



In this issue:

**Town Talk Magazine Celebrates
4 Year Anniversary**

**Pearls & Gems Learning
and Tutoring Center**

The Micah 6:8 Leader

**Remembering Captain Virginia
Ferguson: Queen of the Silver River**

**Fourth Annual Freedom
Recovery Festival Returns**

Family First For Dorielle Gaskin

Graduation Ceremonies Scheduled



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

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

**Ocala City Council Meetings
May 6 and May 20
4 p.m.**

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

**Marion County School Board
May 13 and May 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

Elgin Carelock

Connie Mann

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
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announcements and advertisements
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or Towntalkmagazine.org.**

EDITOR'S DESK



Wow, how time flies. Town Talk Magazine, a passion project, was born from the shared vision of two friends determined to bring more community representation from people who look like us. This month we're celebrating four years (36 issues), and we're proud of how far we've come and we're excited about the future.

More than two decades ago, we realized the need to tell our stories, so we bought a printing press and over 50 reams of colorful paper from a business in Dunnellon. However, life intervened, the dream paused and we donated the press to Forest High School, our alma mater.

As time passed, our conversations continued - not as complaints but as reflections.

Other magazines existed, but coverage of specific people and communities was often limited or reserved for special issues. When Alonzo Hardy launched the *UNITE Publication*, we supported it and did not want to duplicate his efforts. However, after Hardy relocated and UNITE ended, an opportunity emerged when residents, who participated in a survey conducted in West Ocala by the Marion County Health Department, indicated that they felt a publication was needed to keep them informed of what was happening in their community. This motivated us to launch Town Talk Magazine and name it after our neighborhood grocery store, which bought people in the community together.

So we went to work, created our logo and designed the layout all within a month. From the beginning, *Town Talk Magazine* has been committed to telling the stories that often go unheard, shining a light on small businesses, local leaders and vibrant communities, all at no cost to the public.

We are extremely grateful for the support we've received over the past few years. Special thanks to Federica King, whose tireless behind-the-scenes work has been essential since day one. We also thank our writing contributors, loyal subscribers, advertisers and our readers who believe in our mission. You helped make this dream finally become a reality.

The magazine is available online and in print. Printed copies are primarily being distributed to small businesses and churches. Our goal this year is to expand print distribution to include the outlying areas in Marion County.

You can support the magazine in a few meaningful ways:

- Advertise with us. Rates are very affordable. Donations are too welcome.
- Share your story or submit ideas for future stories.
- Help distribute copies to your church, business or local community.
- Receive a printed copy, mailed to your home, for \$50 annually

Let's Talk!

Monica Bryant

Monica T. Bryant, Editor

**Thank you for supporting us the last four years!
Town Talk is not about us, it's about our community!**

Cynthia Wilson-Graham and Monica Bryant

Subscribe with Us:

To receive a **free** copy via e-mail, subscribe at Towntalkmagazine.org

Annual subscription (printed copy) via mail: \$50

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Ads are black and white and must be submitted in Jpeg or Pdf format
and sent to Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com.

Payments can be made via Cash App (\$Towntalkmarion)

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

PEARLS & GEMS LEARNING AND TUTORING CENTER



Yvette Johnson

Since 1987, Yvette Johnson always knew her calling in life was to work with children. With encouragement from her co-workers, she started her career as a paraprofessional, and in 1999 became a certified teacher. Johnson, who has four children of her own, is a certified teacher in the state of Florida in K-6 and has 34 years of experience. She has reading and ESOL endorsements, a Bachelor of Science from Nova Southeastern University, and she received the Golden Apple Teacher Recognition Award in 2018-2019 for Teacher of the Year while teaching at Evergreen Elementary School, which is now Fordham Early Learning Academy.

"I've always wanted to open a business that would allow me to give my students the same opportunities they would receive at a magnet school, not to mention smaller learning environments where all their needs would be targeted," she said.

"Students with a 504 and IEP's don't receive the services they need to be supported because the work load for the support facilitator is too large. I love working with students that struggle academically who are rated level one or two, or they have a 504 or IEP."

In August of 2024, she took a leap of faith and opened Pearls & Gems Learning and Tutoring Center, LLC despite the challenges she knew she would endure.

"There's no grants for startup businesses like these, but once you've been operating for several years, there's grants available," Johnson said. "I had to use all my savings, credit cards and missed paying my mortgage for several months to make my dream, vision, passion and goals be birthed."

