

## **A NEW YEAR FOR NEW BEGINNINGS: BISHOP CHRISTOPHER STOKES CALLED TO SERVE!**



### ***In this issue:***

The History of Watch Night Service

The Willie Mae Stokes  
Community Center

New Year With New Resolutions

Remembering Mary Sue Rich:  
A Trailblazing Leader

Dr. Jaiya John, Author & Poet  
Releases New Book

MLK Day Celebration of Events

Nominations Needed for Veterans  
Hall of Fame

NAACP Jubilee Celebration



### **GET INVOLVED**

County Commission Meetings  
**January 6 and January 20**  
9 a.m.

McPherson Governmental  
Campus Auditorium  
601 S.E. 25th Ave.  
Ocala, FL 34471

Ocala City Council Meetings  
**January 6 and January 20**  
4 p.m.  
110 S.E. Watula Ave.,  
Ocala, FL 34471

Marion County School Board  
**January 13 and January 27**  
5:30 p.m.

School Board Meeting Room  
1614 E. Fort King Street  
Ocala, FL 34471

*Our mission is to record the rich history of the people, places and events in the community and share information that impacts the lives of residents in Marion County.*



## TOWN Talk MAGAZINE

Sharing the good news happening  
in our community.

### Founders

Monica Bryant & Cynthia Wilson-Graham

### Editor

Monica Bryant

### Photography/Editor

Cynthia Wilson-Graham

### Contributors

Scott Hackmyer

Monica M. Jacobs

### Let's Talk

#### We want to hear from you:

Email your submissions, events,  
comments or questions to

**Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com.**

Please include contact information  
(name and phone number) on the  
submission. Deadline is the first  
Monday of each month for the  
following month's publication.

### Policy Statement

All submissions become the sole  
property of Town Talk Magazine.

The opinions expressed in this  
publication do not necessarily reflect  
the views of Town Talk. All articles,  
announcements and advertisements  
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editing at the editor's discretion.

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**Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com**

**or Towntalkmagazine.org.**

## EDITOR'S DESK

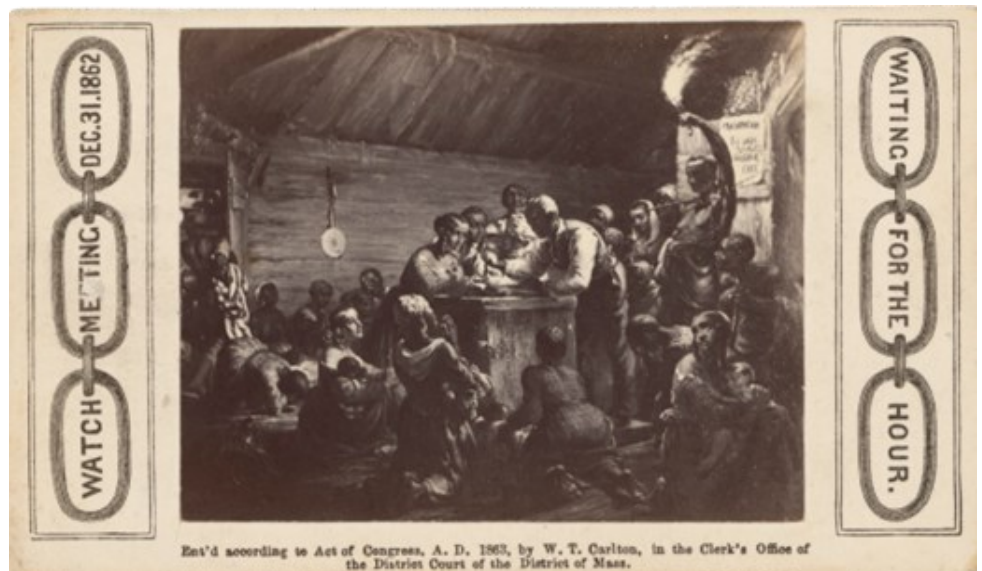


For as long as I can remember, I've always spent New Year's Eve in church attending Watch Night service. It was just something we did maybe out of habit, expectation or a wise tale I was told when I was growing up that whatever you were doing to bring in the new year is what you would be doing all year long.

Until recently, I never realized, maybe you did, that there was a historical reason behind "Watch Night" services in African American congregations.

In a Facebook post by Frank P. Green, Watch Night Services in Black communities can be traced back to gatherings on December 31, 1862, also known as "Freedom's Eve." On that night, Blacks came together in churches and private homes all across the nation anxiously awaiting news that the "Emancipation Proclamation" had actually become law.

Green said he assumed that "Watch Night" was a fairly standard Christian religious service, perhaps made a bit more Afro centric because that's what happens when white elements of Christianity link with the Black Church for that one service each year. He said it's a traditional way in which a white church reassures themselves that they are inclusive when they really are not.



### Source: National Museum of African American History and Culture

At the stroke of midnight on January 1, 1863, Green said that all slaves in the Confederate States were declared legally free. When the news was received, there were prayers, shouts and songs of joy as people fell to their knees and thanked God. Since that time, people of color have gathered in churches on New Year's Eve to praise God for bringing them safely through another year.

