

## HONORING COMMUNITY SERVANTS



### *In this issue:*

*February is National Teen Dating  
Violence Awareness Month*

*Learn More About The Family Violence  
Prevention Workgroup*

*The Come Back Generation*

*Don't Let Your Past Dictate Your Future*

*Honoring our Community Servants*



County Commission Meetings  
**February 4 and February 18**  
9 a.m.

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

Ocala City Council Meetings  
**February 4 and February 18**  
4 p.m.

110 S.E. Watula Ave.,  
Ocala, FL 34471

Marion County School Board  
**February 11 and February 25**  
5:30 p.m.

Board of County Commissioners  
McPherson Governmental  
Campus Auditorium  
601 S.E. 25th Ave.  
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

Elgin Carelock

### 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.

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### Contact Us:

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or Towntalkmagazine.org.**

## EDITOR'S DESK



Today's young people often get a bad rap! While research evidence shows that a substantial number of adults believe that the "average" teenager is wild, disrespectful, irresponsible and have an entitlement attitude, did you know teenagers played a key role in the Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention initiative?

In 2004, the American Bar Association (ABA) began efforts to raise awareness about teen dating violence. The call to end it was formally recognized in 2006 and 2007 when both Houses of Congress declared the first week in February National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week. As part of the ABA's work, several adults and a teen from each state gathered together in Washington D.C. to inform the work. That movement was led by teenagers.

Three years later (2010) Congress declared the entire month of February as National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month (TDVAM). Teen dating violence or dating violence (TDV) is a pattern of controlling behavior by one teenager over another in a dating relationship and includes the following types of behavior: physical violence, sexual violence, psychological or emotional abuse and stalking.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- About 1 in 12 experienced physical dating violence.
- About 1 in 10 experienced sexual dating violence.
- Some teens are at greater risk than others. Female students experienced higher rates of physical and sexual dating violence than male students.

Last year, the Ocala Police Department had 133 reported cases of teen dating violence, an increase of 33 cases the prior year (2023).

During the month of February, you can join the *Family Violence Prevention Workgroup* in its efforts to raise awareness about dating violence; talk to teens about healthy relationships and dating abuse and wear orange, the color that represents TDVAM, throughout the month of February. Join us on Tuesday, February 11, for Wear Orange Day to recognize survivors of dating violence and to show unity with young people.

Teen dating violence is preventable, and resources are available for teens, families, schools and communities.

If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship, help is available. Call our local 24/7 domestic violence hotline at **(352) 722-2272** or go to **www.breakthesilenceonviolence.org**.

Let's Talk!

*Monica Bryant*

Monica T. Bryant, Editor



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# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## THE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION WORKGROUP

*Our mission is to organize activities that increase public awareness through education, training and collaboration with individuals, community leaders and public and private organizations.*

In 2004 when Debra Vasquez, a beloved college professor, was shot and killed in front of the Ocala Police Department (OPD) by her husband, it shocked the community that something like that could happen so close to the front doors of the police station and no officers came out to assist her.



Although she never made it to the station's doors, the public outcry from the community was immediate after they found out that the doors were locked and no one was manning the front desk at the time of the shooting. Vasquez's death was one of seven domestic violence homicides that year and the 27th recorded since 1997.

The community's outrage was so overwhelming that then former police chief Sam Williams made some immediate departmental changes, which resulted in officers being assigned to man OPD's headquarters and its two main substations around the clock.

A year later, (2005), the Marion County Children's Alliance Board of Directors hired a family violence prevention coordinator to undertake the challenges of addressing the impact of domestic violence in our community and to chair a taskforce officially named the Family Violence Prevention Workgroup (FVP). For the past 19 years, I have served as the chair, and our goal is to reduce family violence in Marion County by coordinating community resources and services to assist families in crisis.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), initially observed in October 1987, started as the Day of Unity in 1981 to connect organizations working to end domestic violence. In 1989, Congress passed a law making October National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Domestic violence, a serious and challenging public health problem, includes a range of abuse, including economic, physical, sexual, emotional and psychological, toward children, adults and elders.

The FVP Workgroup focuses on improving communication among agencies, organizations and individuals involved in family violence prevention; Educating all segments of the population on relevant facts of family violence; Improving the delivery of services to victims and survivors; Closing gaps in services and establishing benchmarks for participating agencies; and Working towards a unified strategy for all agencies.

Approximately 1 in 3 women and 1 in 10 men 18 years of age or older experience domestic violence. Annually, domestic violence is responsible for more than 1,500 deaths in the United States

Last year (2024) the Ocala Police Department received **620** reported cases of domestic violence, **133** teen dating violence cases and had **one** domestic violence homicide. The Marion County Sheriff's Office received **2,458** reported cases of domestic violence and had **five** homicides. The Workgroup provided assistance to **182** families (**270** children) from January through December and housed **8** families (21 individuals) in its domestic violence apartment.