Johnson said the name of the center came to her in a dream. Pearls comes from her youngest two children's grandmother, who passed away but was a beloved Science teacher for 35 years and the one who inspired her to pursue teaching. Gems, she said, is the standard for what she believes is within every child if you teach with passion and show them their worth.

Pearls & Gems is located at Johnson's home at 14415 S.E. 43rd Terr., Summerfield, FL., and is open from 7:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. and serves students in grades K-5 in Sumter and Marion County. Before and after care is available for an additional fee. Students bring their own lunch, wear bottoms of their choice, but are required to purchase shirts with the Pearls and Gems logo on them. The cost is \$7 for small and medium sizes and \$10 for large shirts.

Johnson currently has four students enrolled and has openings for six more when the new school year starts on August 11, 2025. The registration fee is \$500 per student and covers testing, supplies for STEM projects, animal care, crops, etc. Tuition is \$1,000 per month for homeschooling and \$1,500 for students who have an IEP or 504 Plan. When she reaches full capacity, she can hire a part-time employee, but volunteers who have passed a background check are always welcome to come help out. Tuition can be paid by Step Up for Students Scholarship or if it's a private pay, payment is due at the end of week two. Students with a 504 or IEP must apply for the Unique Abilities Scholarship and others can apply for the New World Scholarship, which allows tutoring for students.

Johnson is offering summer tutoring Monday through Thursday, from 8 a.m. to noon, June 16 through July 18 and includes two one hour sessions. Payment is due at the end of each session. Rates are \$35 per hour full-time and \$25 per hour part-time. Every session is two hours minimum for full-time, 3 to 4 days a week and part-time, 1 to 2 days a week.

"My long-term goal is to have the center in a building where I can serve more students who are getting lost in the public schools because of unqualified teachers, lack of staff to meet targeted goals on 504 and IEP's and large classrooms with time restrictions to teach benchmarks in a manner that they're obtained," she said.

Johnson said Pearls & Gems is unique because she focuses on the whole child. She said many of her students in the public sector came from broken homes, foster care, were homeless, abused or from the judicial system, information that was often withheld from teachers.

A typical day starts with prayer then they read a targeted monthly Psalm and affirmation. The students journal for 20 minutes before they go into their core learning blocks for Math and Language Arts, which lasts 1:45 minutes. After lunch, the students have Recess and PE. The day ends with a STEM activity or caring for the Peace Garden or crops.



Johnson said her greatest need is an outside covered concrete area for the STEM projects and shelter and some raised flower beds.

"I want to expose my students to artwork from famous artists through different cultures and time periods, places they might want to visit in another state or country one day, or seeing gifts that lay dormant in students because they can't use them because the focus is on core subjects," she said. "I believe if you're a dancer, singer, musician or an artist, it's important that I allow the gifts to become part of their road to success academically."

Johnson said she wants all her students' challenges to be addressed in a manner that they're successful and their self-esteem is boosted because they know someone believes that they are gifted, intelligent and loved.

"Teaching is my passion and I've dedicated my life to teaching all my students that together we're going to uncover their hidden gems," she said.

For enrollment information, questions or to contact Johnson, call (352) 330-7549, email her at yvettejohnson49@yahoo.com or follow Pearls & Gems Learning and Tutoring Center on Facebook.



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.

THE MICAH 6:8 LEADER: A BLUEPRINT FOR LEADERSHIP WITH INTEGRITY

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

In a world filled with complex challenges, ethical dilemmas and evolving definitions of success, leadership requires more than just strategic thinking or emotional intelligence. It calls for moral clarity, empathy and a deep sense of justice. The Bible offers timeless principles for leading with integrity, none more succinct and powerful than Micah 6:8. This verse serves as a compass for godly leadership, providing a clear directive: **"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."**

These three pillars - justice, mercy and humility - form the foundation of the "Micah 6:8 Leader." Let's break down these elements and explore how they apply to leadership today, both in personal and professional contexts.



1. Act Justly

Justice is more than just fairness; it's about actively pursuing what is right. In leadership, acting justly means creating environments where truth, honesty and equality are prioritized. It involves standing up for those who cannot speak for themselves and ensuring that all voices are heard, especially the marginalized and the oppressed.