Today the Watch Night service, initially meant to welcome emancipation, encourages reflection on the history of slavery and freedom, as well as reflection on the past year - both its trials and triumphs - while also anticipating what the new year will have in store. It is a continuation of generations of faith that freedom and renewal lie ahead.

Let's Talk!

*Monica Bryant*

Monica T. Bryant, Editor

As we close another chapter (2025) and embark on a new year (2026),  
what will you thank God for?

**Town Talk Magazine wishes you a Safe and Happy New Year!**

### Subscribe with Us:

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Please visit our website at [Towntalkmagazine.org](http://Towntalkmagazine.org) to keep up with the latest happenings in the community.



# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## THE WILLIE MAE STOKES COMMUNITY CENTER

Bishop Christopher Stokes never intended to follow in the footsteps of his mother, who had a heart for the community she lived in. Born and raised in Micanopy, FL., he vowed that when he was old enough to leave the small town that offered few opportunities for young people, he would never come back.



**Bishop Christopher Stokes**

But after serving in the military, he returned home only to find that nothing had changed, and the same problems still existed.

"My mother had nine children and she raised us all on a meager income, but ensured that each of us had what we needed," Stokes said. "She kept us involved in our community."

Willie Mae Stokes, a community matriarch from Micanopy died in 2011 at age 85.

It was his mom's strong community involvement, Christian faith and legacy of service that inspired him to carry on her legacy. He opened the Willie Mae Stokes Community Center in December of 2017 to honor his mom for the work she did in the community. The mission is to educate youth, strengthen the community and build bridges between school, community and parent involvement.



**Willie Mae Stokes**

Stokes, who was serving as the Career Resource Manager for the Gainesville Job Corps, said the building, which currently houses the center, was part of a charter high school and part of their program. When the school moved, the center and the building became available and they relocated the building to its current location. Although the building needed a lot of work and didn't look like much at the time, he hoped that people would see it the way he saw it.

The 1,200 sq. ft. facility can accommodate about 66 people which Stokes said creates a major space issue because they keep growing each week. The center, which serves students in first through 12th grades, Monday - Friday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., opened with four children and now serves more than 60 youth who receive literacy and math gains. Each family receives a turkey for Thanksgiving and every student in the program gets a gift for Christmas.

"The community center strives to ensure each program participant knows their value and is academically sound," Stokes said. "We instill in them that education is the new currency, and we must ensure that they can spend well."

Although the center is funded through the Children's Trust of Alachua County, Stokes said their biggest challenge and need is financial support. His goal is to be able to purchase a shoestring so he can tell people that they operate on a shoestring budget.

"Since we are a nonprofit, we operate dollar in, dollar out," he said. "We're always open to donations which can be made directly to the community center, located at 355 N.W. 6th Ave., Micanopy, FL., 32667."

Follow Willie Mae Stokes Community Center on Facebook. For volunteer opportunities, contact Dolly Stokes, volunteer coordinator, at (352) 466-1136 or for more information or to support the center, contact Bishop Stokes at (352) 246-2533 or send email to [Bishopstokes2@gmail.com](mailto:Bishopstokes2@gmail.com).



The **Community Spotlight** highlights a person, place or event in our community. Tell us what's happening around town so we can share your **Good News** with others. Email submissions to [Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com](mailto:Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com).

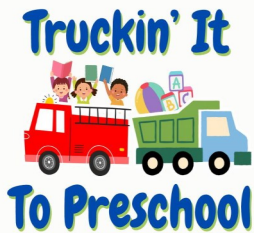




Even with HIV, you can live a long, healthy life.

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For more information, call 352-644-2667  
or visit [Marion.FloridaHealth.gov](http://Marion.FloridaHealth.gov).



**Saturday**  
**January 31, 2026**  
**11 AM - 2 PM**

(A quiet hour for children with  
sensory sensitivities begins at 10 AM)

**Marion Oaks Community Center**  
294 Marion Oaks Ln, Ocala, FL 34473

- Learn about the many preschool options available in Marion County and meet local preschool providers
- Receive assistance with VPK applications
- Free children's activities
- Interact with trucks and emergency vehicles

Scan today to apply as a  
vendor or truck exhibitor!



**Early Learning  
Coalition** Marion  
County

(352) 369-2315  
[www.ELC-Marion.org](http://www.ELC-Marion.org)

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Marion County.



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- Immunize pets and secure livestock
- Avoid wild or stray animals
- Never feed wild or stray animals



For more information, visit  
[FloridaHealth.gov/Rabies](http://FloridaHealth.gov/Rabies)  
or call DOH-Marion, 352-629-0137



# New Year with New Resolutions!

By Monica M. Jacobs, Teacher and Author of “My New Church” children’s book



**Monica Jacobs**

As the new year unfolds with fresh possibilities, you start planning for the blessings and successes that lie ahead of you and your children. That is what New Year’s resolutions are about, right? I look at the new year like I do Spring cleaning: it’s a time to let go of the old and make room for the new. As you make your New Year’s resolutions, your children can too! A suggestion for a New Year’s resolution is to get more involved at their school.

Children will need your help to do this. I have learned that most parents and guardians work at least two jobs and may already volunteer in their children’s sports or extracurricular activities outside of school. Therefore, they may question why they should participate in school activities? Let’s share some reasons!