The workgroup meets the second Monday of each month at 11 a.m. via Zoom and includes representatives from a variety of social service, non-profit and for-profit agencies, businesses and community members. We sponsor several annual events i.e. Night of Hope, Domestic Violence Walk, Community Walks, Lunch-n-Learns, etc. and facilitate free community trainings and workshops to raise awareness about the issue in addition to providing emergency resources and services to victims and survivors of domestic violence.

New members are always welcomed! Go to **[www.breakthesilenceonviolence.org](http://www.breakthesilenceonviolence.org)** or follow us on Facebook at **<https://www.facebook.com/ItsOkayToTellSomeone>**. For more information, to support the work we do or to request the Zoom link to join the monthly meeting, send email to **[fvpinfo@mcchldrensalliance.org](mailto:fvpinfo@mcchldrensalliance.org)** or call **(352) 438-5990**.

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)**.

# THE COMEBACK GENERATION

*By Elgin Carelock, Chairman of the Greater Ocala Community Development Corporation*

As a business and CRE strategist, I have an opportunity to work with businesses in many disciplines and of various sizes. Over the past couple of years, no matter where I've traveled, I have come in contact with young entrepreneurs in the 28 to 45 age range that are building some amazing businesses. From multi-chain restaurants, daycares and multi-family units to tech companies, food trucks and hair salons.

What has become very obvious is this group is the key to our nation's economic comeback. The primary thought being they are well educated (street or school) and fearless. They understand risk taking and are willing to fail and learn to get to the next level. To put it plainly, "they get it!" I'll refer to this group as the "Young Turks" for the remainder of our conversation.

The Young Turks I have met span the full range of ethnicities and race and are 55% women. They have really studied the market space they want to invade and understand the importance of social engagement. They have worked for companies in the same space, figured out what their employers are doing wrong and are willing to take the risk themselves.

However, I have also noticed many Young Turks are operating their businesses on talent and intelligence, which invariably runs into problems when life interrupts. They don't always have a foundation built around core values, standard operating procedures or strategic planning.

Fortunately, this can be taught, and the Young Turks are willing to learn. I mentor more than 20 Young Turks from nascent entrepreneurs to those looking to open their second location. Some are already millionaires and others are under-employed and looking for a way out.

## **So why do I think they are the key to our comeback?**

When you think about the current state of our economy, it's not only the lack of affordable housing, inflation or crime that is causing the problems, but sustainable growth. COVID changed consumer behavior and as a result, consumers are driven more by the emotive parts of life. This has been translated into more remote workers and an unwillingness on the part of employees to work in toxic environments.

The result of this change is slowed consumption for companies who have not adjusted to changes in their employees and customer's values and expectations. This has opened doors for the Young Turks who understand consumer behaviors, and many have been able to use their skills with social engagement to keep a steady flow of business.

It is this business smarts and determination that will prove to be the saving grace across many segments of our economy, but we (Baby Boomers & Gen X) need to do our part. We need to work together to support the Young Turks with mentorship and funding.

I really enjoy working with young visionaries because their minds are so expansive and without fear of failure they are constantly challenging the norms. However, many times the Young Turk's visions are so large, the details of what is necessary to actually bring it to fruition are not considered. They get snagged by the day-to-day aspects of building, growing, and sustaining a successful company.

## **What do I want you to do about it?**

What I want you to do is the same thing I am doing, find Young Turks in your market and support them both from your years of experience and investment. If you are above the age of 50, your best way of retiring the way you envisioned is to have at least six revenue streams. Let the Young Turks provide the vision and the energy and you supply structure and capital.

I have partnerships where I have provided capital for equity in their companies and I'm there to make sure their stumbles aren't fatal. It's not my job to tell them how to run their company, but to allow them to work out issues through planning, research and analysis.

When life throws a curve ball, I ask them to walk me through what went wrong, if they cannot, we take the time to write out a course correction strategy with KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), a timeline and periodic check-ins to see how the strategy is progressing. Those that work are put into standard operating procedures and the others are reworked for other scenarios or dropped all together.

Once they have worked through a couple of problems and built the resulting adjustments, they begin to understand the value of planning, processes and systems and our check-ins are less frequent. Since I helped them realize the solution themselves, there is never a reluctance to come to me when there is an issue. We just go to the whiteboard and work it out.

Finally, we need more nontraditional forms of raising capital, whether it's family funds, opportunity zone funding or groups of individuals who have discretionary funds to lend. Access to capital will fuel the growing number of Young Turks who want to make money solving social issues. Whether its building tiny houses to offer a solution to homelessness or building state-of-the-art learning centers in underrepresented neighborhoods, these Young Turks are poised to have generational impact on our nation if they are given the proper opportunities and support.



**PAST DUE RENT ASSISTANCE INTAKE FORM WILL BE AVAILABLE ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2025, STARTING AT 3:00PM, AND WILL BE ACCEPTED UNTIL CAPACITY IS REACHED.**

ATTENTION PLEASE !