Practical Applications:

- **Transparency in decision-making:** Leaders who act justly ensure that their decisions are transparent and accountable. In the workplace, this could mean setting clear expectations and following through with fairness, whether dealing with promotions, bonuses or disciplinary actions.
- **Advocating for others:** A just leader doesn't shy away from hard conversations, especially when it involves advocating for those without power. If you see a co-worker being treated unfairly, it's your responsibility to step in and address the situation.
- **Equitable policies:** A leader should regularly assess whether their organization's policies promote equity and justice for all employees, clients or stakeholders.

Supporting Scripture:

Proverbs 31:8-9 reminds leaders to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Isaiah 1:17 adds to this, commanding us to "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed."

2. Love Mercy

Mercy in leadership is about leading with compassion and forgiveness. It's easy to be punitive and harsh when mistakes are made, but the Micah 6:8 leader recognizes that people are more important than processes, and relationships are more valuable than results. Loving mercy means extending grace to others, especially when they fail or falter.

Practical Applications:

- **Encouraging a culture of forgiveness:** Leaders should encourage a culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than failures. If a team member falls short, offer them a chance to grow and improve rather than immediately penalizing them.
- **Practicing empathy:** Leaders who love mercy take the time to understand the challenges their team faces. This could mean offering flexibility in work arrangements or providing support during difficult times.
- **Restoring relationships:** When conflicts arise, a merciful leader seeks reconciliation over retaliation. They focus on restoring broken relationships rather than holding onto grievances.

Supporting Scripture:

Matthew 5:7 declares, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Colossians 3:12-13 encourages leaders to "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another."

3. Walk Humbly with Your God

Humility is often misunderstood as weakness, but it is one of the most powerful traits a leader can possess. A humble leader recognizes that they don't have all the answers and that they are not the ultimate authority. Walking humbly with God means acknowledging our dependence on Him, seeking His wisdom and aligning our actions with His will.

Practical Applications:

- **Servant leadership:** Jesus modeled servant leadership by washing His disciples' feet, showing that true leadership is about serving others. As leaders, we should adopt the mindset of serving our teams rather than lording over them.

Continued on page 5

Protecting, Promoting, and Improving Community Health

The Florida Department of Health in Marion County

provides a wide range of services for county residents, including:

Medical, Dental, Nursing

- Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program
- Dental Health
- Disease Reporting
- Family Planning
- Hepatitis Services
- HIV/AIDS Services and PrEP
- Immunizations
- Sexually Transmitted Infections Testing and Treatment
- Tuberculosis Services

Community Health

- Positive Youth Development Program (BRAZEN)
- Chronic Disease Management and Prevention
- Health Education
- Healthy Start
- Mobile Health Unit
- Overdose Data to Action
- Refugee Health
- School Health

Community Services

- Birth and Death Certificates
- Disaster Preparedness
- Volunteer with the Medical Reserve Corps

Environmental Public Health

- Environmental Public Health

WIC

- WIC Program (Women, Infants, and Children)



Main Office: 1801 SE 32nd Ave., Ocala, FL 34471 • 352-629-0137

Dental Clinic: 1501 W Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala, FL 34475 • 352-622-2664

WIC: Ocala, Belleview, and Reddick • 352-622-1161

For more information, visit Marion.FloridaHealth.gov or email Info.Marion@FLHealth.gov.

Continued from page 4

- **Continuous learning:** A humble leader is teachable. They seek feedback, are open to correction and constantly look for ways to grow both personally and professionally.
- **Seeking divine guidance:** Walking humbly with God involves seeking His guidance through prayer and scripture. This ensures that our leadership decisions are aligned with His purposes and not driven by ego or ambition.

Supporting Scripture:

- **Philippians 2:3-4** teaches, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others."
- **James 4:10** reminds us, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

Conclusion: Becoming a Micah 6:8 Leader

The Micah 6:8 Leader embodies a unique blend of justice, mercy and humility. In a world that often prioritizes power, control and results, these qualities set Christian leaders apart. By acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God, we reflect the character of Christ and create environments where people flourish.

Whether you are leading a business, a family or a community, these principles are a divine blueprint for successful leadership. They ensure that your leadership is not just effective, but meaningful and transformative, both for you and those you lead.

Let us commit to being leaders who seek justice, extend mercy and walk humbly, trusting that as we follow these principles, we will lead in a way that honors God and blesses those around us.