The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) allows parents, guardians and teachers an opportunity to collaborate and provide enrichment experiences for the students, the school and the community. The PTO committee holds fundraisers for supplemental educational materials and experiences for the school and supports interaction between the school and families. For instance, you may wonder why your child is not going on better field trips or whether he/she goes on any field trips at all. Schools have limited budgets, and have experienced even greater budget cuts this year. A PTO committee could help raise funds to use for special projects.

The School Advisory Council (SAC) is a partnership between the school and parents or guardians. Being a part of the committee allows them a voice in the direction of the school’s movement. Possibly their biggest opportunity is to influence the way that the Title I money at their school is being spent since the SAC committee is the first to know the school’s goals as outlined by the School’s Improvement Plan.

Parent Data Nights provide time for parents and guardians to come to hear how the school is performing and how their child specifically relates to that data. Strategies that target specific skills for the child’s grade level are taught. Overall, families and teachers work together to improve student learning. Questions are answered, concerns are addressed and help is provided.

Attending other events such as school tutoring, Hispanic Heritage Night, Black History Month celebration and Winter Story Night, etc. will help your child know how important school is to his/her family. Attending these events demonstrates that in your family education holds a place of importance.

## Additional Information Regarding After-School Events:

School Event	Time Frame	Cost	Meeting Frequency
PTO	Approximately 1 hour	Depending on the school Approximately \$0 - \$20 per family	Usually quarterly or as needed
SAC	Approximately 1 hour	No cost	3 times a year
Parent Data Night	Approximately 1 hour 30 minutes	No cost	Approximately two times a year

To reach Jacobs, contact her via e-mail at [Jacobsmonica628@gmail.com](mailto:Jacobsmonica628@gmail.com).

CELEBRATING THE LIFE & LEGACY OF

THE HONORABLE  
**MARY  
SUE RICH**



Public Visitation  
**Friday, January 2, 2025**

4:00PM-7:00PM

Saint Paul AME Church  
718 NW Seventh St, Ocala, FL 34475

Celebration of Life  
**Saturday, January 3, 2025**

12:00PM

Central Christian Church  
3010 NE 14th St, Ocala, FL 34470

Lying In Repose  
**Saturday, January 3, 2025**

11:00AM

Central Christian Church  
3010 NE 14th St, Ocala, FL 34470

Interment

Faith Memorial Gardens  
3035 NW Blitchton Rd, Ocala, FL 34475

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# REMEMBERING MARY SUE RICH: A TRAILBLAZING LEADER

## MARY SUE RICH: A LIFE WELL LIVED (1940 ~ 2025)

- **1957:** Graduated from Howard High School
- Graduated from Central Florida Community College (now the College of Central Florida) and the University of Central Florida (UCF) with a degree in criminal justice.
- **1972:** Worked for the Florida Department of Corrections for 27 years, retiring in 2003 as a senior supervisor.
- Co-founded and led First Step Inc., which helped individuals on probation with basic needs and toys for children for Christmas.
- Distinguished Service Awards from the Florida Council on Crime and Delinquency and Central Florida Community College.
- **1995:** Made history as the first African American woman to be elected to the Ocala City Council representing District 2 in Northwest Ocala.
- **2001:** Distinguished Alumni Award by the College of Central Florida Foundation.
- **2003:** Helped create the REACH program, which worked to unite all cultures in the city as part of the Racial Harmony Cultural Awareness Taskforce.
- **2005:** United Way Humanitarian of the Year Award.
- **2014:** Inducted into Howard Academy's Marion County Black History Museum Hall of Fame.
- **2023:** LeRoy Collins "Hometown Hero" Distinguished Alumni Award.

Lena Hopkins fondly remembers all the times Mary Sue Rich would stop by their house and drop off little things for her mother, who was ill, when nobody else came by.

Hopkins said she's known Rich for more than 40 years and they use to attend church together at St. Paul A.M.E. Church. She said Rich, who was a senior supervisor, trained her when she worked for the Florida Department of Corrections as a probation and parole officer.

"She was genuine. You didn't have to worry about where she was coming from or what she was thinking," Hopkins said. "She was who she was, and you knew where she stood. There was no guessing."

Rich, a community pioneer, died on December 18, at the age of 85.

"I will miss her smile, her concern for others and how she was matter-of-fact, but always did it with a sense of humor," Hopkins said. "She had a love for her family, for her church and for this community, and she believed in seeing the best even in the worst people."

Rich, who was born on August 31, 1940 in Ocala, FL., was adopted as an infant and raised in Ocala where she's lived her entire life. A devoted public servant, she wanted Ocala to flourish and be a place where families were happy and successful.

A leader and staunch advocate for racial harmony, community development, education and recreation initiatives, the achievement she was proudest of was serving on the City Council because it allowed her to make decisions that improved lives. When asked how she wanted to be remembered, Rich said for doing what was fair and enhancing the lives of people in the community.

When she decided not to seek re-election in 2019 after serving on the Ocala City Council for 24 years, at her final meeting that year, her fellow Councilmembers voted to name the new community center, located at the site of the old Royal Oak Charcoal Plant, in honor of her extensive civic and community service.

When interviewed about the honor in 2023, Rich's granddaughter, Brittani Griffin, said knowing the center was going to be named after her grandmother meant everything to them.

