. Brookwood Dr., in Valdosta. The box office can be reached by calling (229) 259-7770.





*The production staff, consisting of musical directors, directors, technical directors, choreographers and management of PSST meet to discuss the season's productions.*



*A young audience member meets Shrek following a 2017 performance of "Shrek the Musical."*





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## Our Story

ChrisMill Homes began in 2001 when Bill Gaskins and Ernie Norton partnered up to build custom homes in the South Georgia-North Florida area. In 2007-2008, the economy crashed and the building industry took a devastating hit. ChrisMill Homes was only able to survive by the grace of God and the great people of Florida. Loyal customers in the North Florida community referred enough business to allow ChrisMill Homes to stay afloat. Since that time, ChrisMill Homes has been divided into two separate companies with two separate owners. Ernie Norton began ChrisMill Homes Florida in April of 2019. It was important to Ernie to maintain this side of the business and work to show the immense gratitude he feels to the people of Florida. While we still operate with many of the same basic principles, Ernie has taken considerable action to ensure ChrisMill Homes Florida thrives in success.

Our team has really enjoyed the process of "re-vamping" a long-standing company into something newsworthy. ChrisMill Homes Florida began with just two homes under construction and with relentless effort, the right people in place and a new eye for the custom home building business, we have increased our business for the year by 95 percent, with no signs of slowing down. Ernie has led this company and our team to a level of achievement we could only dream of. ChrisMill Homes Florida now has a division, with a person appointed, for each part of the building process.

ChrisMill Homes Florida is a family that is devoted to walking with our customers side by side in the process of building their dream while making an impact on the communities in which we are present. We have no interest in becoming a huge corporate-run business. By honoring our customers and the communities that we serve, and performing each day with strong, faithful character, ChrisMill Homes Florida's interest is simply to become better.



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Foreword by Rick Patrick, Staff Writer

It seems these days that there's no shortage of places to shop. When you add the nearly endless list of online retail stores, it can almost make one's head spin. But not all businesses are created equal. That "bargain" you find on the big mega-shopping site may not be as much of a "bargain" as it may seem, especially when you think of the impact that "bargain" may, or rather not have, on your community.

Research shows that spending money in local, homegrown businesses has a positive "ripple" effect in economic terms for your local community. A study conducted in 2003 by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance showed that \$100 spent locally generated \$45 of local, secondary spending; compared to \$14 for a big-box chain store. That online shopping site might generate one dollar of local secondary spending if the delivery service is local.

The numbers are similar at your locally owned and operated restaurant, compared to the chain restaurant. Local restaurants recirculate over 65 percent of their revenue, compared to less than 35 percent with the chain restaurant.

In this issue of The Front Porch, we salute four businesses that not only provide a valuable service, but also help the local community by keeping dollars and economic activity local.

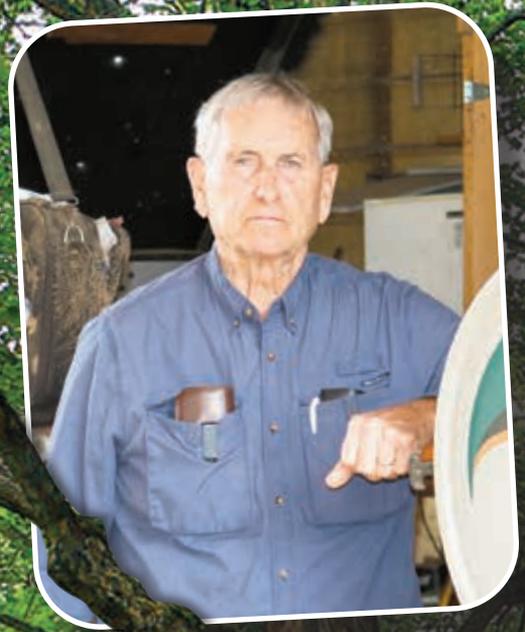




Photo courtesy of Deal's Famous Oyster House



# A Salute to Homegrown Businesses

## Deal's Famous Oyster House: "The finest people in the world"

Story and photos by  
Rick Patrick, Staff Writer



*For current owner of Deal's Famous Oyster House, Zodie Horton, running the restaurant has been a "family affair." Pictured, from left to right, are Zodie's children: Daniel, Sky and Lacey, along with Zodie.*



"The finest people in the world walk through that door." For nearly six decades, people from all across North Florida and beyond have heard that same greeting as they enter Deal's Famous Oyster House, in Perry, Fla.

Opened in 1961 by Roy Deal, the restaurant then was little more than a counter where one could order either oysters, shrimp or mullet; and that was about it. In those days, the restaurant was closed from May through August when oysters were out of season. One year, after a trip to the World's Fair in Knoxville, Tenn., during which Mr. Deal was disappointed with a lack of places to eat, he decided to expand the seating area of his small restaurant. During that time, a young waitress by the name of Zodie Gibson was working for Mr. Deal.

Young Zodie had just graduated from Taylor County High School when she began working for Deal's in 1982. She worked for the restaurant until 1996, when she decided to stay at home and raise a family. In January of 2009, Zodie, whose married name is now Horton, prayerfully decided to buy the restaurant. After some renovation, the restaurant re-opened in March of 2009 with an expanded menu to include more seafood options, as well as non-seafood fare such as steaks. One thing she kept was the "small restaurant" charm, as well as that old familiar greeting for each customer.

Anyone visiting Deal's will be treated not only to great seafood, but a special kind of entertainment that can



*Deal's owner Zodie Horton plays the "pogo stick" to the delight of a large Saturday evening crowd.*

be found nowhere else. At various times of the evening, especially on busy Friday and Saturday nights, the music will be turned up and a rowdy version of "Cotton Eye Joe" will be heard. That's when either Zodie, or one of the waitresses (often one of Zodie's daughters) will work the room playing "the pogo stick." This is an instrument consisting of a "pogo" stick with a drum head and cymbals and various jingles attached. The story is that a traveling salesman sold the first instrument to Mrs. Deal when the restaurant was still in its early days. It soon became a "tradition." After many years of playing the pogo stick, Zodie has become a bit of a virtuoso. "If I had a nickel for every time I've played it, I'd be a millionaire," says Zodie with a laugh. "At first, I was

embarrassed to play it, but when one customer tipped me \$20 (in 1982), it wasn't so bad. There are still customers who insist on tipping, even when I try to talk them out of it."

Deal's is located at 2571 W. U.S. Hwy 98, in Perry, Fla. Deal's is closed on Sundays and Mondays, but open for lunch and dinner the rest of the week. Friday and Saturday evenings are generally busy, so you may have to wait for a table. They can be reached at (850) 838-DEAL (3325). There, you will find "the finest people in the world," just inside the door.

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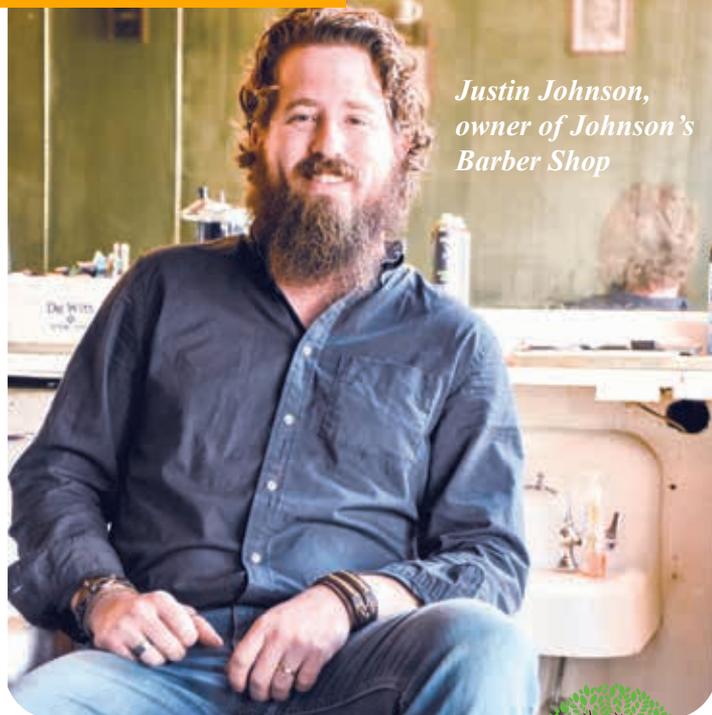
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*Justin Johnson,  
owner of Johnson's  
Barber Shop*



## Johnson's Barber Shop is a cut above the rest

Story and photo by Ashley Hunter, Staff Writer

On the walls of Justin Johnson's barber shop, a photo of Floyd Lawson (the barber from the *Andy Griffith Show*) hangs opposite the barber chairs.

When stepping into Johnson's Barber Shop, customers immediately feel as though they've stepped into Mayberry's quaint barber shop, and you almost expect Sheriff Andy Taylor to walk in at any moment.