HOW YOU CAN HELP!

- **Leave your donation in a bag near your mailbox on May 10.** The letter carrier will collect the food during their regular delivery route.
- **Ensure your donation is non-perishable, not outdated and properly packaged.**
- **Support your local food banks.** The collected food is distributed to local food pantries and charities.

Save-the-Date for the 22nd Annual



DRIVE -THRU ONLY!

**Saturday,
July 26, 2025
10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Friends Recycling
2350 N.W. 27TH Ave.
Ocala, Florida**

**~ FREE BACKPACKS AND SCHOOL SUPPLIES ~
STUDENT(S) MUST BE PRESENT ~ NO EXCEPTIONS!**

THEN, STOP BY OUR BOUTIQUE

**FREE CLOTHING AND HYGIENE ITEMS,
(WHILE SUPPLIES LAST) FOR TEENS!**

SATURDAY, JULY 26, 2025

10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**ED CROSKEY CENTER
1510 N.W. 4TH ST., OCALA**

***Backpacks and School Supplies
NOT available at this location!***



Immunizations (**Must Bring Current Shot Record**),
School Physicals, Vision and Hearing Screenings, dental cleanings,
fluoride, sealants and exams for children birth to 18 years old.

Vendors include: Marion County Health Department, Central Florida
Community Action Agency, Community Home Project, Estella Byrd
Whitman Community Health Center, Ocala Fire Rescue and more.

Sponsored by

Marion County Children's Alliance, Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida, Inc. and the City of Ocala

For information, vendor and sponsorship opportunities or to donate school supplies, call (352) 438-5990

FOURTH ANNUAL FREEDOM RECOVERY FESTIVAL RETURNS

Ken Lunday knows what it's like to hit rock bottom and lose everything he cared about. After growing up in a family of fortune tellers who practiced black magic, he was an Opioid and Heroin addict for 13 years. His addiction lasted several years and got worse after a back injury at work.

"In those years, I lost my family, my friends, my marriage and my place to live. I was homeless under the Belleview bridge," he said. "I stole from my mother-in-law, family and my son's baseball team during my journey. I sold everything in our house to curb my addiction, including our AC unit."

While on the streets, he begged God to take his life or change him. God did just that. He sent a good Samaritan and Lunday surrendered everything that day. He was taken to a Regeneration Program, which taught him how to forgive, heal, love himself and most importantly God so he could love others. After a year in the program, his children grew, his wife forgave him, his family was restored and he developed an intimate relationship with God and became a new man in Christ.

Lunday and his wife Kim wanted to find a way to let the community know there is support for them too. They used their recovery connections and supporters to organize the first Recovery Festival to get the word out that if you're in active addiction, have been in recovery for years or have a family member in addiction, there is a supportive community waiting to help.



Ken and Kim Lunday

The Fourth Annual Freedom Recovery Festival will be held on May 17, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Celebration Church, 12404 S.E. 112th Ave. Rd., Belleview, FL. Joe Nester, a Christian music artist will perform and share his testimony.

"The community needs to know there are people who have a heart to help them. They are not alone," said Lunday, who with his wife, are members of the church and Celebrate Recovery Directors. "Today, we live to help others and show them hope!"

The free event includes live music, free food and drinks, local testimonies, vendors, bounce houses for kids, a Celebrate Recovery table, prayer tent and a Baptismal for anyone who wants to be baptized. A team of people, including Lunday and his wife, will be available to talk to anyone who needs help. This year, attendees can purchase a memorial space on the memorial wall for \$20 to honor a loved one who died from an addiction of any kind, mental illness or self-harm. The deadline to purchase a memorial space is a week before the event. Free T-shirts are available on a first-come, first-served basis and free clothing and hygiene items will be available at the community outreach table.

"The vendors that attend have various programs and facilities that offer help and are all in one place to ask questions and get information," he said. "There are so many in recovery who successfully maintain it and are flourishing people give their testimonies of where they came from and where they are now."

Last year, 300 people attended the festival and 35 vendors participated. Lunday hopes more people will show up this year although he believes God will send those who need to be there. Vendor opportunities are still available. The cost is \$30. Payments can be made by scanning the QR code or online by texting **(855) 575-7888** and putting **278582** in the message to be taken to the payment site. Checks can be made payable to Celebrate Recovery and mailed to 28 Sequoia Drive Trce., Ocklawaha, FL 32179. Donations are also welcome.