"To see her hard work and dedication to the City of Ocala be honored in such a way as this center, our hearts are full," Griffin said. "She is Love. She is Light. She is a Legend. The Humble Humanitarian. I am honored to share her lineage."

The groundbreaking for the Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place, which honored Rich and Ruth Reed for successfully getting the Royal Oak charcoal plant closed down in 2006 after 30 years of operations, was held in January 2021. The 41,750 square foot, two-story building, estimated to cost \$10.3 million opened in 2023.

Prior to the center opening, Griffin said what she admired most about her grandmother was her FIGHT! She said she watched her in so many arenas and with so many different battles, whether it was city business or her own personal business, and she had this fight that was unwavering.

"When she's for something, when she wants something, when she needs something, she's going to fight and she's not going to give up, Griffin said. "She's such a strong lady."

Indeed she was. She never gave up and she fought until the end.

Well done Mrs. Rich! The life you lived speaks for you. You will be missed!



Mary Sue Rich



Ruth Reed and Mary Sue Rich

# A NEW YEAR FOR NEW BEGINNINGS:



**Bishop Christopher Stokes**

Christopher Stokes always knew he wanted to be in ministry, but growing up he loved sports and desired to be a sportscaster to do sports play-by-play.

"I remember applying to the Columbia School of Broadcasting. Everyone said I had a voice, but I had no money for school," he said. "That has always been my dream. I would love to have the privilege and opportunity to do that."

But in 1983, Stokes, the seventh of nine children born to Willie Mae Stokes, truly felt the desire to be in ministry, but he was scared, so in 1984, he joined the military instead.

But it would only be a matter of time since preaching was a part of Stokes' bloodline. His grandfather, the Rev. Ethel Daniels, was a preacher, pastor and he served as a Presiding Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME); and his uncle, the Rev. Richard D. Daniels, was a pastor and Presiding Elder in the (AME) until he retired.

It took 13 years for Stokes to finally accept his call into the ministry. He stopped running on October 26, 1997.

"It differs in the sense that I'm still using my voice. I'm just calling plays for Jesus," he said.

Born and raised in Micanopy, FL., the small town is all he knows. Prior to starting New Beginning Christian Worship Center (NBCWC) in August of 2013, his brother and sister joined him and were part of the ministry's implementation. Stokes has also served as pastor of Ward African Methodist Episcopal Church, Micanopy; Greater Mt. Olive African Methodist Church, Coleman, FL.; and Mt. Pedro Missionary Baptist Church, Flemington, FL. He said he still has mentor's and trusted voices of guidance and wisdom.

On July 20, 2019, he was consecrated to the office of Bishop and serves as the Presiding Bishop of the New Beginning family of churches, which consists of four churches located in Micanopy, Coleman, Tampa and Clearwater, Florida.

Stokes is planning for the future because their biggest challenge has always been space from the beginning. The current church is about 1,000 sq. ft. and can seat 80 people on a good day, but its membership is about 100.

"The building is in need of repair and we needed to meet our need for space and building was our only option," he said. "Our ministry survives on God's grace and the strength and biblical teaching that where God guides, God provides. Always have, always will."

Stokes said their message is every time you enter our doors, you will have a chance for a New Beginning. Church School is held on Sundays at 9:15 a.m., followed by Morning Worship at 10 a.m. Bible Study is held online on Tuesdays from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. To join, use Meeting ID 894-3829-1841. Passcode is 433738 or participate by phone using One Tap Mobile **(305) 224-1968**.

In March of 2026, Stokes plans to open a new 5,000 sq. ft facility that can seat more than 220 people. The church, which sits on 1.5 acres and located at 815 North Division St., in Micanopy, is about a quarter-mile from the existing church.

Once the new church opens, the former location will be used for their children's youth ministry.



**New Beginning Christian Worship Center**



# BISHOP CHRISTOPHER STOKES CALLED TO SERVE!

Continued from Page 4



The move will be bittersweet for Stokes, who said he'll miss walking into the place where it all started for him.

He visits the new church every-day, sometimes three to four times a day, and every Sunday morning he parks his vehicle at the new church and walks to the old church.

"I have a chair that I sit out front in and just bask in what God is doing," he said.

## Bishop Christopher Stokes



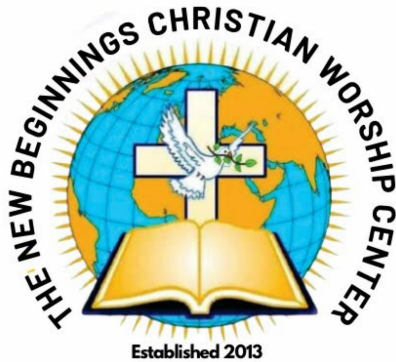
Christoper and Dolly Stokes

Stokes said his wife Dolly and sons Dominique, Sean and McKenzie are amazing and his strength. He has battled cancer three times, and in July of 2017, their lives changed forever when Sean, at age 17, was tragically killed in a four-wheeling accident.

"My family has been my rock and without the love and support, there's no me without them," he said. "I try to be as transparent as I can be but I want people to know that I truly believe and know that the Lord has been gracious and kind to me, and if he never does anything else for me, he's already done enough!"

Stokes said his desire to honor God, his mother, his son and his family is what motivates him to keep going.