Like Lawson's barber shop in the television show, Johnson has cultured his own barber shop to reflect the community environment and social hub that barber shops are so often known for.

Small town, people-owned businesses are something Johnson is familiar with - he grew up in a Bainbridge, Ga. hardware and lumber shop that had been in his family since his grandfather opened it.

For 33 years, the Johnsons' family hardware shop was just as much a part of the family as any cousin, uncle or parent could be.

While the family business has since been sold, Johnson remained interested in pursuing a business that was family and community focused.

"I come from a family of entrepreneurs," explains Johnson. That entrepreneurship background, coupled with his interest in working with his hands and meeting people, caused Johnson to be interested in the Monticello barber shop.

When Justin Johnson first discovered the small barber shop tucked into Monticello's downtown Dogwood Street,

it was owned by the Register family (a name well known around Jefferson County).

While Johnson was fairly quickly drawn to the idea of taking an ownership role in the barber shop, it wasn't until two years later that he was able to purchase the business from the Register family.

Johnson says his barber shop was first established in the 1950s, and Johnson is the third barber-owner to run the small shop.

When the deed to the business was moved to him, Johnson gave the barber shop a new name and continued the decades of barbering in the quaint establishment.

Over the course of a year, Johnson took classes and obtained the needed training that the State of Florida requires barbers and cosmetologists to obtain certification training.

Johnson received his 1,200 hours of training from the North Florida Cosmetology and Barbering Institute in Tallahassee.

Entering the world of business at any time can be a risky move, but Johnson notes that he purchased the barber shop around the time of the Great Recession of 2008-2009, making his new business venture increasingly perilous.

While it was a risky move, Johnson says he had confidence in his new enterprise.

"Barbering is a business that is fairly recession-proof," Johnson explains. "People are always going to need haircuts."

As with any small town business, however, Johnson says that there have been high peaks and low points in his trade.

"It can be a lot of feast and then famine," says Johnson. "You don't know what's going to happen day to day."

Despite the fact that his family relies on the barber shop as their livelihood, Johnson makes sure that every client who walks through his front door never feels like - as Johnson put it - just a "haircut in the bank."

"It's all about getting to know folks," he says. "I want to truly get to know my clients and make them feel welcome."

His priorities are to make people feel welcome, to try and be an example of Christ, be a listening ear and remember the details that his clients tell him about their lives.

"The blessings are that you get to know people. You get involved in their lives and you get to do a lot of first haircuts, little boy haircuts and even end-of-life haircuts," Johnson has worked with local hospice caretakers to barber for those who are approaching the end of their lifetimes. "You really get to know people on a more personal level; you get to meet their families and make connected relationships."

In one word, Johnson explains what his goal is for his shop's atmosphere: "Welcoming."

"Just an old-school, traditional barber shop," Johnson adds. "Where people can come in, they can laugh, they can talk and get to know one another and see old friends. A place where people just like to hang out."

Johnson's Barber Shop is located at 135 E. Dogwood St., Monticello, Fla. The shop is open on Tuesdays through Fridays, from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., and on Saturdays from 8 a.m. through 1 p.m.

You can call the shop at (850) 933-6868 in order to schedule a barbering service.

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*Stephen and Amy Sanders stand next to the brick oven where much of the magic happens at Flatwoods Café.*

## Flatwoods Café is deliciously different



Story and photo by Mickey Starling, Staff Writer

If you want to make someone feel special, there is no better way than to tickle their tastebuds with a dining experience at Flatwoods Café, in Lamont, Fla. This little gem's greatness is obscured by its outward appearance, which suggests you might be about to graze at a greasy spoon. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What began in 2014 as Woody's Wood-Fire Pizza, a mobile pizza oven, has now grown into a top-notch eating establishment that draws customers from all over the region. Their signature dishes and appetizers come from the creative minds of owners, Stephen and Amy Sanders, who spend much of their time working to make sure their customers are satisfied and full when they leave. "I just want to make my customers happy. I'm not trying to be a millionaire and it's really not about the money," said Stephen Sanders.

The restaurant opened in August of 2018, after the couple spent two years doing repairs and preparing the building for opening. Stephen worked eight months of this time with only one arm due to having underwent shoulder surgery. His determination and love for cooking are paying off as word spreads about how good the food is at Flatwoods Café.

Sanders was blessed with good teachers and an Italian background that helped him appreciate the values of family and fellowship. He grew up cooking next to his mother

and great grandmother, who he describes as "the best cooks ever." Many of the featured menu items at the café are made from secret family recipes that Sanders declares are "made with lots of love." True to Italian traditions, the portions are generous and the list of house favorites is pretty long.

Some of the dishes that keep people coming back include brick-oven pizza, Philly sandwiches, fried green tomatoes, bacon-wrapped dates, beet salad and chicken wings. They also feature gator tail that is shipped from a sole provider in Louisiana who is known for processing the meat in a manner that ensures it will be tender and delicious.

Sanders came into the restaurant business after leaving the construction industry, where he had worked for over 30 years. The building's beautifully crafted counter tops and tables are evidence of Sanders' craftsmanship. Health issues required a career change and when Sanders considered opening a restaurant, he "just jumped in." He quickly realized that he had to jump in with both feet. "Sometimes it feels like I live here," said Sanders. "You have to like working a lot and love doing what you do."

The love is obvious in the quality of the food that the Sanders serve and if you pay them a visit, you will be glad they took a leap of faith into the food industry.

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Marvin Buchanan

## Authentic Cypress Creations: A steady hand for a work of art

Story and photo by John Willoughby, Staff Writer

The Buchanan Ingenuity is not a shy trait in the small community of Day. For one of the earliest settling families in the area, creativity and care for originality is in their blood.

Six generations of saw-millers and timber men have graced Day, embracing their love for cypress and whatever else may come their way. Namely, Marvin Buchanan and his son, Matt, have continued the legacy of the art, utilizing their hand-me-down saw mill skills for a new endeavor.

If you travel either way on State Road 53, as you pass through Day, you'll see the family pride that is North Central Florida Land and Timber Nursery. You may notice, however, a small section of property along the roadway, is dedicated to Buchanan's originality; an idea spawned off of an availability of wood – Authentic Cypress Creations.

Aside from his regular everyday business, benches, swings, chairs, tables and other unique unusual pieces of furniture lay under a small shed as they're produced by a small saw mill and the hands of Buchanan himself.

"We've always had an interest in timber and saw milling," Buchanan says about his skilled lineage, mentioning that his grandfather's family saw mill was responsible for some structures

around Day. "We've always have had some way to cut up wood."

Around 20 years ago, the Buchanan family welcomed a cypress orchard to the farm, but as the orchard was rouged, "I had a considerable amount of wood available," Buchanan states. "We took those out so I needed to do something with it. I bought a saw mill of my own, started creating lumber out of that and then created specialty furniture out of that. We come up with the idea; we build it and make it work."

While Buchanan doesn't market his creations, that doesn't stop passersby from dropping in from time to time. It's also a great customer relations tool to help him with his land and timber business which has been passed down from generation to generation. "A guy will come in here wanting to pick up a few trees and he'll see the furniture down there. We might even give him one," Buchanan adds.

Buchanan, a staple in his community as a real estate broker, notary and dedicated member of Day Masonic Lodge No. 166, notes that anyone who has a hand and eye for creating items out of natural wood must have a love for it first. "If you don't like what you're doing, you best go hunt something else."

"It's just a knack. It's something that we grew up with," Buchanan concludes.



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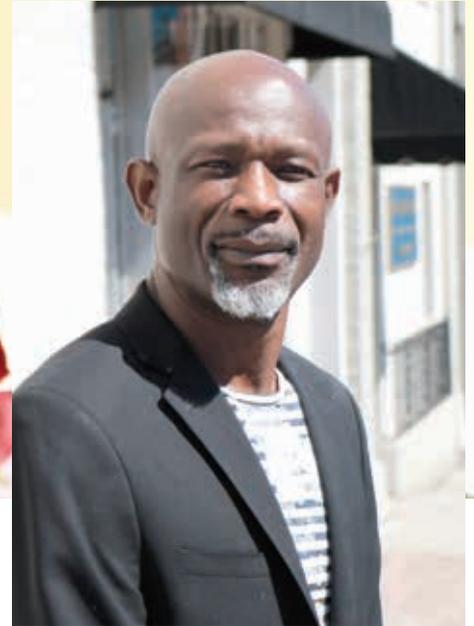
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BRINGING HOPE TO  
NORTH FLORIDA

Marriese Jones



Story and photos by John Willoughby, Staff Writer

American author Tom Bodett once said a person needs only three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do and something to hope for. Thanks to two people who recently brought life to an incredible vision, hope is coming to North Florida.

Brought to you as a branch of Hedges and Highways Outreach Ministries, Inc. (H&H), you might see community, family-oriented events booming at the old B-Posh Boutique at the corner of Ohio Avenue and Howard Street in Live Oak. In addition, you'll see church services and a free community lunch every Sunday. It's no secret that The HOPE Center is not just a resource for food and vital experiences—they seek to feed the soul.