#### CONDITIONS OF ASSISTANCE

- RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT: MUST LIVE IN ALACHUA, LEVY, OR MARION COUNTIES.
- PROCESSING TIME: MAY TAKE UP TO TWO WEEKS ONCE ALL REQUIRED DOCUMENTS ARE RECEIVED.
- ELIGIBILITY: ASSISTANCE IS INCOME-BASED. MUST PROVIDE PROOF OF INCOME AND STEADY RENT PAYMENTS. PROSPECTIVE RECIPIENTS ARE **NOT ELIGIBLE** IF THEY HAVE RECEIVED CFCAA RENT ASSISTANCE WITHIN THE PAST YEAR OR ARE CURRENTLY RECEIVING SECTION 8/OTHER SUBSIDIZED HOUSING.

Intake form link will be on our website: [www.cfcaa.org/rise-2/](http://www.cfcaa.org/rise-2/)

Posted January 27, 2025



**EDUCATION ASSISTANCE INTAKE FORM WILL BE AVAILABLE ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2025, STARTING AT 2:00PM, AND WILL BE ACCEPTED UNTIL CAPACITY IS REACHED.**

IMPORTANT

#### CONDITIONS OF ASSISTANCE

IMPORTANT

- RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT: MUST LIVE IN **ALACHUA, LEVY, OR MARION** COUNTIES.
- PROCESSING TIME: MAY TAKE UP TO TWO WEEKS ONCE ALL REQUIRED DOCUMENTS ARE RECEIVED.
- ELIGIBILITY: ASSISTANCE IS INCOME-BASED. PROSPECTIVE RECIPIENTS MUST BE CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN AN EDUCATION PROGRAM OR HAVE AN ACCEPTANCE LETTER.

NOTE: FUNDING DOES NOT COVER ALL EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES. THEREFORE, IT IS ADVISABLE FOR APPLICANTS TO HAVE EMPLOYMENT OR A SOURCE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME, AND/OR TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID, IN CASES WHERE FINANCIAL AID ELIGIBILITY IS NOT MET. APPLICANTS ARE STILL EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES.

Intake form link will be on our website: [www.cfcaa.org/rise-2/](http://www.cfcaa.org/rise-2/)

Posted January 27, 2025

NJ MBC  
"THE BALM"  
Marriage Ministry

# Cherished n' Chosen

Mark 10:9  
VALENTINE'S DAY DINNER  
*Dinner for two\**

**Friday, 14th February 2025**

Seating: 8:00pm (\$100 per couple) - Deadline February 2nd  
Dinner, Dessert, Beverage, Comedian, Photo, Couples' gift  
Attire: Formal

Diamondz N Pearlz Event Center  
4875 SW 60TH AVE OCALA, FL 34475

For more information:  
Call 347.248.2345 or visit our website [www.njmbsci.org](http://www.njmbsci.org)

JDaFunnyMan-Comedian





 @OfficialMCYFL  
 @MCYFL70  
 MCYFL70@gmail.com

Non-travel YOUTH league with all games played at MCYFL Fields, Jervey Gantt Park, 2200 SE 36th Ave., Ocala, FL. 34471

## GET REGISTERED ONLINE!

Visit [mcyfl.us](http://mcyfl.us) to create your MCYFL Sports Engine Account.

**Returning Football & Cheer sign-ups: Feb. 01-Feb. 15.**  
**Open/New Football & Cheer can sign-up beginning Feb. 15**

**FOOTBALL: \$180**

- Register online at [www.mcyfl.us](http://www.mcyfl.us) and click "FOOTBALL REGISTRATION."
- Ages 7 - 15 (on or before 12/1/2025) can register.
- All coaches are background-checked and USA Football certified.
- Full access to HUDL (which includes all MCYFL season games, playoffs and championships); Riddell jersey and pants included in registration.

**CHEER: \$75**

- Register online at [www.mcyfl.us](http://www.mcyfl.us) and click "CHEER REGISTRATION."
- K - 8TH Grade can register.
- All coaches are background checked. Progressive Stunting Program Senior Division coaches are UCA certified
- Professionally recorded competition/exhibition video included in registration.

**High school level students (9th-12th grade) are ineligible to participate.**

Marion County Youth Football League has been a part of this community since 1970. We believe in providing a safe and positive environment, where kids can learn to play the great game of football – a sport that teaches discipline, mental toughness and team work. MCYFL adopted the "Heads Up" training philosophy and requires ALL coaches to be background screened and certified in the "Heads Up" program. As the game evolves, we are committed to leading the way to make youth football safer and more enjoyable for players, coaches and parents!

# Father-Daughter Dance tickets on Sale

Don't miss this magical opportunity to share a night your little girl will cherish forever. ❤️


FEB | 7th & 8th | 2025

Get ready for an unforgettable evening of laughter, dancing, and precious memories! 🎉 Tickets are going fast, so secure your spot today.