Lunday, who is celebrating 14 years in recovery wants those who attend to know that they are not alone. He said if you have a heart for recovery, call Kim at **(352) 553-5412** to volunteer. Anyone with a Hurt, Habit or Hang-up can attend their Celebrate Recovery support group held every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. Dinner is served starting at 5:45 p.m.

If you're struggling with an addiction, Lunday encourages you to talk to someone who has been in recovery for years.

"See that they are real people with real struggles just like you," he said. "Find your community and get plugged in. We all need support."

For questions or more information, call Kim Lunday at **(352) 553-5412** or email her at **celebraterecoveryatcelebration@gmail.com**.

Follow them on Facebook at **<https://www.facebook.com/celebraterecoveryatcelebratebelleview>**.



Celebration Church
Belleview, FL
352-470-1619

CAPTAIN VIRGINIA FERGUSON: QUEEN OF THE SILVER RIVER



Every Mother's Day we have the opportunity to honor not just our mothers, but the incredible women in our lives who have made a difference in this world and who have shown us, by their example, how to be the best versions of ourselves we can be. I'd like to introduce you to one such amazing lady.

Captain Virginia Ferguson was a trailblazer and a pioneer, but she was also a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. I was privileged to know her as my mentor and dearest friend. They called her, *The Queen of the Silver River*, and rightly so. In 1973, she earned her captain's license from the USCG and became the first female and first black woman to captain at Silver Springs. That was no small feat for a woman, never mind a black woman, in those days. She loved the Silver River and delighted in showing it off to guests from all over the world. She worked there for 46 years until a stroke ended her career at the park. She entered her heavenly home on March 25, 2025.

I met Captain Virginia in early 2006 when I was hired as a Glass Bottom Boat captain at Silver Springs. Out of the 30 captains, there were only three ladies, so they sent me to train at the "Pink Dock," aka Fort King River Cruise, under Captain Virginia's watchful eye.

She had a warm smile, twinkling brown eyes, a wonderful laugh – and a spine of steel she showed when necessary. She never considered herself a trailblazer or pioneer or mentor; she'd tell you she was just a woman trying to put food on the table. She was a hard worker and expected the same from those she trained. She let me know on day one that it didn't matter how nice I was to people or how cute I looked, I'd earn my place among the other captains when I could **prove** I could handle a glass bottom boat, which meant a whole lot of early-morning practice before the park opened.

When she decided I was ready, she had me take the boat over to the Glass Bottom Boat dock. As it happened, the park manager was there and every single captain working that day lined up on the dock, arms crossed, to watch the new girl try to dock the boat in those tricky currents. My hands were shaking, and I swallowed hard. "Oh, man." Captain Ginny just lifted her chin, sent them all a serene smile and murmured, "Just do it like I taught you, Connie. Just do it like I taught."

I did, and she was right. I earned my place among the captains that day. Her example taught me how to step into the role of captain with skill, grace and confidence - despite those who didn't welcome the idea of a woman at the helm.

She loved people and had a gift for dealing with guests from all over the world. No matter how many years she worked there, she still got excited every day to show guests the gators and birds and other wildlife. She'd make them laugh, teach them about the river, called everybody "Baby."

We became close friends as well as colleagues and had so much fun working together. Back then the Rhesus Macaques lived at Silver Springs and the wildlife staff put food out for them every day so they'd stay around. But we also kept bags of old Wonder Bread down by our seats to feed to the ducks. One day while Virginia's boat was tied at the dock, a monkey jumped on and tried to take off with her loaf of bread. She snatched up a broom and took off after him hollering, "Oh no you don't! Git on off my boat!" They chased each other round and round while the rest of us about fell off the dock laughing. But I'll have you know that monkey did not steal her bread.

Recently, I found this old photo from around 2010, with the two of us on the dock, holding the ropes around this big ole alligator, laughing, pretending we were some kind of Steve Irwin wannabe's, wrestling this big ole gator into submission.

The truth was, he was dead. They'd fished him out of the river and were about to cart him off for a necropsy to determine cause of death. That big boy stank to high heaven. But we had ourselves a good time pretending we were some kind of tough gator wranglers.