"It's hope we're giving out," said H&H founder Marriese Jones. "We're giving it out and we're teaching it. We're demonstrating it ... and that's what The HOPE Center is about."

Started in Denver, Colo., in 2013 by Jones, H&H has provided unequivocal opportunities to thousands, regardless of color, creed or nationality. Recently launched, on Wednesday, April 1, H&H has expanded and welcomes the North Florida community

to The HOPE Center of Live Oak. But without community sponsors like North Florida Pediatrics (NFP), their presence in downtown Live Oak may not have come to fruition.

In December, NFP funded The HOPE Center for six months after hiring H&H's Elizabeth "Liz" McLaughlin as a coordinator of outreach for NFP's 10 North Florida clinics. This allowed The HOPE Center to be launched as a central hub of services in the tri-county region of Suwannee, Hamilton and Columbia counties, with future extension services taking shape in Duval, Dixie, Gilchrist and Levy counties.

Serving as an outreach center for individuals, youth and companies in the area, The HOPE Center offers a plethora of services including welcoming companies or individuals to their conference space, complete with free refreshments; as well as weekly and monthly events for teens in the area. Training and mentoring sessions, as well as parenting and nutrition events, will also be an offered amenity of The HOPE Center through the Executive Women's Forum, Global University for Women and WHO (Women of Hope).

Business and entrepreneurship classes, as well as strength and health

coaching, can be expected, among the many other services Marriese and Liz plan to offer to the community of Live Oak. The Mile High Bistro, serving sandwiches, soups and salads, will also open within the center.

Currently taking shape, Marriese and Liz have welcomed community members to their weekly church services every Sunday since Feb. 16. While they haven't wanted to take residents away from their regular church homes, the two have provided a free, hot meal every Sunday, around 1:30 p.m. for all who will join them after services.

With hearts of gold, the leaders of The HOPE Center had to first be humbled. Marriese was humbled by choice.

Born just outside of Miami, Marriese ran away from home at the age of 13. He left South Florida and went to be with his Uncle in Orlando, but after his Uncle was determined to get him back to Miami, Marriese took to the streets. "I was sleeping in the stairwells of apartments," said Mo, as he is affectionately called by some. Not soon after going homeless, Marriese was sent to

*An ordained minister, one of Marriese Jones' missions with The HOPE Center is to provide church services every Sunday, followed by a free community lunch at 1:30 p.m. This is just one of many things The HOPE Center has to offer.*

prison at the age of 17 for a charge he received at 15 years old. Once he was released, however, things became real to him after realizing the false hope he had received.

The GED he had obtained in prison was unaccredited. Because he was a convicted felon, no employer would hire him; even lying on his job applications proved to be unsuccessful. "Convicted felon, no GED and a black man. Three strikes against me," said Marriese. "That's how I felt about it. After a while though, I just never gave up."

Soon, Marriese realized his obstacles weren't due to his skin color. "It's not the color. That's why I go back into these black neighborhoods and say it's not the white man's fault. No one is going to give you anything; go and get it."

Fast forward to 2013, Marriese founded H&H, which later expanded to Birmingham, Ala., and even South Africa. As it was building, Marriese worked with other non-profits in the Denver metro area and had plenty of experience prior to that venture with Denver Rescue Mission and the Salvation Army. In 2015, Liz, who lived in Denver for 30 years, joined Marriese in building up H&H after crossing paths with the natural-born leader while working for an outreach center in Denver.

"I kind of saw the uniqueness with Liz. I watched her; I saw how she was running the center, how she was interacting with the people," said Marriese. "She was the only one who went with me that day to outreach training."

"We couldn't be more different," said Liz. "This man is an incredible leader, but what really compelled me is that he didn't have the same opportunities that I had. I recognized this leader, but at the same time, why isn't he where he should be?"

"I went to prison. She went to Purdue," Marriese added.

Today, given their experiences, it is the mission of both Marriese and Liz to change the way people approach others. "My passion and my purpose is to change the way people think about people, places and things. When you really look at those three parts of life, it's very important," said Marriese. "I



just want to be a light to a dim place. Some people, their lights are dim. They see themselves in nothing but darkness and I want them to change. I want to be that person. If I can take one person, and they can change, I'm good."

Both Marriese and Liz left Denver and a \$1 million restaurant behind to relocate south under the direction of God, more than one and a half years ago. The two were gifted 28 acres and 13 cattle, but no home to dwell in. Soon, however, a cabin in White Springs was gifted, but the house was settled on the banks of the Suwannee River with no running water inside. "There were times when we thought maybe we misheard God," Liz added. "God had us where he wanted us; stretching us and cultivating us."

"We're rootless, we have nothing," said Marriese. "I'm like, 'Lord, are you kidding me? I'm in the woods.'" He eventually left North Florida, ending up in Birmingham, but what brought him back was the job Liz was hired for by NFP, which put forth in motion The HOPE Center in December.

"People don't see what it takes to make that gold shine. It isn't valuable to a person with all that crud on it," said Marriese. "I found out that you have to go through the fire in order to shine for God."

Marriese and Liz welcomed Live Oak community members to The HOPE Center during a gala on Friday, Feb. 14. There, Live Oak was introduced to the vision created by H&H leaders years



*Elizabeth McLaughlin*

ago.

"Even though this is not a NFP entity, they were the ones who cut the ribbon," said Liz. "We want to honor our community sponsors. We weren't even the speakers!"

As The HOPE Center continues to build relationships and grows their sponsorships with companies like NFP and Home Depot, Marriese and Liz hope to expand by creating extension services in a number of surrounding counties. If you would like to reach your community through a platform that can bring your vision to life, email Liz at [emcloughlin@nflpediatrics.com](mailto:emcloughlin@nflpediatrics.com).

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# Kindred at Home

Home is where  
the healing is

Story by Savannah Reams, Editor-in-Chief  
Photos by John Willoughby, Staff Writer,  
and Shane Mathews Photography

Oftentimes, when we find ourselves in difficult places, we long for the familiar faces, comforts and happiness attributed to home. Whether it's



Photo by Shane Mathews Photography

*Dianna Webb-Denny, RN (left) and Eva Merten (right) enjoy each other's company. Merten's healthcare team has become a part of her family.*

your mother's chicken noodle soup, the deep timbre of your father's voice or the laughter shared with a sibling, each serves as a gentle reminder that you are valued, cared for and, above all, loved. Soon, the comforts associated with our childhood are replaced as we start families of our own—we draw close to our children, spouse and the busy, yet wonderful, life we create with them. However, as we continue to age,

**"I chose homecare because I enjoy working with patients in their own environment, helping them achieve personal goals that directly help them in their day to day life."**

- Isaac Newman, PT

we are presented with a new normal. Our nests become empty, our bodies change and we begin to focus on self



Photo by John Willoughby, Staff Writer

*The newest Kindred at Home facility employs a number of dedicated therapists and assistants to help local Madison County residents. Pictured, from left to right, are: Isaac Newton, PT; Angela Thompson, PT; Kelsey Varn, PTA; Joni Russ, PTA; Heather Givens, PTA and Traci Raybon, OT.*



Photo by Shane Mathews Photography

*Kindred at Home's nurses and therapists play essential roles in the lives of their patients. They have become an extension of Eva Merten's family. Pictured around the table, clockwise, from left to right, are: Ashley Macarages, LPN; Bobbi Jo Middleton, Clinical Home Health Specialist; Heather Givens, PTA; Dianna Webb-Denny, RN; Isaac Newton, PT; and Eva Merten.*

preservation.

Elderly citizens are faced with a multitude of health issues—from mobility, to cardiac and pulmonary-related setbacks. Eventually, proper healthcare

becomes a constant necessity rather than an occasional requirement. It's during these trials that we begin to long for the

**“Home health provides me the opportunity to get to know patients on an individual basis. Treating them in their home environment allows me to help them overcome any barriers to becoming more independent and safe.”**  
- Joni Russ, PTA

comfort and healing that comes from simply being at home, surrounded by the people who care about us the most. Luckily, in the North Florida-South Georgia region, there is a medical services provider that takes into consideration the importance of healing at



Photo by John Willoughby, Staff Writer

*Behind the scenes at Madison's Kindred at Home facility, are dedicated administrators, managers and coordinators which allow operations to flow smoothly and efficiently. Pictured, from left to right, are: Andrea Granger, executive director; Deanna Nicholson, RN clinical manager; Darla Gatewood, patient service coordinator; and Lucille Everly, administrative specialist/human resources designee.*



Photo by John Willoughby, Staff Writer

Nurses make up a portion of Kindred at Home and come face to face with patients on a daily basis. Pictured, from left to right, are: Brenda Carmichael, RN; Ashley Macarages, LPN; Brenda Kiff, LPN; Dianna Webb-Denny, RN; Kehli Stewart, RN; Jennifer McGhee, HHA.

home.