[marioncountyfatherdaughterdance.my.canva.site](http://marioncountyfatherdaughterdance.my.canva.site)

## Howard Academy Community Center

# 2025 SCHOLARSHIP NIGHT



CALLING ALL HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS AND SENIORS


**Thursday, February 6, 2025**  
**6:00pm to 7:30pm**

**Howard Academy Community Center**  
 306 N.W. 7th Avenue  
 Ocala, Florida 34475


Join us and find out about the many scholarships available to you right here in your community!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL:  
 352-671-4175

We will have representation from the following organizations:  
 Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity  
 Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity  
 Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority  
 Delta Sigma Theta Sorority  
 Zeta Phi Beta Sorority  
 Omega Psi Phi Fraternity  
 FAMU Alumni  
 MLK Commemorative Commission  
 College of Central Florida  
 Men Working to Better the Community  
 Marion County Chapter of the Charmettes and more!



## READY2WORK. READY2BUILD.






The Construction Academy and Training Institute in partnership with the Lennar Foundation, Building Talent Foundation, and Jobs To Build, is excited to announce the launch of our first construction education academy in the Ocala/Marion County area.


**WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR:**  
 Individuals 18 and older Unless turning 18 before the class is complete.  
 "11 week training Earn Industry-Recognized Credentials"

- OSHA 10 Certification
- NCCER Core Certification
- NCCER Jobsite Safety Certificate

GET READY TO WORK. GET READY TO BUILD.  
 Contact Us for More Information!

📞 352-283-2185  
 📧 [pleasantstreet@pleasantstcrca.org](mailto:pleasantstreet@pleasantstcrca.org)



# DON'T LET YOUR PAST DICTATE YOUR FUTURE!

The economy may be thriving and the employment rate may be low in Marion County according to some reports, but if you have an arrest record or are a convicted felon, your chances of getting a good paying job, a better job or employment at all can be bleak.

Community Legal Services may be able to help. On Friday, February 21, they are hosting a Sealing and Expungement Clinic, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Marion County Courthouse (Jury Assembly Room), 110 N.W. 1st Ave.

If your charges were dropped or adjudication was withheld, Lena Hopkins, Senior Manager of Pro Bono Services, Community Legal Services, encourages you to attend the clinic to meet with an attorney who will determine if you are eligible to have your charge sealed or expunged. If you qualify, the attorney will help you fill out the application.



**Lena Hopkins**

"Removing certain offenses from one's criminal record can minimize or even remove some of the barriers that disproportionately impact underserved and minority communities such as access to employment or safe housing due to the background checks that are often required," Hopkins said.

Once a criminal charge is sealed or expunged, you can deny or withhold knowledge of a prior arrest from *most* prospective employers.

## **What can a felon do to improve their job prospects:**

### **Highlight skills & experience:**

Focus on relevant skills and work experience that are directly applicable to the job, emphasizing transferable abilities.

### **Be upfront about criminal history:**

When asked about your criminal record, be honest and transparent, explaining the circumstances and any steps taken to rehabilitate yourself.

### **Seek support from organizations:**

Many non-profit organizations provide job training and placement services specifically for individuals with criminal backgrounds.

### **Consider entrepreneurship:**

Starting a business can be an option for felons who face significant employment challenges.



To participate in the clinic, your criminal case must have occurred in Marion County, and if you qualify for sealing and expungement, you will be responsible for a \$75 application fee.

"Our criminal justice system is built on the principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty. Yet, even when there isn't enough evidence, and the charges are dropped, the repercussions of the charge alone, can impact the rest of your life," said Silvia Lopez Smith, Community Legal Services, Pro Bono Development Attorney. "A criminal charge, will keep you from a better job, housing and higher education. If your charge is sealed or expunged, you literally have a second chance at life.

Pre-registration is RECOMMENDED.



COMMUNITY  
**LEGAL SERVICES**  
of MID-FLORIDA

To register, scan the QR code or go to <https://forms.office.com/r/WVh0wcZRhx>.



For questions or more information, call Lena Hopkins at (352) 509-9279.



# HONORING THOSE WHO SERVE OUR COMMUNITY



**Daniel R. Banks**

**Daniel Ramone Banks**, 67, retired but works part time as a State Training Specialist with Childhood Development Services, Inc., has lived in Ocala since 1963 only leaving to attend Florida State University from 1977 – 1979. He is the son of the late Doyle Ernest Banks and the late Alice Marie Davis Banks and grandson of the late Edward Daniel Davis Sr.

A ruling elder at Fort King Presbyterian Church, Banks said they are passionate about loving their neighbors and helping their fellow man, and they strongly believe in diversity, equity and inclusion. He enjoys gardening, music, writing and travel. In 2013 he recorded a national gospel CD and has published 11 books that are available on Amazon.

"It's great to be honored and recognized outside one's community, but it's also nice to be recognized at home," he said. "Now my family's name will go down in local black history, not only the work I've done, but the works my ancestors did here too. Without them, I wouldn't be here."

Banks said as a member of the local NAACP and in today's political climate, it's imperative that we, as a people, preserve and defend all of the black history that we can for posterity's sake. I love the Lord. I love people. I love life!