But more than she loved the Silver River, Captain Ginny loved her family. Back when cell phones had these teensy little screens, we'd squint at each other's photos of the latest family doings. Weddings, graduations, new jobs and babies.

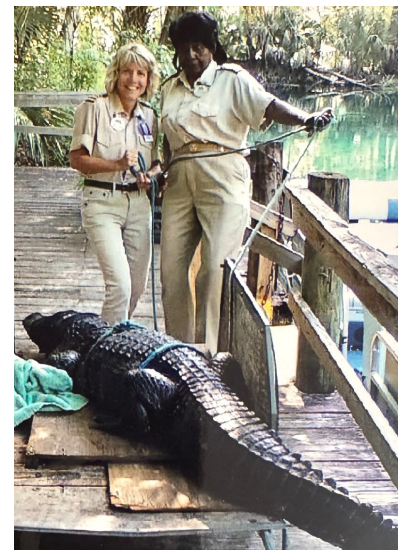
More than once, on her "favorite" days - when it was 45 degrees, raining and windy - she'd be bundled up to her eyebrows and we'd huddle in that drafty captain's shack with the space heater cranked up, hoping the three guests in the park from Minnesota or somewhere up north weren't going to want a boat ride. On those days, we'd have ourselves a prayer meeting. We prayed for her family, my family, our friends. Thanked God for the blessings and those doing well, and prayed for those who were sick, or grieving, or struggling or hurting.

Because that's who she was. She loved her family more than anything and it was my great privilege to have her scoop me into the fold.

Thank you for everything, Miss Ginny. For blazing a trail for other women to follow and for being my mentor, encourager, example, sister and dear friend. Your encouragement to "do it like I taught you" inspires me to do the same for the next generation. I look forward to seeing your bright smile when I reach heaven's shore.

This Mother's Day, I hope you'll take time to thank the amazing women who've helped shape your life, too.

Submitted by Connie Mann, who currently works as a captain for the Marine Discovery Center in New Smyrna Beach. She is also the author of nine novels, most recently, *The Crown Conspiracy*. Visit her online at: www.conniemann.com.



MY BELOVED PRE-MOTHER'S DAY DINNER COMING SOON



Virginia Ferguson

When Jessica Hadley-Brown came up with the idea to organize a Pre-Mother's Day Dinner, she wanted it to be for mother's who had experienced the loss of a child or children. She envisioned it being a time for those mother's to fellowship in an evening of love, laughter and sisterhood as they journeyed together through grief, honored their strength, share their stories and hold space for healing. But things changed when her mother, Virginia Ferguson, asked her why she couldn't invite daughters who had experienced the loss of their mom to the event.

"Mom spoke, I implemented the idea," she said. "Therefore, this event will be shared by both mother's and daughter's."

The Pre-Mother's Day Dinner this year will be a little different for Hadley-Brown, who lost her mother on March 25, 2025.



"This year, I now have a connection as a daughter who has and is navigating the grief Journey," she said.

Hadley-Brown said her mother's memory will always be in her heart, and she may say something, but the event is for every mother and daughter attending and she won't be self-ish and make the event about her mother.

The Pre-Mother's Day Dinner set for Sunday, May 4, will be an evening filled with an abundance of door prizes, games and dinner. The event is free, but the deadline to RSVP is closed.

Hadley-Brown said the family of the late Captain Virginia Ferguson would like to thank everyone for their support, participation, prayers, phone calls, visits and meals during the preparation for their mother's life celebration.

Ferguson's children, Youlando Green Jones, Robert (Rock) Green, Hadley-Brown, and her grandchildren are asking the community to support and stand with them as they continue to honor their mother's memory.

During the month of May, e community is invited to visit the exhibit featuring Captain Virginia Ferguson at the Marion County Black History Museum at Howard Academy Community Center, 306 N.W. 7th Ave. Please call **(352) 671-4175** to schedule an appointment.

Hadley-Brown said they plan to contact the Silver Springs Board of Directors and City of Ocala Mayor, Ben Marciano, to ask if they would consider making June 6, Captain Virginia Ferguson Day.

Join us for a **Brunch Buffet & Build-A-Boquet Booth** to celebrate mom!