Kindred at Home and their skilled nurses provide care centered on their patients and the education they need to help them recover from an injury, surgery or illness in the comfort of their own home. Kindred's expert care team helps one maintain their independence, all while reducing the risk of unplanned hospital visits. In fact, for those who seek information and resources, team members make themselves available to patients in their very own or neighboring hometown, with Kindred at Home locations in Live Oak, Fla. Thomasville, Ga., Tallahassee, Fla., and a brand new facility in Madison, Fla. These centers offer a friendly face and a personal experience for those who would like to know more about their home health options.

**"I had three therapists over the course of my care and all were very caring, knowledgeable and prompt. They provided excellent care and guidance throughout my therapy."**  
- Kindred at Home patient

One of the faces local residents will have the pleasure of meeting at the new Kindred at Home Facility located in downtown Madison, is Bobbi Jo Middleton, Clinical Home Health Specialist. With 15 years in the healthcare field, she understands the importance of face-to-face service—especially for those who are going through stressful situations. Middleton

has a passion for assisting patients with their needs, helping refer them to the best therapists and medical professionals in the business and making sure patients feel respected and cared for. "For me, home care is more than just a job," says Middleton. "I love being able to interact with our referral sources ed-

ucating them on the services available for their medicare age population and I really enjoy seeing the patients we are able to help regain independence in their home every day."

Middleton's passion for home health is derived from past experiences. Before she served in an administrative role, the Live Oak native was on the ground floor, working as a nurse. "When I started as a nurse in the [healthcare] field we treated many patients, but one patient in particular made me realize home care was very beneficial. After our encounter, I knew I was where I belonged," asserts Middleton. "This patient left the nursing home and was bed bound, could not transfer on his own, he also

**"Home health gives me the opportunity to identify the [patient's] needs in the home, allowing a more personal touch, and gives [the patient] independence and safety in their environment."**  
- Brenda Carmichael, RN

had unhealed wounds. This occurred in March and the patient's only goal was

to attend his grandson's graduation. Our therapy staff assisted him weekly, he regained independence, our nursing staff healed his wounds and this patient was able to attend his grandson's graduation the first week of June.

Seeing the excitement and joy this patient had gave me the same joy. At that point, I realized it is more than just home care—with the help of our clinical teams, patients are able to regain independence, safely in the home, allowing for a higher quality of life."

For Middleton's patient, healing in the safety and comfort of his own home while gaining his independence was his goal, as well as the goal of Middleton and her colleagues. However, each person's needs are different and Kindred at Home is able to provide assistance in many different ways. Kindred at Home provides care

**"I was very pleased with Kindred at Home and will certainly refer them to others. The nurses, therapists and supervisors were very nice and professional."**

- Kindred at Home patient

that includes skilled nursing; physical therapy; occupational therapy; speech therapy; medical social workers; and home health aid, which can include anything from medication management,

disease process teaching, diabetic care, cardiac/pulmonary care, wound care, Dementia/Alzheimer's care, stroke/brain injury care, fall prevention, orthopedic care, low vision care, hospice and palliative care, assistance with activities of daily living (ADL); and much more, to include outcome-based specialty

programs in cardiopulmonary, orthopedics, fall prevention and memory care.

If you are a North Florida or South Georgia resident and you or a family member could benefit from the home health services Kindred at Home provides, do not hesitate to reach out to a facility near you.



Photo by Shane Mathews Photography

*Bobbi Jo Middleton, Clinical Home Health Specialist, assists patients throughout North Florida and South Georgia. She meets with physicians, case managers, social workers, nurses and staff in offices across the area in order to educate the public on Kindred at Home's services and identifies patients who would benefit from these services.*



Photo by Shane Mathews Photography

*With the help of Kindred at Home's clinical teams, patients are able to regain independence safely, allowing for a higher quality of life.*

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## What's happenin'?

**Notice:** Due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, events are subject to cancellations. Please make sure you contact the event sponsor closer to the time of the event in order to gain further information

### MAY

#### 9: Monticello Bike Fest Tour

Jefferson County is on two wheels during this fun-filled event! With Monticello's rolling hills, canopy roads lined with ancient oaks and country sights, the bike fest invites hobby and professional cyclists to get out and enjoy Jefferson County. This event is perfect for families with a 10-mile ride as well as serious cyclists who want to undertake the 30, 60 or 100 mile rides. For more information, contact the Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce at (850) 997-5552.

**9: Dustin Lynch** will perform at the All Star Amphitheatre at Wild Adventures Theme Park in Valdosta, Ga., beginning at 8 p.m. The concert is included with park admission or a season pass. Reserved seating, located close to the stage, may be purchased

in advance and is \$5 with a gold season pass and \$10 for everyone else. Visit [wildadventures.com](http://wildadventures.com) to purchase tickets.

### JUNE

**6: Kelsea Ballerini** will perform at the All Star Amphitheatre at Wild Adventures Theme Park in Valdosta, Ga., beginning at 8 p.m. The concert is included with park admission or a season pass. Reserved seating, located close to the stage, may be purchased in advance and is \$5 with a gold season pass and \$10 for everyone else. Visit [wildadventures.com](http://wildadventures.com) to purchase tickets.

**13: TLC** will perform at the All Star Amphitheatre at Wild Adventures Theme Park in Valdosta, Ga., beginning at 8 p.m. The concert is included with park admission or a season pass. Reserved seating, located close to the stage, may be



purchased in advance and is \$5 with a gold season pass and \$10 for everyone else. Visit [wildadventures.com](http://wildadventures.com) to purchase tickets.

**19-20: Watermelon Festival**  
Monticello's annual Watermelon Festival will be returning for its 70th year this June! There will be street dances, a community pancake breakfast, children's theater, vendors from around the south, an

antique car show, 5K Melon Run, art show, watermelon games, live music and surprise shows and performances! The crown jewel of this summertime festival is the festival vendors and the lengthy parade that rolls through town. For more information, contact the Monticello-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce at (850) 997-5552.



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## travel

**20: Little River Band and Three Dog Night** will perform at the All Star Amphitheatre at Wild Adventures Theme Park in Valdosta, Ga., beginning at 8 p.m. The concert is included with park admission or a season pass. Reserved seating, located close to the stage, may be purchased in advance and is \$5 with a gold season pass and \$10 for everyone else. Visit [wildadventures.com](http://wildadventures.com) to purchase tickets.

**26: The Little Miss Red, White and Blue Pageant**, held annually in Perry, Fla. at Forest Capital Hall, is for girls 6-12 years of age, allowing them to show their appreciation for America and help celebrate July 4! For more information, please call (850) 584-5366.

**27: For King and Country** will perform at the All Star Amphitheatre at Wild Adventures

Theme Park in Valdosta, Ga., beginning at 8 p.m. The concert is included with park admission or a season pass. Reserved seating, located close to the stage, may be purchased in advance and is \$5 with a gold season pass and \$10 for everyone else. Visit [wildadventures.com](http://wildadventures.com) to purchase tickets.

## JULY

**June 29 - July 5: Celebrate America Week** Celebrate America's birthday at Wild Adventures Theme Park with days full of thrills and fireworks on July 3 and 4! Celebrate America Week is packed with family fun and entertainment you won't find anywhere else. Have All-American fun for seven straight days with your family and friends! All military personnel who have served will receive free admission to the park. Guests visiting with



a military member are eligible for \$10 off single-day admission. Visit [wildadventures.com](http://wildadventures.com) for more information.

**4: A Fourth of July Celebration** will be held in downtown Perry, Fla., including craft vendors and a beer and wine garden sponsored by Perry Rotary Club. For more

information, call (850) 584-5366.

**4: The God and Country Festival**, sponsored by the Madison Lions Club, will be held in downtown Madison, Fla., beside Lake Frances, beginning around 5 p.m. There will be vendors, entertainment, food and a dazzling fireworks display. Call Lions Club



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President Tim Dunn at (850) 464-4890 closer to the time of the event for more information.

**4: The Spirit of Greenville Fourth of July Fireworks Show** takes place over the pond at Haffye Hays Park in downtown Greenville, Fla. annually. Fireworks begin at dark between 9-9:30 p.m. Bring your lawn chairs and blankets and get comfortable! Call the Town of Greenville at (850) 948-2251 closer to the time

of the event for more information.

**4: July Fourth Fireworks & Festivities** will be held at Remington Park, 45 Ben Grace Drive, in Thomasville, Ga. Celebrate Independence Day with good old-fashioned fun and activities for the whole family! Enjoy great games, food and music beginning at 6:30 p.m. and a fantastic fireworks display beginning at 9:30 p.m! Call (229) 227-7020 for more information.

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agriculture

# GRAM'S LEGACY GROVE:

## A new tree for the Tree Capital

Story and photos by Rick Patrick, Staff Writer



Taylor County has long been known as the “Tree Capital of the South.” Much of the area’s economic health can be easily tied to pine trees and forest products. However, there is a different tree taking root in the area that most people associate with the warmer climates found further south in the Sunshine State.