## ~ **RECOGNIZING OUR AFRICAN AMERICAN PRINCIPALS** ~

Victoria Thomas, Belleview Elementary School; Dr. Dion Gary, Belleview Middle School; Wade Martin, Dunnellon High School; Shameka Murphy, Dunnellon Middle School; Stacie Newmones, Fessenden Elementary School; Lamar Rembert, Forest High School, Tracy Crawford, Hammett L. Bowen Elementary School; Jason Jacobs, Lake Weir Middle School; Melicia Cooper, Legacy Elementary School; Ronald Jones, Marion Technical Institute; Dr. Anna Streater-McAllister, Shady Hill Elementary School; Dr. Diana Elysee, South Ocala Elementary School

**CONGRATULATIONS TO EACH OF YOU!**

**TiAnna S. Harris**, 50, a Juvenile Probation Officer Supervisor for Marion County Department of Juvenile Justice, was born and raised in Ocala. She is married to Jonathan Harris and has a son, Jaxson A. Greene (soon to be Harris), and a dog, Cairo A. Harris. TiAnna is most passionate about our community and said as far as she can remember, there has never been a time that she's doubted or wavered on ensuring that everything she did, including within her occupation, was done to uplift others and provide support to others, from those that needed support or from others who gave back to our community daily. She said people before us did it for us, therefore, it's our duty to do it for the generations behind us. She describes herself as a modest person, however, leaving a legacy is very important to her.

"I want to always fill life with moments of love, happiness and support of others by using my time and talents daily. To be nominated and recognized for all that I've done in the community is an amazing feeling," she said.

TiAnna wants to be remembered for her caring and genuine spirit. She said she always wants the best for our community. No matter if we are leading a charge or assisting in the background, we must all do our part. I'm going to do mine just as long as it's humanly possible. "Let my legacy speak for me!"



**TiAnna Harris**



## AND AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS IN EDUCATION



**Rosemary Roberts**, 63, who retired from the U.S. Military and the U.S. Post Office, has lived in the community for the past 23 years. She is the seventh of 12 children and has been married to Cavinaugh Roberts for 38 years. They have three daughters, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Rosemary said her first passion is for the Lord and then her family and friends. She believes her purpose is to serve God's people and has always believed in helping others.

"I'm very honored and grateful for this recognition," she said. "But without the support from volunteers, my pastors, Louis and Danielle Cherubin, friends and family, none of this would be possible."

Rosemary wants to be remembered for her love of Jesus Christ, family and friends. She said her life is centered around treating everyone with respect, love and kindness.

### **Rosemary Roberts**

#### ~ **RECOGNIZING OUR AFRICAN AMERICAN ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS** ~

Charnee Bryant, College Park Elementary School; Lisa Coleman, Dr. N.H. Jones Elementary School; Samuel Bullock, Dunnellon High School; Tara Willis, Forest High School; Bashannon Hinson, Ft. King Middle School; Kelley James, Horizon Academy; Karen Hall, Lake Weir High School; Steven Powell, Lake Weir Middle School; Dr. Carmen Smiley, Maplewood Elementary School; Aisha Pete, North Marion High School; Cynthia Jones, North Marion Middle School; Jonathan Cannon, Osceola Middle School; Dr. Tiffany Drummond, Romeo Elementary School; Terrell Davis, Westport High School

**CONGRATULATIONS TO EACH OF YOU!**

**Clint Hart**, 47, owner of Healthy Harts Fitness and Head Coach at Trinity Catholic High School, has lived in the community for 18 years and has one daughter, Lillian Hart.

Hart, who played baseball at the College of Central Florida, is a former American football safety in the National Football League for the Philadelphia Eagles, San Diego Chargers and the St. Louis Rams.

He believes his purpose is to share, care, unite and teach.

His life is an "Amazing testimony of what God has for you is for you, but you have to prepare to receive the opportunity," he said about receiving the recognition.



**Clint Hart**

## African American Read-In's

Come join us and Celebrate a rich heritage of literature, film, music and art at the 35th National African American Read-In.

**February 3, 2025**

**11:30 a.m.**

**Fort McCoy Public Library  
14660 NE Highway 315  
Ft. McCoy, Florida 32134**

**February 4, 2025**

**3:30 p.m.**

**Freedom Public Library  
5870 SW 95th St.  
Ocala, Florida 34476**

**February 8, 2025**

**2 p.m.**

**Dunnellon Public Library  
20351 Robinson Road  
Dunnellon, Florida 34431**

**February 10, 2025**

**11:30 a.m.**

**Reddick Public Library  
15150 NW Gainesville Road  
Reddick, Florida 32686**

**February 12, 2025**

**11 a.m.**

**Forest Public Library  
905 S. Hwy. 314A  
Ocklawaha, Florida 32179**

**February 17, 2025**

**2 p.m.**

**Sankofa Public Library  
1821 NW 21st Ave.  
Ocala, Florida 34475**

**February 21, 2025**

**2 p.m.**

**Headquarters-Ocala  
2720 E. Silver Springs Blvd.  
Ocala, Florida 34470**

*Howard Academy Community Center*

# SAVE THE DATE

## Annual Black History Awards Gala

### "A Night of Stars"

*Recognizing Our African American Principals & Assistant Principals"*

*2025 Inductees*

*Elder Daniel Banks  
Ti Anna Greene Harris*

*Unsung Hero: Clint Hart  
Beacon of Light: Rosemary Roberts*

*Special Guest Entertainment: KDC Line Dancers*

**Friday, February 28, 2025**

**6:30 in the evening**

**Venue: College of Central Florida Klein Center**

For more information, please call (352) 671-4175



@Howard Academy



www.marionschools.net



Sponsorships, Tickets and Ads can be purchased  
at the Howard Academy Office or online