### Their motto is Come As Our Guest & Leave As Family!



NBCWC is a Multi Cultural Non-Denominational Ministry whose focus is Loving God and The People of God By Changing the way we do Church.

Call (352) 234-0302 for more information, follow them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NBCWC352> or visit NBCWC.ORG.



Future home of New Beginning Christian Worship Center



## DR. JAIYA JOHN, AUTHOR AND POET, RELEASES NEW BOOK

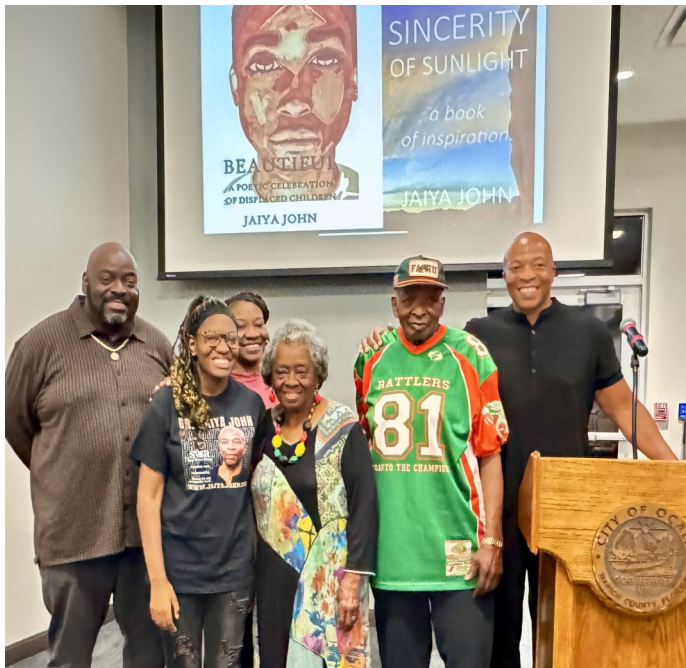
Dr. Jaiya John, a celebrated author and poet, recently unveiled his latest book, "Wildflowers Praying at Midnight," in Ocala, Florida. The event, co-hosted by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. and the Sankofa Public Library, featured an intimate conversation and book signing at the MarySue Rich Community Center at Reed Place on Tuesday, December 23.

Dr. John shared his deep connection to Ocala where his ancestors lived and his family currently lives. He also expressed his desire to help people reconnect with their divine nature through his work.

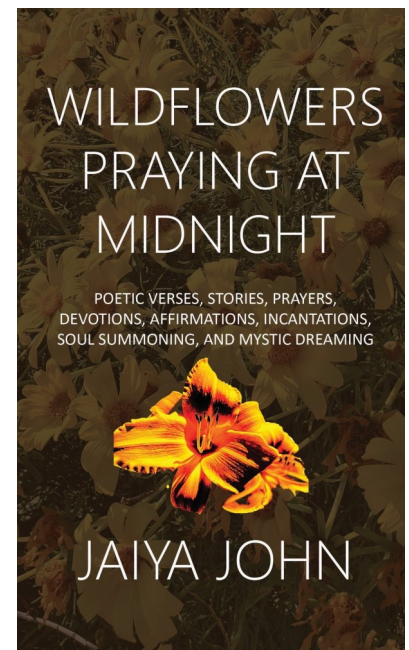
The concept of the book "Wildflowers Praying at Midnight" stems from the idea that humanity has faced numerous challenges, particularly in the last few years. As a result, we've become disconnected from our true nature due to our prolonged exposure to materialism, capitalism and individualism.

John's book seeks to stir our souls, encouraging us to recall our inherent value and resist the notion that our worth is determined by external factors.

We must recognize our individual strengths and the positive impact we can have on the world.



**Dr. Jaiya John**



## NOMINATIONS NEEDED FOR VETERANS HALL OF FAME



Marion County we need your help with nominations for our Marion County Veterans Hall of Fame inaugural class! If you know someone you feel deserves this honor, please read the following:

The Marion County Veterans Hall of Fame was established to honor the more than 45,000 veterans calling our community home.

Annual nominations are accepted until Jan. 31. Inductees are listed on a display within the Ocala-Marion County Veterans Memorial Park.

Please visit <https://www.marionfl.org/vetshalloffame> for the nomination form. Marion County is proud to serve those who have served. For more information on the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame, visit [FloridaVeteransHallOfFame.org](https://FloridaVeteransHallOfFame.org)  
**Vets Helping Vets USA**





# MLK DAY Celebration 2026

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 2026**

**9:00 A.M.**

## **Food Drive**

2nd Bethlehem Association  
N.W. 4th Avenue - Ocala, FL 34475  
Ire Bethea (352) 208-0819  
Rev. Eric Cummings, (352) 804-6871

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, 2026**

**6:00 P.M.**

## **Ecumenical Service**

Contact:

Rev. Mikel James, (352) 300-4271

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2026**

**9:00AM**

## **Prayer Breakfast**

Mary Sue Rich Center at Reed Place  
1812 NW 21st Ave. - Ocala, FL 34475  
Loretta Jenkins, (352) 351-0824  
Paula Leahmon, (352) 207-6036

**MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2026**

## **The Historic March**

8:00 A.M.: Line up downtown

9:00 A.M.: March begins

Contact: Ire Bethea, (352) 208-0819

Transportation available from 7:00a.m.  
to 8:00a.m. at MLK Raquetball Court  
Kelvin Richardson, (352) 207-9558

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2026**

**12:00 PM**

## **Wreath Ceremony**

Martin Luther King, Jr. Park  
500 SW MLK Jr., Ave. - Ocala, FL 34471  
Cassandra Boston, (352) 209-2973

## **Day in the Park**

**10:00 A.M. TO 2:00 P.M.**

Activities & Vendors

Dr. Dwanette Dilworth, (352) 207-6036

Performance Space

Derek Ponder, (352) 857-4118

Te'Sha Jackson, (352) 426-0861

Email [entconsultantbyteshaj@gmail.com](mailto:entconsultantbyteshaj@gmail.com)  
for performance applications

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2026**

**1:00 PM**

## **Youth Day**

Mary Sue Rich Center at Reed Place  
1812 NW 21st Ave. - Ocala, FL 34475  
Dr. Dwanette Dilworth, (352) 207-6036  
Trellis Hagins, (386) 451-1973

**Theme: Mission Possible II - "Uniting the Nation; Building a Future"**





## TEEN COOKING CLASS

Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place | 1821 NW 21st Ave.

Teens will learn how to make delicious meals from scratch while having fun with friends!

.....

Wednesdays | Jan. 7 - Feb. 18  
5 - 6 p.m. | Ages 13-17 | \$10 per class

For more information or to register: [ocalafl.gov/recpark](http://ocalafl.gov/recpark)



## RISE INTO *Resilience* CONNECT. RECHARGE. THRIVE.

Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place | 1821 NW 21st Ave.

This group offers a welcoming space for women of all ages to connect, recharge and support one another. Each session includes hands-on activities like journaling, crafts or wellness projects to encourage healing, balance and community.

Mondays | Jan. 5 - March 30  
6 - 7 p.m. | Ages 18+ | Free program

For more information or to register: [ocalafl.gov/recpark](http://ocalafl.gov/recpark)

## YOUTH TALENT Show

AT MARY SUE RICH COMMUNITY CENTER AT REED PLACE

Join us for an evening of creativity and talent! Cheer on young performers as they sing, dance, act and showcase their unique gifts, celebrating the skills and creativity of our youth.

Friday | Feb. 20  
6 - 8 p.m. | Free Program | Ages 5 - 17

Required auditions will be held on the following dates:

Jan. 16 & Feb. 6 | 6 - 7 p.m.

For more information or to register: [ocalafl.gov/recpark](http://ocalafl.gov/recpark)



## know the safe-sleep



Scan the QR code to learn more.



your baby should sleep  
**ALONE**

Adult beds are dangerous for babies.



your baby should sleep on their  
**BACK**

Reduce sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) risks.



your baby should sleep in a  
**CRIB**

Your baby is safest sleeping with no pillows, soft toys, stuffed animals, or bumpers.





# MONEY SMART TIPS

By Scott Hackmyer

## YOUR NEIGHBOR CAN BE A GREAT RESOURCE!



How do you know where to go to make purchases or get service. Whether it's buying new tires, plumbing repairs for your home or even selling old jewelry. There are a couple of things you can do to help pay the least and get the most. Ask your neighbors. Sometimes you will hear a theme in which the same name

keeps coming up as to where you get treated well. If your neighborhood has a community website, post the question. I recently asked about who does good plumbing repairs and received some excellent suggestions. You can also look at a company's ratings when searching on Google. Look for those companies getting four stars or above. I like trying to find a locally owned business with high recommendations. They tend to be very responsive and you are supporting someone from your own community.

I received a question about a credit card offer from CareCredit which is offered through Synchrony Bank. The purpose of this card is to help you pay for health and wellness costs for you and your pets. The writer asked if I thought this was a good idea. In my opinion, this sounds nice until you read the terms. This card charges 32.99% interest and if you make a late payment that rate increases to 39.99% and "the penalty APR may remain in effect indefinitely." The late fee is \$41 and the returned check fee is \$41. Synchrony Bank also charges \$1.99 per month if you want a paper statement. I consider these rates to be way too high. For every \$100 you charge on an annual basis that rate costs you an extra \$32.99. I am sharing this with all our readers just to warn you to read carefully any Pre-Approved Credit Card offer you may receive and make sure you check the interest rate and other fees they charge. Remember, if you have a financial question you can email it to me at [moneycala@gmail.com](mailto:moneycala@gmail.com).

The "Guardian" is a British publication that also has a presence in the United States. They are known for their investigative reporting and recently published a story about the convenience stores that many of us visit. Dollar General and Family Dollar were the focus of this article and the Guardian highlighted how their posted shelf prices very often don't match the price that is rung up at the cash register. They note that Dollar General seems to be very bad about this. When shopping at this type of store make sure you pay attention to the posted shelf price and if you are charged too much when checking out tell the cashier. My personal experience has been that the cashiers are very understanding and will lower the price to match the price that is posted.