In recent years, Huanglongbing (HLB), a bacterium that hinders citrus fruits from ripening, and spread by small flying insects called psyllids, has devastated citrus groves of Central and South Florida, causing many citrus growers to go out of business. Some experts estimate that, since 2005, some 5,000 citrus farmers have called it quits, resulting in a 75 percent decline in the state’s \$9 billion citrus industry. Although the cooler temps of North Florida do not completely keep the psyllids away, they do decrease the likelihood of HLB infection.

Taylor County native Andy Jackson learned of this and, after consultation with the local County Agent, saw an opportunity. In 2016, Jackson decided to begin a citrus grove on 23 acres of land he owns within the city limits of Perry, Fla. Gram’s Legacy Grove was born. With assistance from the City of Perry and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Jackson began planting a wide variety of citrus trees, specifically for their ability to grow and thrive in cooler temperatures. In addition, Jackson utilizes irrigation techniques to protect trees from freezing when temperatures drop. “The biggest thing you have to worry about when it freezes is the tree drying out,” said Jackson. “We have methods to help ensure that the trees stay hydrated when it gets cold.” In fact, according to Jackson, there are advantages to growing citrus in cooler temperatures that go beyond the decreased threat of HLB. “Often, the fruit grown in cool climates is sweeter and juicier than fruit grown in warmer weather,” says Jackson.

For Jackson, whose background is more aligned with project management and engineering than with agriculture, beginning a citrus grove has been a learning experience. “When I first started, I did my due diligence and researched the matter,” said Jackson. “I found that there was a lot of information about growing citrus trees ... in South Florida.” Much of Jackson’s experience has been a “learn as you go” undertaking. Researchers from the University of Florida have been a valuable asset for Jackson, especially in terms of finding new plant varieties to grow.

Maintaining a 20-plus citrus grove takes a great deal of care. Jackson has a small staff of workers who help with the day-to-day operation of the grove. During the harvest season, from November through December, he expands his workforce to approximately 30 workers to harvest the fruit. “It’s good money for those who need a little something extra during the holidays. We don’t have any problem hiring the people we need during the harvest time.”

Jackson has plans to expand his citrus grove with additional acreage planted in trees. He has also considered the idea of constructing a processing plant at the location of



*Andy Jackson picks fruit from one of his trees at Gram’s Legacy Grove, in Perry, Fla.*



his grove, just off U.S. Hwy 19, in Perry. Jackson has seen the production of his grove grow from year to year, from “many buckets” of fruit in 2017 to “several tons” of fruit harvested in 2018. Jackson feels the future is very bright for citrus groves in North Florida and South Georgia. “By 2027, the projection is there could be 60 million pounds of fruit produced in this region, based just on the amount of trees that are planted right now,” said Jackson in a story in the Perry News Herald in October of 2019.

In 2019, Jackson was recognized by the Florida Farm Bureau with their “This Farm Cares” designation for his stewardship of resources and his practices of water conservation and management. Other innovative practices employed by Jackson on his farm include the use of specially trained dogs to help with early detection of HLB infection in his own grove. This early detection has allowed Jackson to remove infected trees before the infection could spread to other trees in the grove.

Jackson has several methods of getting his fruit into the hands of awaiting customers, including sales to grocery distributors, fruit packaging operations and direct sales to customers. Currently, Jackson offers a wide variety of fresh fruit to customers including: navel oranges, satsumas, Orlando tangelos, tangerines, sugar belles, grapefruit, tango, cara caras and more.

*For more information about Gram’s Legacy Grove, please feel free to contact Jackson at (850) 643-0932, or you can email him at [andy@gramslegacy.com](mailto:andy@gramslegacy.com).*



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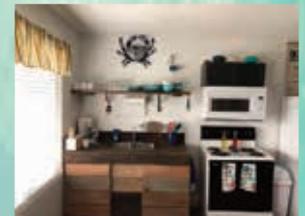


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For years, a Taylor County cemetery has lured the daring and querying inside its boundaries. Allegedly, the anguished spirits of witches and unrested Native Americans linger in the dark, within the confines of the burial grounds. Graveyards have been rumored to be haunted for centuries and most are familiar with the expression, ‘the ghouls come out at night.’ But, for the doubters, how true is it?

As an individual who grew up hearing the consistent accounts of bruising and scratches from an unknown entity, I had resolved to shine a light on the spooky stories surrounding Poor Spot Cemetery, in Perry, Fla.

Before diving into the mystery headfirst, I made a trip into the legend-filled burial grounds in mid-February to take a risk at experiencing the paranormal, if it existed at all. I circled the cemetery slowly, but did not enter in order to respect the resting. I kept my eyes peeled for anything that may

catch my attention at any given moment. During my visit, the graveyard was peaceful with no disturbances, other than my camera batteries dying within minutes—an odd occurrence, I’ll admit.

I soon began digging through social media for people who had stories to tell regarding Poor Spot Cemetery, its history and their experiences visiting the burial grounds. I wanted to understand what I could possibly get myself into by exploring the city of marble further. I ran into roadblocks with some who were unwilling to speak on behalf of their experiences; others stating only that they would never step foot in the cemetery as long as they live.

One who spoke freely about her experience was long-time Taylor County resident Janae Murphy, who visited the cemetery many times before an unexplainable phenomenon caused her to refuse to return at any given point in the future.

# Where bones lie still

## Unravelling the legends of Poor Spot Cemetery

Story and photos by John Willoughby, Staff Writer

"We get out there and a friend has her vehicle's headlights shining into the cemetery," Janae recalled. "She's wanting to get out to take pictures, begging me to get out with her, but I'm sitting there shaking my head 'no,' because something just didn't feel right." Janae soon exited the vehicle and shuts the door. All of a sudden, she saw a figure. Shortly thereafter, all hell broke loose when her friend claimed she was pushed by something or someone. "When she got to the car and tried to put it in reverse, the car turned off," Janae added. "She tried to turn it back on and it wouldn't."

In the midst of the chaos, while trying to leave, she heard an alarming whisper which came from the back seat, warning the two to "get out." Luckily for them, the vehicle started after another attempt, Janae concluded. "I've went out there about 20 times or so. Even riding by the road gives me chill bumps to this day."



Little to no history regarding the graveyard was available, other than tall tales. Therefore, I turned to a professional to hear her thoughts before I explored on foot and in-depth.

Denise Burroughs leads Paranormal Investigators of North Florida, based out of North Florida, but, undoubtedly, visiting and investigating the legends behind Poor Spot was uncharted territory for her before relocating to the area in 2011. However, upon visiting and investigating multiple times, she feels that rest is not exactly what's going on in this place of slumber.

"One night, my son-in-law was out there with a bunch of his friends and they were goofing around," said Denise.

## local legends

“He just had this really overwhelming feeling and something wasn’t right. Somebody with him told him ‘look, we’ve got to go. Get in the car.’ He had indicated he had never been that scared in his life.” She added that while her son-in-law was leaving, red glowing eyes were in the rear-view mirror. “That was the only story I had heard, which intrigued my interest afterwards about going out there.”

While visiting the cemetery, herself, with her investigating team, she encountered the unexplainable after being chased by what they thought to be an off-road ATV, identified by two lights coming toward them. “We kind of freaked out. I don’t think we had ever ran so fast in our life.” But upon looking back, “there was nobody there and there were no lights.”

Other occurrences Denise experienced include flashlights blowing out, phone batteries dying and watches shutting down. Surprisingly, she too has experienced physical scratches on her back just after an investigation at the cemetery; a common occurrence as

*One item that has been a topic of discussion regarding Poor Spot Cemetery has been the baby doll, which appears leaned up against a moss-covered gravestone. While there’s no explanation, visitors claim the baby doll appears in different locations.*

told by many.

Denise continued her thoughts regarding the burial grounds, warning about the right side of the cemetery, which I later found featured grave markers from the early to mid-1800s. “If you walk towards that side, it’s almost like something’s going to suck you in,” she added. “There’s also been this feeling that if you’re not careful and you’re there too long, you feel the need to go to the right side of the cemetery. It’s just the strangest thing ever. I feel that a lot of the people who go out there to goof around and play, I don’t think they really, really get what they may be getting into out there.”

“There’s just something about it; when the lights go out, that place changes from a place of rest to some-



thing else,” Denise said. “People are fascinated with the paranormal. Is it possible that something was brought in by doing all the wrong things to try and conjure a spirit? I really think there’s a force to be reckoned with there and I really believe that it’s possible it was brought in a long time ago. I think the entire North Florida area has got a lot of stuff, but it seems like the Perry area has more going on than what most think.”

After speaking with Denise, I

strapped my boots up and loaded my camera gear in my truck on a bright night, early in March, to trod deeper into the unknown. Unlike my first time visiting, the ground was soaked after a fresh rain and the skies had cleared from the troubling clouds which hazed the Taylor County sky most of the afternoon.