## Sponsorship Packages

### Peace Sponsor - \$1,000

One Peace Table for 10  
1 Full Page Ad in Program Booklet  
Acknowledgement at Awards Gala  
Acknowledgement on all social media platforms

### Joy Sponsor - \$800

6 Gala Tickets  
1 Half Page Ad in Program Booklet  
Acknowledgement at Awards Gala  
Acknowledgement on all social media platforms

### Love Sponsor - \$500

4 Gala Tickets  
1 Half Page Ad in Program Booklet  
Acknowledgement at Awards Gala  
Acknowledgement on all social media platforms

Individual Tickets: \$60.00

Table of 10: \$700.00

Purchasing a table of 10 guarantees your guest will  
sit together at one table up front

### Program Booklet Advertising Opportunities

Full Page  
\$150.00

Half Page  
\$100.00

Inside Covers (2)  
\$250.00

Back Covers (1)  
\$300.00

All ads MUST be print ready in jpeg or png form. NO PDFS.  
Ads can be emailed to [Davida.Randolph@marion.k12.fl.us](mailto:Davida.Randolph@marion.k12.fl.us).

ADS ARE DUE NO LATER THAN 2/14/2025.

For more information, please call (352) 671-4175



@Howard Academy



Marion County Public Schools  
"Helping Every Student Succeed"

[www.marionschools.net](http://www.marionschools.net)

# MONEY SMART TIPS

By Scott Hackmyer

## DON'T BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DEBT THAT'S NOT YOURS!

This month starts with some good news for those of you who have medical or hospital debt. On March 17, 2025, a new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau rule means consumers' hospital and doctor bills can no longer weigh down your credit scores. According to U.S. News and World Report this will impact around 15 million Americans and bring their credit scores up by about 20 points. If you have recently applied for credit, a new apartment or any loan and been turned down due to a low credit score and think a 20 point boost would make you eligible, it might be time to try again if your score was low partially due to medical debt.

I write a lot about shopping with coupons and lately Digital Coupons. Last week I bought \$82.81 worth of items at a grocery store and only paid \$55.87 for them. The store receipt stated I saved 34% and that came with very little effort on my part. Clip the Digital Coupons on your store's website, look for Buy One Get One (BOGO) free items and other sales on items you normally use. When I see a great deal, I check the Best If Used By date then stock up on those items. If I can eat a bag of chips for \$2 it seems to taste even better than if I had paid \$4 for it.



If you or your spouse are in bad health check to see if you are joint owners of your credit cards. If you have a joint account with your spouse and you pass away your spouse is responsible for the debt. If you are an authorized user on a card but not an account owner in Florida you are not

responsible for this debt as Florida is not a Community Property state. If this is the case with you or your spouse, I would suggest calling the credit card company and changing from being a joint owner to becoming an authorized user. If you have a balance you might have to pay this off before you can make the change. Some financial experts even advise you not to be an authorized user so the credit card companies aren't tempted to come after you. Speaking of credit cards, I have warned you about high interest rates on store credit cards. Lately I have noticed that even regular credit card interest rates are going sky high. Capital One just wrote me that the rate on their Quicksilver card is going to 30.74%. Be aware of what your cards are charging you and close those with such high, unreasonable costs.

Valentine's Day is coming and without trying to sound unromantic I suggest you ask the special person in your life if you can celebrate on the weekend before or after Friday, February 14, the official Valentine's Day. Many restaurants raise their prices on this day and the wait can be so long it ruins the occasion. Many are so crowded and with a lot of illness going around it makes good health sense not to be part of that crowd. If you are in debt or on a tight budget perhaps taking care of a chore that has been on the Honey Do list for a long time, cooking a special meal at home or just a super good washing of your significant others car might be an appreciated gift without using your credit card or going further into debt. Be creative, what can you do, make or write (a love letter perhaps) that would mean just as much to your partner?

Federal Income Tax time is here and you can spend a lot of money getting your taxes prepared. If you earn a low to moderate income I suggest going online or calling the United Way of Marion County to sign up for their free VITA tax assistance program. You can request a specific date, time and location to meet with their representative. United Way has been offering this service for years and use only trained volunteers to help you prepare and file your income tax return. The closest location to West Ocala is the Marion County Literacy Council at 120 S.W. 5th Street.

## Business Spotlight

**Business Name:** DeNaya Wilkerson Arts and Wellness, LLC

**No. of Employees:** 1

**Business Owner:**  
DeNaya Wilkerson

**Business Address:** No physical address. Classes are online and at local community buildings. Visit [www.denayawilkerson.online](http://www.denayawilkerson.online) for more information

**What Year Did You Start Your Business?** 2021, and my LLC was established in 2023.

**Hours of Operation:** Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Check website for booking availability and class times.