I really enjoy Sirius XM radio in my car. My annual renewal just came and the cost to renew for another year was \$299.76. I called the company and explained that this was more than I was willing to pay. After a short and friendly conversation, they agreed to renew for the next 12 months for \$101.83. I was willing to do this. I write this often but don't be afraid to reach out to companies you do business with and ask for a lower price. Often these companies have senior discounts, will be sympathetic if you are caring for children, elderly parents or someone with a disability, or just can't afford the price they are charging. They often agree to lower the price as they don't want to lose you as a customer. Make a note on the calendar on your phone or a wall calendar for about three weeks before any automatic renewal subscription charges come due so you can call the company in advance and negotiate that lower price.

Like many others, some of you spent more on holiday gifts and meals than you intended. Now that it is January the bills are coming and they might be higher than what you can pay. If you are swamped with credit card bills first and foremost I urge you to at least make the minimum payment on each credit card so you don't get charged a late fee. Once you have covered all your minimum due payments calculate what you have left to pay these holiday bills. My suggestion would be to pay off as many of the small bills in full so you don't receive an interest charge on those accounts. Once you start getting interest charges credit card companies have an interesting thing called "trailing interest" which means you are now paying interest on the interest charge you incurred.

Have a good January everyone. Stay warm.

## Business Spotlight



**Business Name:** Royal Flush Detailing

**No. of Employees:** 1

**Business Owner:** Joel Dixon

**Business Address:** Mobile Business

**Business Phone:** (352) 553-7165

**What Year Did You Start Your Business?** 2022

**Hours of Operation:** Monday - Saturday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and by appointment only on Sunday.

### Products and/or Services:

We are a professional car detailing service that specializes in interior and exterior cleaning with a focus on providing high-quality services. We restore and maintain the appearance of vehicles for our clients. Packages include Royal Elite, Royal Premium, Royal Essential, Single Services plus additional add-on services are available.

**E-mail Address:** [royalflushdetail@gmail.com](mailto:royalflushdetail@gmail.com)

### Website Address:

<https://royal-flush-detailing.square.site>

**Are You on Social Media?** Yes

**If yes, on what platforms?**

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61550354103110>

### Instagram:

[https://www.instagram.com/royalflushdetail\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/royalflushdetail_/)

### What or Who Inspired You to Start Your Business?

Covid and my mother, Yvonne M. Dixon. Knowing her business acumen, she pushed me to have my own business and not work for someone else. That influenced and energized me especially after she passed in 2021.

### What Makes Your Business Unique or What's Your Specialty?

I really take pride in my work and the attention to detail I put into it. I never miss a spot!

### What Advice Would You Give Someone Starting a Business?

Do your research. Never give up or listen to any bad advice!

*The Small Business Profile is FREE and open to small businesses located in Marion County with less than 25 employees or solo entrepreneurs.*

*To have your business featured in an upcoming edition, please request a form by emailing [Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com](mailto:Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com). Completed forms can be returned via email or mailed to P.O. Box 6212, Ocala, FL 34478.*

## INAUGURAL ART PARK LITERARY AND POETRY FESTIVAL SET FOR APRIL

The City of Ocala Cultural Arts Division, in partnership with the Marion County Public Library, will host the first Art Park Literary and Poetry Festival on Saturday, April 11, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Tuscawilla Art Park, 213 N.E. Fifth St.

The free community event is part of the Tuscawilla Art Park Series and will feature local and regional authors, literary and community vendors, hands-on activities, open mic poetry recitals, live music, food trucks and family-friendly workshops.

The City is now accepting vendor applications in the following categories:

- Literary vendors including independent publishers, small presses, bookstores, magazines, newspapers, authors, zine creators and comic creators

- Calligraphers, printmakers, illustrators and bookmakers

Food trucks, nonprofit groups and arts organizations

Applications are available at [www.ocalafl.gov/poetryfest](http://www.ocalafl.gov/poetryfest).

Completed applications may be submitted by email to [artinfo@ocalafl.gov](mailto:artinfo@ocalafl.gov) or mailed to City of Ocala Cultural Arts, 201 S.E. Third St., Second Floor, Ocala, FL 34471.

Ocala Cultural Arts will also open a call for poets in January 2026. Selected poems will appear in the first edition of the Art Park Literary and Poetry Book.

For more information, contact the City of Ocala Cultural Arts Division at (352) 629-8447 or [artinfo@ocalafl.gov](mailto:artinfo@ocalafl.gov), or visit [www.ocalafl.gov/poetryfest](http://www.ocalafl.gov/poetryfest).

## Martin Luther King Jr's Day Annual Food Drive

# Food Caravan

2026  
MARCH 10

IN CONJUNCTION WITH: THE MARION COUNTY FAITH COMMUNITY; MLK COMMEMORATIVE COMMISSION, LOCAL GREEK ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHERS



PLEASE LOAD YOUR CARS WITH NON-PERISHABLE ITEMS TO  
DONATE TO A LOCAL FOOD PANTRY

LINE UP WILL BEGIN AT  
THE OCALA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY @ 9:00 AM  
1205 NW 4TH ST, OCALA, FL 34475

MONETARY DONATIONS ARE ACCEPTED. PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:  
INTERFAITH EMERGENCY SERVICES



TUSCAWILLA  
ART PARK SERIES

OCALA

# OTRAK Chalk WALK

## Jan. 24

10 a.m. – 5 p.m. | 213 NE Fifth St.