Around 9 p.m., which was the time of action according to numerous accounts, I began making my way into the cemetery where I found chiseled stones marking the graves of infants and others who have been buried under the leaves and tree branches for over 150 years. I carefully made my way to the right side of the cemetery where the older gravestones stood, stepping over stones which had been broken in two or three pieces. But, with little to no activity, I left respectively after about 30 minutes of exploring, leaving the buried to rest in peace as they should.

No unruly sights or sounds attracted my curiosity, though it's no secret that I watched my back the entire time. I shown my flashlight one more time into the darkness before calling it a night, with nothing but pine trees waving at me in the passing wind.

So, what is the truth that lies within Poor Spot Cemetery? For me, it remains just out of reach. However, it seems to be clear as day to others, according to their accounts. Could it be a case of disturb or be disturbed? Based on what I've heard during my investigation, I can't advise you to find out.



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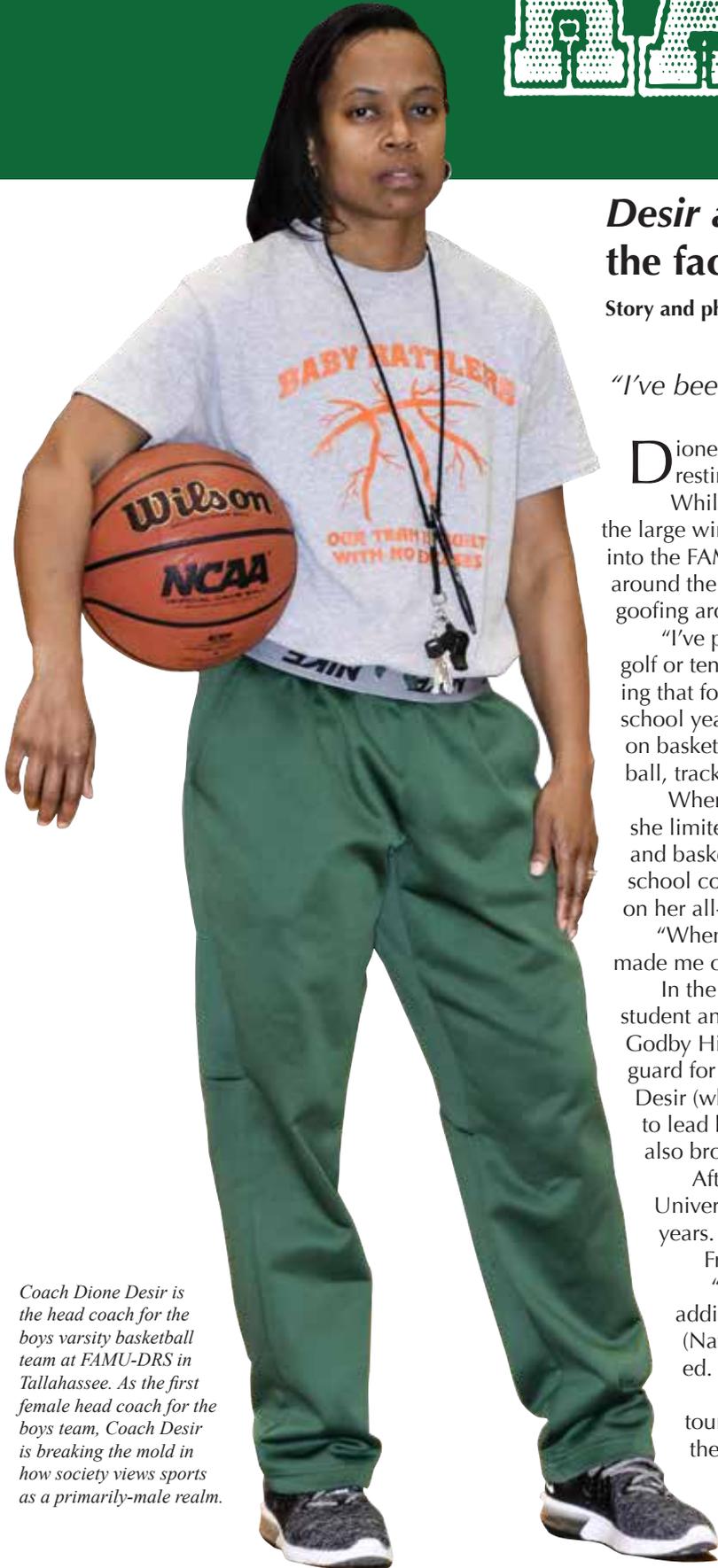


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# BATTLE



## Desir and Curry: two women changing the face of boys basketball

Story and photos by Ashley Hunter, staff writer

*"I've been playing sports since I was five."*

Dione Desir says this while leaning forward in her chair, her arms resting casually against the desk in her office.

While speaking, her eyes glance occasionally up to look through the large window that is positioned opposite her desk and looks out into the FAMU-DRS gym; through it, she can see her athletes bounce around the court. They are cleaning up the court from practice and goofing around with each other.

"I've played every sport except golf or tennis," Desir continues, adding that for the majority of her middle school years, she primarily focused on basketball, softball, soccer, volleyball, track and swimming.

When she entered high school, she limited her athletics to soccer and basketball, saying that her high school coaches made her "cut back" on her all-over-the-place sports focus.

"When I got to high school...they made me choose," Desir adds.

In the 1970s, Dione Desir was a student and athlete at Tallahassee's

Godby High School, where she would eventually become a star point guard for her schools' Cougar basketball team. Before graduating, Desir (who was known as Dione Smith at that time) would go on to lead her teammates to a state title three times while Smith/Desir also broke the national record for career steals.

After her high school sports career, Smith/Desir attended the University of South Florida, where she played and studied for four years.

From there, Desir played basketball in Germany.

"I'd always wanted to play professionally," Desir explains, adding that she did receive the chance to play in the NWBL (National Women's Basketball League) before the league folded. "But I always wanted to go overseas."

Pursuing that goal, Desir attended a few professional tryout tournament camps in Germany and she says they "liked what they saw" and put her in their professional teams.

"From there, they gave me the opportunity to play with the team in Germany," Desir adds.

For a year and a half, Dione Desir played for the Leipzig Eagles in Germany before she returned to the

*“What you're not going to do is tell me what I can't do.”*

- Coach Dione Desir

*Coach Dione Desir is the head coach for the boys varsity basketball team at FAMU-DRS in Tallahassee. As the first female head coach for the boys team, Coach Desir is breaking the mold in how society views sports as a primarily-male realm.*

and

# ROAR

United States.

Today, Dione Desir is coaching the game she played - but it's not a team of girls who find wisdom in Coach Desir's gameplay experience.

While it is common to find a male coach standing on the sidelines and issuing gameplay tactics for a girls basketball team, it is much rarer to find a woman fulfilling that same role for a boys varsity team.

With that in mind, it makes it all the more remarkable that two North Florida schools employ female head coaches in training their male high schoolers in the prowess of basketball.

While Coach Desir is at FAMU-DRS, Coach Q'Vaunda Curry coaches the boys varsity basketball team at Jefferson County K-12: A Somerset School ("Jefferson Somerset"), only a few miles east of FAMU-DRS. If she's not in the gym practicing with her Tigers, Curry can be found teaching the school's entrepreneurship class.

Like Desir, Curry began playing sports while young.

"I started playing early, while I was still in kindergarten," says Curry, reminiscing on playing basketball with her cousins in a park near their home. "I picked up a love for the game at that time. I just latched on to basketball and from kindergarten onto the rest of my life, I've been playing."

In middle school at Carter Parramore Academy in Quincy, Fla., Curry began playing basketball and softball before eventually dropping the latter to focus on the former.

After graduating from high school in Gadsden County, Curry attended Florida A&M University, where she eventually became the university's career leader in 3-point shots.

Back in Tallahassee, Desir began coaching in 2007-2008, after returning from her professional career in Germany.

Surprisingly, Desir's first coaching opportunity was not with a girls team, but as an assistant coach for the boys basketball team at her alma mater of Godby High School.

While coaching at Godby, Desir also started a girls weightlifting team, which would travel to state a few times during Desir's years of coaching it.

After several years, several transfers and several different teaching and coaching positions, Desir found herself teaching at FAMU-DRS.

As a health and physical education teacher, Desir already had a familiarity and bond with the athletes; she had experience in basketball and had coached boys before - therefore, when a head coaching position opened up at FAMU-DRS, Desir thought about stepping into the role.

According to Desir, she prayed over the opportunity, spoke

*"I think female voices can only help overall. If we blend that culture of female skill and fundamentals with male physicality, there can only be a more dynamic team."*

- Coach Q'Vaunda Curry

*Coach Q'Vaunda Curry coaches the Jefferson Somerset Tigers, of Jefferson County. Coach Curry was the first woman to be hired as the Tiger boys basketball head coach and has put her name into the local history books.*



with her husband to get his input...and then waited until the last day possible before submitting her application for the coaching position.