**Products and/or Services:** Dance Classes, Yoga/Stretch Classes, Pine Needle Basket Weaving Classes, Private Assisted Stretching, Event-Dance Performance Booking, Motivational Speaker- Event Booking, Flyer Graphic Design and Video Editing. Visit website Services Tab.

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

**Website Address:** [www.denayawilkerson.online](http://www.denayawilkerson.online)

**Are You on Social Media?** Yes.  
**If yes, on what platforms?**

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/dwaaw](https://www.facebook.com/dwaaw) **Youtube:**  
[www.youtube.com/denayawilkersonartsandwellness](https://www.youtube.com/denayawilkersonartsandwellness)

**Instagram:**  
[www.instagram.com/denayawilkersonartsandwellness](https://www.instagram.com/denayawilkersonartsandwellness)

**Tik Tok:** [www.tiktok.com/@denayawilkerson](https://www.tiktok.com/@denayawilkerson)

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

My family inspired me to start my business. They have always spoken life into my talents saying you will open a dance studio one day, your touch and attention to detail and love for people is healing and can help so many. You are so talented and creative, it's time to share it with others. My mama, Donna Wilkerson, is community driven. I've watched her teach, nurture and give back to our community for as long as I can remember.

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

DeNaya Wilkerson Arts and Wellness, LLC stands out because of its unique blend of restorative yoga, artistic classical/cultural dance expression and community advocacy all rooted in my personal health journey of brain decompression surgery and faith in God.

My Specialty is my personality and light. I create heart centered practices that allow me to deeply connect with my clients and tailor practices to their unique needs creating a safe, nurturing space for transformation.

**What Advice Would You Give Someone Starting A Business?** If someone is just starting a business, I want to remind you that "you learn from experience." Just do it, and trust the process. Your people will find you, and things take time to grow. Trust your intuition, your unique creativity and expression and let it flow.

*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.*







**Early Learning  
Coalition** of Marion  
County

# DIAPER ASSISTANCE

Diapers are packaged based on size, not brand (25 per package). Program is subject to funding and while supplies are available.



The ELCMC provides  
diaper assistance  
every Thursday,  
7 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
2300 SW 17th Road  
Ocala, FL 34471



Eligible families should provide proof of:

- Marion County residency
- Child's age (between birth to five)
- Financial need

Visit [elc-marion.org/parents/success-by-6](http://elc-marion.org/parents/success-by-6) for additional information.

**Diaper Donations Welcome**

*Thursday, February 27th @ 5:30*

## Black History Month Program

### College Park Elementary School

Black History Month is a celebration to commemorate the achievements of African-American blacks in the history of the United States and the contributions of other black people worldwide who have contributed to the diverse culture of black people throughout history.

*\*Food · Music · Dancing · Fun\**

## Open Call to Artists



**Levitt AMP Ocala Music Series  
Community Art Project Opportunity**

Apply to design and paint two MCA awning panels during  
Levitt AMP concerts with community help. Apply online at  
[www.ocalafl.gov/levittamp](http://www.ocalafl.gov/levittamp)

**Deadline: February 7, 2025**



**OCALA**

*Save The  
Date  
Feb 22nd -  
March 3rd  
2024*

## MARION COUNTY FAIR

**FKHK.ORG**

### NOW ACCEPTING VENDOR APPLICATIONS

**175 Flea Market**

4121 NW  
44th Ave  
Ocala FL  
34482





*Inaugural*  
**HEART OF FLORIDA**  
 HEALTH CENTER

**BBQ BASH**

[www.MyHFHC.org/BBQ](http://www.MyHFHC.org/BBQ)

**April 5th, 2025**  
**Southeastern Livestock Pavilion**

Officially Sanctioned Event  
 FLORIDA BBQ ASSOCIATION



WOMEN AND MEN OF PURPOSE & DESTINY INCORPORATED PRESENTS

**2025**  
**THE SUPER AWARDS**  
**AWARDS**

HONORING SUPERMEN, SUPERWOMEN AND SUPERKIDS  
 APPLETON MUSEUM OF ART  
 (4333 E SILVER SPRINGS BLVD, OCALA, FL 34470)  
**MARCH 8, 2025 2:30PM**  
 FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT CHRISSY VICKERS (352) 304-3908  
 OR AUTHORCHRISSYVICKERS@OUTLOOK.COM WRITE TO CHRISSY VICKERS



*An Evening with*  
 BETHUNE-COOKMAN UNIVERSITY  
**INSPIRATIONAL GOSPEL CHOIR**

**SATURDAY MARCH 22ND 4PM**  
 DOORS OPEN AT 3PM

MARY SUE RICH  
 COMMUNITY CENTER  
 1821 NW 21ST AVE  
 OCALA, FL 34475

**FREE TICKETS AVAILABLE**  
[ocalatlc.org/events](http://ocalatlc.org/events)  
**LIMITED SEATING!**  
**GET YOUR FREE TICKET**  
**BY MARCH 20TH**