*Create your own chalk art alongside  
professional chalk artists!*

**FREE** event with chalk art, food trucks,  
local vendors and live music!

[www.ocalafl.gov/chalkwalk](http://www.ocalafl.gov/chalkwalk)



# SAVE-THE-DATES~AND ADD TO YOUR CALENDAR NOW!

Knowledge Brown Presents

## From Boys to **MEN**

First Annual Leadership Event  
**SUNDAY FEBRUARY 22ND 2026**



Inviting Young Boys  
Ages 12-19 for a Fun &  
Motivational Event!

**DOORS OPEN AT 3PM EVENT STARTS AT 4PM**



**Free Registration on Eventbrite**



LEADERSHIP ISN'T JUST A TITLE.  
IT'S THE COURAGE TO INSPIRE  
OTHERS TO BE THEIR BEST  
SELVES!

**Turtle Neck Attire**

- Special Guest Speakers
- Dinner
- Panel Discussions
- Q & A Small Groups
- Social Party Following

Diamonds and Pearlz Event Center  
**4875 SW 60th Ave, Ocala, FL 34474**



The story of the **Ocala (FL) Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.** is a powerful testament to vision, perseverance, and Brotherhood that spans nearly seven decades. First established on **December 20, 1957**, a trailblazing group of Kappa men planted the seeds of excellence

in Ocala—creating a legacy that would influence Marion County for generations. Though the chapter later transitioned into the Gainesville (FL) Alumni Chapter, the spirit of Kappa never left Ocala - it simply waited for the right moment to rise again.

That moment arrived in **2023**.

Fueled by renewed purpose and civic pride, a determined group of Brothers reignited the flame. Beginning with a pivotal planning meeting on **May 21, 2023**, they set out to restore Kappa Alpha Psi's presence in Ocala with intention, discipline, and excellence. What began as the Ocala (FL) Alumni Association quickly became a respected force -visible, engaged and impactful - earning admiration from community leaders, NPHC organizations, and residents alike through service, leadership and brotherhood.

Their unwavering dedication culminated in a historic achievement on **November 23, 2025**, when the **Grand Board of Directors officially chartered the Ocala (FL) Alumni Chapter**. This milestone was more than an administrative victory - it was the restoration of a legacy born in 1957 and a bold declaration that Kappa Alpha Psi is once again firmly rooted in Ocala.

As articulated by **Polemarch Ire J. Bethea Sr.**, the charter stands as a permanent tribute to collective discipline, sacrifice and the relentless pursuit of Achievement. Today, the Ocala (FL) Alumni Chapter emerges not just as a newly chartered chapter, but as a revitalized brotherhood—committed to service, mentorship, leadership and building a future worthy of its pioneering founders.

**What began in 1957 was restored in 2025—and now stands poised to endure for generations.**

The Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade in Dunnellon will be held on Monday, January 19, 2026. The parade begins at 8 a.m. in the McDonald's parking lot and ends at the Ernie Mills Park on Bostick Street.

The event, organized by Rev. Al Washington, Sr., Pastor of Mt. Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church, includes games, a bounce house, entertainment and food. Please feel free to bring your banners.



## Ovation's Encore Gala

An elegant evening to honor outstanding contributions to  
community service, advocacy and humanitarian excellence

**Saturday January 17, 2026 | 6:00PM - 9:00PM**  
**APPLETON MUSEUM OF ART, OCALA, FL**



Keynote - **Elgin Carelock**  
Renowned author, educator,  
and leadership coach



Unveiling  
of the 2025 **Ovation's of the  
Year Award**



Soul-stirring  
performance by **Ocala  
Symphony Chorus**

See **HONOREES** and Purchase **EARLY-BIRD TICKETS** at:  
<https://www.accoladecelebrations.org/event-details/ovations-encore-gala>



**Town Talk Magazine, P.O. Box 6212, Ocala, FL 34478**

# NAACP

5114 Marion County Branch  
1205 NW 4<sup>th</sup> St. Ocala, Florida 34475

*"The Fierce Urgency of NOW!"*

## *Jubilee Celebration*

Join Us for a night of worship, inspiration, powerful music, and an uplifting message, as we support the work of the Marion County NAACP

**JANUARY 4, 2026**  
**6PM**

*Immerse Church of Ocala*  
5105 N. US HWY 441  
Ocala, Florida 34475

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
352-351-4567  
[marioncountyflnaacp@gmail.com](mailto:marioncountyflnaacp@gmail.com)

*Featured Speaker/Messenger*

**Reverend Derrick Smith**

Pastor of the Church of St. Andrew  
Missouri City, Texas

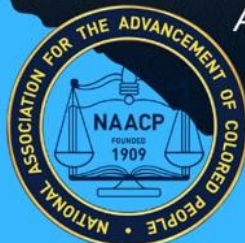


### **Send Donations to:**

NAACP 5114 Marion County Branch  
P.O. Box 2274  
Ocala, Florida 34478

**Zelle:** [marioncountyflnaacp@gmail.com](mailto:marioncountyflnaacp@gmail.com)

**Cash App:** \$naacpmarioncountyfl



*Apostle Lillie Tuggerson, Pastor*  
*Immerse Church of Ocala*