After a few days, Desir was given the job and became FAMU-DRS' first female head varsity boys basketball coach.

Q'Vaunda Curry began her career as a coach in 2012; at the time, she was living in the Chicago area and was offered the chance to coach a girls fifth-grade travel basketball team.

With no prior coaching experience, Curry says this position intimidated her at first - though now she laughs about it.

"They were just fifth-grade girls," she says with a grin. "But I was nervous."

She coached the Chicago team for one year and didn't take another coaching position until she returned to her hometown of Quincy.

In 2014, she coached a Gadsden County girls team, but the coaching opportunity didn't 'stick', and Curry ended up stepping away from coaching and teaching to launch her own fitness company.

It was shortly after that, Curry says, that she received a call from Jefferson Somerset.

The Somerset Charter had recently taken over the Jefferson County School District's only public elementary, middle and high schools, and were looking for teachers to staff the classrooms.

They asked Curry to come and teach an entrepreneurship class at Jefferson Somerset, and Curry accepted the position.

Curry recalls that she'd only been at the school for a year when she was offered a chance to coach again.

Like all her other prior coaching positions, Curry coached girls - but Jefferson Somerset offered her a chance to coach a varsity team for the first time.

Third time still wasn't the charm, though. While Curry coached the girls varsity team, she had no plans to return to coach the girls a second team - and that was when a position as a boys varsity coach opened up at the school.

Though Curry was still new to the community, she says that Jefferson Somerset's Athletic Director and JROTC commander Sgt. Terry Walker immediately offered the head coach position to her.

"I didn't plan to take it," Curry admits. But the more she pondered on the opportunity and realized that she had plenty of experience to give young athletes, the more Curry realized it wasn't so crazy of an idea.



Coach Q'Vaunda Curry is a Gadsden County native.



Coach Dione Desir is a Leon County native.

Before her, Jefferson County hadn't had a woman head coaching a varsity boys team - but Curry says she wasn't thinking about how it was a historical occasion as she accepted the offered position.

For the first time in Jefferson County history, the basketball team was led by a woman, but Curry wasn't thinking about the shattered glass ceiling that lay around her feet,

"I've had male coaches my whole life," says Curry. "For me, it just seemed like the normal thing."

It wasn't until after taking the coaching position that she began to reflect on the fact that coaching staff is predominantly male.

Even today, Curry says she isn't sure if this trend is caused by social constructs or a lack of female interest in putting their name into the coaching hiring hat.

"Maybe we women just haven't sought out those positions," says Curry. "Maybe we were just not interested...or maybe we are overlooked. I don't know."

It isn't uncommon for a man to coach a high school or collegiate team of girls - but it is rarer to find a woman coaching a team of boys on the same level.

"It's the norm," Desir adds. "People feel like it's ok for a male to coach girls because they've been doing it so long."

Desir attests that the prevalence of male coaches and lack of female coaches, however, has nothing to do with skill or knowledge of the game.

"Women have the same intellect and knowledge and skills as a male would," says Desir. Except for frequent dunking, Desir says a female athlete on the basketball court can do all the same stunts that a male athlete can perform. "We can make the craft passes, do the cross overs, we can play defense, we can make free throws and threes, we can box out - we can do everything that a man can do."

Even though the two coaches are breaking the rules of a societal norm, neither say that they have felt much push-back from their school, its teachers, the athletes or the boys' parents.

"For the most part, I've felt supported," says Curry. While she knows that her hiring has not been supported by everyone, those negative voices have been drowned out by the constant support from the school faculty, parents and athletes.

"A lot of students already knew who I was...so there was really no pushback," adds Desir, who was blessed to already be familiar with the school as well as the community, due to being a Tallahassee native.

Many of the students, teachers, coaching staff and parents already knew Desir's career stats, her prowess on the court and the ability she brought to the game.

"If anything...they were a little afraid," she jokes.

She's tough on her students; Desir explains that only students with approved grade levels can play during games, therefore encouraging her boys to keep their minds sharp in the classroom.

"It's not just about basketball. I care about [my athletes] as people. I'm preparing them for life."

While many of her athletes will go on to play collegiate or professional basketball, not all of them will. She wants her students, regardless of what scholarships they get, to be ready to play on life's court - not just the basketball court.

"We try to make sure they can survive on the next level," she adds.

It is that genuine care for their futures, Desir says, that has gained her respect from athletes and their parents.

While her perspective as a female athlete has value on the court, Desir says it is her perspective as a professional athlete and Tallahassee native that gives power to her coaching ability.

Desir says that she knows not only the journey of playing professionally but of growing up in the community where most of her students are growing up as well.

"I've been where they are," says Desir. "And I've done things that they want to do. It helps them understand that I can bring a lot of things to them."

Desir also understands the trials facing basketball athletes who may not exemplify the typical height, weight or skill trends in the sport.

As a younger athlete, Desir was told by one of her coaches that she likely wouldn't be able to pursue an athletic career in basketball.

"She told me that I was probably not going to do anything [in basketball] because of my height. That has always been embedded in me. That lit a fuel and fire under me," said Desir. "What you're not going to do is tell me what I can't do."

While that discouragement inspired her to overcome that coach's low expectations, Desir now uses it to promote strength in her athletes.

"I tell the kids 'don't allow your height, your weight, whatever, to stop you. You can overcome it.'"

Coach Curry adds her narrative to the story, saying that having a woman for a head coach has allowed her athletes to open up in ways they might not have, should a man be coaching the team.

"I feel like the guys talk where they wouldn't have talked so freely," she adds.

While she's their coach, she's also been a "Team Mom" for the boys in her roster.

Curry laughs while sharing how she always makes sure the Tigers' uniforms are clean and smell freshly laundered or how she will bring sandwiches to practice to keep "her boys" well-fed.

Regardless of how the two female coaches do their job, there is proof in the results.

The Jefferson Somerset Tigers advanced to the second tier in the Class 1A Boys Basketball Regional Semi-Finals for the state title in 2020, and the FAMU-DRS Baby Rattlers advanced to the Regional Finals; both teams might have lost a chance to claim the 2020 title, but they fell only a few points behind their opponents.

As societal norms shift, both women are interested in seeing



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## sports

more female coaches on the court in upcoming years and express positive outlooks to involving female voices in the sports world.

"I think it would help to provide an aspect that a lot of boys are missing," says Desir. By having a woman in the field, these athletes receive nurturing as well as firm coaching. "It's not that you are coddling them, but it's showing them that they don't always have to be aggressively 'on' all the time."

Desir says that by having a mixed-gender coaching staff, the boys are given a varied insight into working relationships and healthy friendships between the genders.

"I think most female basketball players are more fundamentally sound. We're not going to slam dunk, so we have to grow other skills and I think that's something that women can bring to coaching basketball," adds Coach Curry. "To transition that to other male sports, I think female voices can only help overall. If we blend that culture of female skill and fundamentals with male physicality, there can only be a more dynamic team."

While there is much growth needed for more women to take leadership in the coaching world, Curry believes the athletes and students are already prepared and willing to encounter that change.

"I think the players are ready. Parents and society might not be ready, but the kids are ready," she says. "Kids that want to play, they just want a coach. They want a leader to lead and teach and coach them. Our kids are ready, if the rest of the world is down, then that'll be good."

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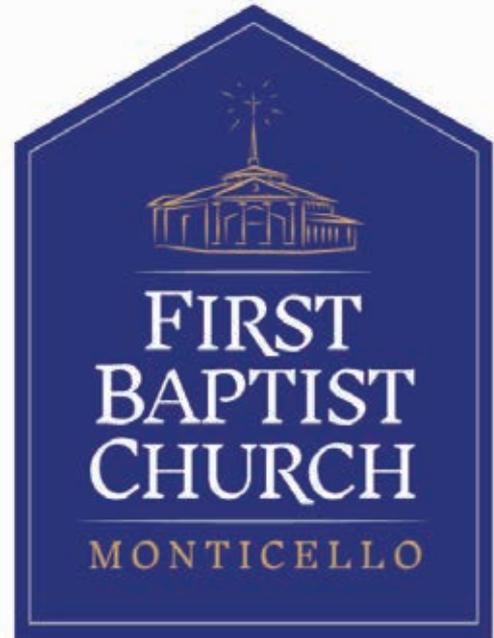
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# More than glitter and garnet...

## Monticello athlete works for her dream as a collegiate gymnast

Story by Ashley Hunter, Staff Writer  
Submitted photos courtesy of Jenny Jackson



*After starting gymnastics at a young age, Jenny Jackson put work into her athletic career in order to be recognized by college athletic scouts. Her hard work paid off, and in 2018, Jackson joined the gymnastics team at Centenary College.*

At Centenary College of Louisiana, Jenny Jackson is studying biology and business.

Her accomplishments in the classroom have been recognized, and Jackson has made her college's Dean's List multiple times and is a member of Tri-Beta – a biology honors society at the college.