Saturday, May 3rd from 10am-1pm

Adult Tickets \$40*	Child Tickets \$15
Includes:	Includes:
• Brunch Buffet	• Brunch Buffet
• 1 Flower Bouquet	• 1 Mini Bouquet
• Photo Booth	• Photo Booth

*Add on Bottomless Mimosas for \$17! (must present valid ID at event)

Location: 45 Laurel Pass, Ocala, FL

Please join us to celebrate

MOTHER'S DAY

MAY 6, 2025 ♥ 5:30-7:30pm

Free Food, Drinks and a Build-Your-Own Flower Bar

Bring your mom, grandmother, friend, or anybody you'd like to come enjoy free bites.

Angie Lewis State Farm
416 E. Fort King St., Ocala, FL

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MOTHER'S DAY Celebration

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18 & UP

VENDOR SPOT AND QUESTION CONTACTS: (352) 816-4901 OR (352) 509-5362

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MUSIC BY CHARLIE B
TICKETS \$25
TIME: 12PM-3PM

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BLOOM & BRUSH

MOTHER'S DAY PAINT & SIP

SATURDAY, MAY 10TH
11AM TO 3PM

Cheers to Moms!
Join us at Bloom and Brush for painting, sipping, music vibes, and a beautiful day to celebrate YOU.

3620 N. EAST 8TH PLACE,
SUITE 2, OCALA
FLORIDA 34470

SCAN TO GET TICKETS

FINE ARTS FOR OCALA

SYMPHONY UNDER THE STARS

CELEBRATE MOTHER'S DAY

SUNDAY, MAY 11
GATES OPEN AT 3PM

OCALA GOLF CLUB
3130 E SILVER SPRINGS BLVD.

BUY TICKETS & MORE INFO: WWW.FAFO.ORG

FAMILY FIRST FOR DORIELLE GASKIN



Dorielle Gaskin never let being a teenage mom stop her from having the best in life and being a role model for her children.

"I was not going to be a statistic," she said. "Being a teenage mother is what pushed me because I didn't want my son to get older and see I gave up in life because I had him young."

While Mother's Day is usually the time set aside to honor and appreciate mothers for their sacrifices and contributions to their families and society, for Gaskin, it's a reminder of the unique bond she shares with her children and her family.

"I don't just celebrate Mother's Day once a year, but everyday," she said. "My kids always call and need me! From helping with financial advice, food instructions how to's and what not's, mommy gets the first call."

From the beginning, Gaskin always put her children first. Initially, she went to school to be a firefighter/EMT, but since the career was so demanding and she was a young mother, she decided to go to school for Cosmetology.

"I wanted something where I could have time for my child and make money," she said.

In 2016, Gaskin said she walked away from the corporate world after her pastor, Bishop Tanya Hanks, preached on not letting fear be your stop sign.

"Everything she was saying was hitting me! I left church that day, walked away from my job on a Tuesday and never looked back."

And Gaskin continues to move forward. This year she's celebrating 20 years since she became a cosmetologist in 2005. Now she's the proud owner of Sylk Threadz Salon, located at 729 N.W. Martin Luther King Jr., Ave. She specializes in all types of hair, from natural, relaxed, curly, straight, long and short, and she's known for growing her clients hair. She also makes her own hair care products which are available in her salon or online. The name came from her being known for silk press, and Threadz stands for hair with a twist.

"Dorielle is not only a great stylist, but she is about making sure her clients have healthy hair," said Lena Hopkins, a client for more than two years. "Of all the years and stylists I've gone to, she is absolutely the best with time management. If my appointment is at 9 a.m., I am in her chair at 9.

Hopkins has a standing appointment with Gaskin every two weeks on Wednesdays. She said in the last year, she has gone from hair that was less than an inch long to hair that is now more than 14 inches long.

"I tell her all the time, she has growing hands," Hopkins said.

She is the proud mother of three children ages 24, 19 and 12.

The oldest is a college graduate, the middle child is in college and the youngest is in middle school. She said she's had many proud moments raising her kids because they all experienced a different Dorielle.

Gaskin said she had a different goal in life for each of her children and she was able to accomplish them with the help of her husband, Fred, of 13 years.

"He is the best support system. With his help, I was able to chase my dreams and be the best," she said. "I just love being with my family, nothing more than that. Everyone who knows me know, family is first for me."

To check out Gaskin's products, go to <http://www.sylkthreadz.org> or for more information or to book an appointment, go to <http://www.styleseat.com/doriellegaskin>.