QUESTIONS?  
 CONTACT JOYCE MAXWELL  
 352-723-7774 OR  
[TLCOCALA@THELIFECENTER.ORG](mailto:TLCOCALA@THELIFECENTER.ORG)

HOSTED BY  
**PASTOR JOE MAXWELL, JR.**  
 OF THE LIFE CENTER CHURCH  
 OCALA, FL





**FREE**  
event for  
families!

**Family Fun Health Fair**  
Celebrates  
**Minority Health Month**

**10 a.m. - 1 p.m., Saturday, April 5, 2025**  
**Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place**  
**1821 NW 21st Ave., Ocala, FL 34475**


Bring the whole family as the Florida Department of Health in Marion County hosts this **free** event to promote health and wellness.

This event will feature many activities and information presented by our community partners that can improve your health and well-being, including:

- Music
- Games and facepainting
- Health screenings
- On-site ultrasound (if suggested following health screen)
- Community resources
- Health education
- Plenty more!

For more information, contact Monica Dasilva at **352-644-2679** or [Monica.Dasilva@FLHealth.gov](mailto:Monica.Dasilva@FLHealth.gov).

**Florida**  
**HEALTH**  
Marion County



**ATTENTION:**  
*Juniors!*

2025  
**YOUTH TOUR**  
APPLY TODAY!

**SECO Energy is seeking student delegates to represent our not-for-profit electric cooperative in Tallahassee!**

SECO Energy will cover the costs for the two-day overnight trip, including transportation, meals, and hotel accommodations.

**YOUTH TOUR DETAILS**

- Join many other students from Florida on a two-day Conference on Feb. 12 and 13, 2025
- Visits to Florida House of Representatives Chambers and the Florida Supreme Court
- Learn about the cooperative business model

To be eligible for the SECO Energy Youth Tour, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- **Enrollment:** The student must be a current high school junior or home-schooled at the junior level.
- **SECO Membership:** The student must live with a parent or guardian whose home is served by SECO Energy, with an active account at the time of application and during the Youth Tour.

*Chance for a 2nd Trip!*

From the ten winning delegates, SECO will choose two students to attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. in June 2025.

Includes visits to famous monuments such as the Lincoln Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, Mt. Vernon, and many more historic sites, alongside thousands of other students from around the nation!

**APPLY ONLINE:**

[secoenergy.com/youth-tour-application](https://secoenergy.com/youth-tour-application)

**SECO ENERGY**  
(352) 793-3801 [secoenergy.com](https://secoenergy.com)

**IG** Weekend of  
March 29th 10:20 AM

**EMPOWER HER**  
*Brunch*  
The Level Up Experience

**Focal Points**  
• Finance Basics  
• Self-Empowerment  
• Self-Care

Register on EventBrite

**Girls 10-19**  
**Free**

Upgrade your ticket (circle only) PRGMO CODE: DG2025  
**Level Up-VIP Package**  
General Admission (Adults only) GP2025

Dress Code: *Diamonds in Denim*

**Contact**  
Amiracle Watson  
352-509-6691 or  
[diamondjorcle23@gmail.com](mailto:diamondjorcle23@gmail.com)

**The Florida Department of Health in Marion County and AdventHealth want to hear from you!**

We are working together to get the community's perspective on the most pressing health and wellness needs. Information collected will be used to develop programs and services to improve health in Marion County.

Please take 15 minutes to fill out the survey below. Your voice is important to ensure these organizations have the best understanding of the needs of our community. Thank you!

Scan the QR code or visit [surveymonkey.com/r/All4HealthFL25](https://surveymonkey.com/r/All4HealthFL25).



**Florida**  
**HEALTH**  
Marion County

**AdventHealth**



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

**FREE LUNCH is Provided!**

Workshop Location: Mary Sue Rich Community Center @ Reed Place  
1821 NW 21st Ave Ocala, FL 34475

Questions? Email Hilary@mcchildrensalliance.org

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2025  
11:30 AM TO 1:00 PM**

**21ST CENTURY MARIJUANA: YOUTH, MENTAL  
HEALTH, AND PREDATORY MARKETING**

**PRESENTED BY:  
AMY RONHAUSEN EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR, DRUG FREE AMERICA FOUNDATION, INC.  
PRESIDENT, WORLD FEDERATION AGAINST DRUGS**

This presentation explores the multifaceted impacts of 21st-century marijuana on youth, with a particular focus on mental health challenges and the rise of predatory marketing targeting young people. Special emphasis will be placed on strategies aimed at engaging female youth, highlighting how modern advertising techniques exploit this demographic. Participants will gain insights into current trends, risks, and practical prevention approaches to mitigate these harms within their communities.

**TO REGISTER, VISIT LINK OR SCAN QR CODE:**

**[WWW.SURVEYMONKEY.COM/R/FEB25THCCASAWORKSHOP](http://WWW.SURVEYMONKEY.COM/R/FEB25THCCASAWORKSHOP)**



**HOSTED  
BY:**



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BY:**