At Centenary, Jackson is also a member of the college's gymnastics team, where she is making her mark on the world of sports. Before playing under the Centenary colors, Jackson was a Aucilla Christian Academy Warrior and resident of Monticello, Fla.

Jenny Jackson, daughter of locals Danny and Lisa Jackson, began her gymnastics career at age four and says that from early on, she developed a passion for the sport.

Her parents enrolled her in training with the Taylor Gymnastics facilities in Perry, Fla., and the sport stuck, with Jackson's dream of becoming a college

gymnast growing with each passing year.

Her dream of competing in gymnastics at a collegiate level, however, had several hurdles that Jackson first had to overcome.

"As a little girl, I always dreamed of becoming a college gymnast, but the club I was training at was very small and had never had another gymnast go to college or even reach the level I had," explains Jackson.

Her trainers - Lisa Arrowood and Mike Romano – saw Jackson's potential, however, and encouraged her, supporting her dream where they could.

"Luckily for me, [Arrowood and Romano] wanted to learn how to get me to college," adds Jackson.

With her trainers' assistance, Jackson began to try and catch the eye of college coaches and recruiters, but it was a difficult journey from the start.

"It was hard to get college coaches to look my way since I was coming

from such a small club [that] they had never heard of before."

To put it into perspective, Jackson says there are only a little over 80 colleges that have all-division college gymnastics programs; she needed to compete against the other gymnasts in the nation to capture the attention of these recruiters and coaches.

While attempting to catch the eye of the collegiate gymnastics coaches, Jackson continued to stunt.

In 2012, Jackson was the first place winner of the Level 8 State Championship for vaults, bars and beams; in 2013, she became the Level 8 AAU Nationals' first place winner for vaults, bars and all-around and won the Level 8 State Championship for vault; in 2014, Jackson was the Level 9 AAU State Champion for the floor.

She continued to gather recognition by qualifying for USA Gymnastics Regionals and AAU Nationals in 2016 and 2017.

*Despite the glittering uniforms and pretty athletes, gymnastics is a demanding sport that requires strength, flexibility, speed, coordination, discipline and power from its athletes. Jackson says she would train for 25 hours a week – and that was when her training was under a light schedule.*

She won the 2017 AAU National Championships on bars, beam and in the all-around category, also winning on floor at the Florida State Championships, then placed first in Level 10 at AAU Nationals on vault, bars, and beam, winning the AAU State Championship in the all-around.

Want to watch this Monticello girl compete at meets? Jackson advises her hometown fans to follow Centenary Gymnastics on social media or stream the Centenary gymnastics home meets online at [gocentenary.com](http://gocentenary.com).

Competing, training and winning the eye of college scouts was a lot of work, and Jackson explains that on a “light week” she would often be training for 25 hours.

“Gymnastics is a very strenuous sport,” says Jackson.

Throughout it all, Jackson held tight to her dream and continued to stay motivated. She adds that she was inspired by knowing that God had given her the talent she possessed for a reason.

“I know I am supposed to use it to the

best of my ability before I can’t anymore,” adds Jackson.

She also felt the weight of being a role model for the younger, upcoming gymnasts at the Taylor Gymnastics facilities.

“I was the oldest at my club gym, the little girls that look up to me motivated me to push past my limits and work hard to show them dreams can come true,” she adds.

Through the long, difficult hours of training, Jackson held tight to her dream, worked to inspire younger athletes and was rallied on by her family and teammates.

Then, it all paid off.

Jackson was accepted into the gymnastics program at Centenary College, located in Shreveport, La., and entered her freshman year with the college in 2018.

Now, two years later, Jackson is still completing her education and stunting with her group of fellow gymnasts.

“At Centenary, I have competed in every meet except one, for an injury precaution, and [I’m] usually competing in more than one event lineup,” says Jackson. “We are currently traveling all over for competitions!”

While college life in Louisiana has definitely been a change of scenery and pace from



Jackson’s childhood in Jefferson County, she says that adjusting to her new life has been easier, thanks to the wonderful school she’s attending.

“Lucky for me, I did not chose to attend a big university. Centenary has an average of about 552 students and 60 percent [of those] being student-athletes,” says Jackson. “This help the transition of living 10 hours away from home easier. I never walk around campus without seeing a familiar face.”



*From a small town girl practicing stunts in a Perry, Fla. gym to a collegiate gymnastics competitor, Jenny Jackson’s athletic journey has been filled with supportive coaches, teammates, family and friends – and it is that support, Jackson says, that has helped her achieve her dreams.*



*Merriam-Webster dictionary defines gymnastics as a “physical exercises designed to develop strength and coordination” as well as a competitive sport. In order to make it into one of the United States’ few colleges with a gymnast program, Jackson had to prove herself as one of the elite athletes in the nation.*

Her family also remains very engaged with her athletic career, as her parents are frequently seen supporting Jackson from the sidelines of her meets – no matter how far away those meets may be from Jefferson County.

“They never miss a meet, whether the meet is in Oregon, Pennsylvania, New York or in Shreveport – one of them is there to be in the stands supporting me,” says Jackson.

She also continues to gain support from her hometown friends as well as her two coaches.

Without Mike Romano and Lisa Arrowood, Jackson says she would not be the athlete she is today; it was their belief in her that has helped to sustain her through these years.

While she is now living in a city with an estimated population of 192,036, compared to Jefferson County’s 14,144, Jackson says she is still the same country girl she was before.



*Jenny Jackson performs an in-air stunt while watched by her fellow gymnasts.*



*At the Centenary College of Shreveport, La., Jenny Jackson is surrounded by a troop of girls and women who build her up and support her career goals, educational pursuits and athletic accomplishments.*

“You may can take the girl out of the small town but you cannot take the small town out of the girl.”

Jackson has one more year with Centenary, and she plans to attend an occupational therapy school after her graduation; there, she aspires to obtain her doctorate and specialize in pediatrics.

Even while pursuing the world of

medicine and care, Jackson doubts she will ever be able to leave behind the sport she loves so dearly.

“After my career in gymnastics is over, I am sure that I will not be able to get out of the sport, you will most likely either see me coaching or judging,” she concludes. “Its hard to just leave the sport you have been passionate for so long!



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# Sittin on the Porch with ...



## Carlton Burnette



Story and Photos by Mickey Starling, Staff Writer

Madison native Carlton Burnette often sits on his front porch and reflects about the simpler times he enjoyed while growing up just a few houses down from his current residence. Gazing across the street, Burnette thinks about the neighborhood families that he spent time with and who helped shape him into the man he has become.

Family is a favorite theme for Burnette, who has two grown children. His daughter, Katie, lives next door and his son, C.J. lives at home. Burnette says "He has taken over the back half of the house," but his smile says he wouldn't have it any other way. "I think a lot about my kids and what they will have left to enjoy as they get older," said Burnette. "Things are changing so fast and it's not like it used to be. We need to stay connected to our past. Small towns are a great place for that."

Burnette has generations of roots

in Madison County and some of those roots inspired his present career. Burnette's grandfather was a plumber, who had a shop next to *The Madison Enterprise-Recorder*, a newspaper that was owned and operated by Curry Merchant, Jr. As a young man in high school, Burnette often spent free time reading old plumbing manuals that his grandfather kept on hand.

One day, as Burnette was leaving the office, Merchant asked him if he had done any plumbing. Burnette said he had "done a little." That was enough for Merchant to ask him to repair a tub drain in a rental home that he owned. Burnette found he could do the job, which turned out to be more extensive than he anticipated. After the job was completed, Merchant asked what he owed Burnette, who said, "I have no idea. Let me ask my dad." Before he reached his father, Burnette encour-

tered a local plumber and asked him what the job was worth. "Without even being a plumber, you should be able to get about \$350 for the job," he said.

Burnette's eyes lit up with excitement at that estimate. Burnette was making a little over three dollars an hour at a local drug store where he was working part-time. He wrote up the bill and presented it to Merchant, who wrote him a check without hesitation.

At that moment, a career was chosen by Burnette. "I do believe I will become a plumber," Burnette recalls saying while looking at his check.

Even in his job, Burnette has brought his family along for the ride, as his son, C.J., and his son-in-law, Wade, work with him. For Burnette, it's just another way to pass along important values that will help make his family good citizens.

"That's why the past is so import-



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ant,” said Burnette. “That’s where we all learned to work hard and be respectful of others. Plus, we were raised to appreciate the Bible and to honor Christians.”

Never one for hypocrisy, Burnette is quick to point out his flaws. “I know I’m not perfect,” said Burnette. “I’m right there with the Apostle Paul, who said he was the least of all of Christ’s followers. But I will keep trying, because we will all be perfected in the end if we continue with Christ.”

One of Burnette’s greatest hopes is that parents will step up and be good role models for their children by staying actively involved in their lives. “Dads, especially, have given up their leadership roles in the family and that needs to change,” said Burnette.



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