MOTHER THELMA EDWARDS HONORED AT AWARDS GALA



Thelma Wright Edwards, seated in wheel chair, a cousin of Emmett Till, and the oldest living relative of Mamie Till Mobley, daughter of Mose Wright, whose courageous court testimony in 1955 helped expose the brutal murder of Emmett Till and shifted the course of civil rights history, was one of 18 women honored at the Women of Courage Awards Gala on Sunday, March 30, at the National Press Club, in Washington, D.C.



The award, presented by the Emmett Till Legacy Foundation, celebrated women who exemplified the strength, resilience and courage of Mamie Till Mobley.

Emmett Till was brutally murdered in August 1955 after whistling at Carolyn Bryant, a white woman, in a Mississippi grocery store. Bryant's husband and brother-in-law dragged Till, who was 14 years old at the time, from his bed in the middle of the night, brutally beat and then shot him in the head and threw him in a river. The two men were acquitted.

Brenda Vereen, Edwards goddaughter, accompanied Edwards and attended the Gala with her.

During the month of May, visit the exhibit, which will include a portrait of Edwards, at the Marion County Black History Museum at Howard Academy Community Center, 306 N.W. 7th Ave. Please call (352) 671-4175 to schedule an appointment.



Nearly 3,000 high school seniors are expected to graduate from Marion County Public Schools in May:

Bellevue High

- **Baccalaureate:** Thursday, May 15, 6 p.m. at Wings of Faith Fellowship Church
- **Graduation:** Saturday, May 24, 8 a.m. at BHS Stadium

Dunnellon High

- **Baccalaureate:** Thursday, May 22, 6 p.m. at River Life Church
- **Graduation:** Saturday, May 31, 6 p.m. at Ocala World Equestrian Center

Forest High

- **Baccalaureate:** Thursday, May 22, 6 p.m. at First Baptist Church of Ocala
- **Graduation:** Friday, May 30, 6 p.m. at Ocala World Equestrian Center

Hillcrest School

- **Graduation:** Wednesday, May 21, 11 a.m. at Hillcrest Gymnasium

Lake Weir High

- **Baccalaureate:** Tuesday, May 27, 6 p.m. at Wings of Faith Fellowship Church
- **Graduation:** Thursday, May 29, 6 p.m. at Southeastern Livestock Pavilion

North Marion High

- **Baccalaureate:** Tuesday, May 27, 6 p.m. at Oak Griner Baptist Church
- **Graduation:** Wednesday, May 28, 6 p.m. at Southeastern Livestock Pavilion

Vanguard High

- **Baccalaureate:** Tuesday, May 27, 6 p.m. at Ocala First Assembly of God Church
- **Graduation:** Friday, May 30, 6 p.m. at Southeastern Livestock Pavilion

West Port High

- **Baccalaureate:** Wednesday, May 28, 6 p.m. @ WPHS Performing Arts Center
- **Graduation:** Saturday, May 31, 8 a.m. at Ocala World Equestrian Center

Additional ceremonies are scheduled for:

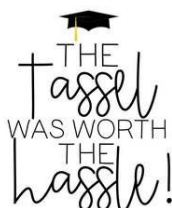
Marion Technical College

- Graduation:** Thursday, June 12, 6 p.m. at First Baptist Church of Ocala

MCPS Summer Graduation

- Thursday, July 24, 6 p.m. at Marion Technical Institute Auditorium

For more information, contact the Office at (352) 671.7734.



Public Relations

MCCA IS COLLECTING GENTLY USED OR NEW CLOTHING FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLERS! HELP STOCK OUR FREE BACK-TO-SCHOOL BOUTIQUE



ALL SIZES

✓ We Need:

Teen Clothing -- hoodies, jeans, tees, sneakers, etc.

Hygiene Items -- deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, body wash, toothpaste, toothbrushes & feminine products, **(Must be New!)**

✗ Please No:

Adult/senior clothing, business wear or worn-out items.

📍 Drop Off:

MCCA – 3482 NW 10th St, Ocala, FL 34475

📞 Call (352) 438-5990 to arrange a pickup!



Howard Academy Community Center SUMMER ENRICHMENT CAMP

Theme: Under the Sea

Students will journey to the depths of the ocean to learn all about the creatures that live in the deep blue sea!

June 4, 2025 to June 26, 2025
Monday thru Thursday
1:00pm to 5:30pm daily

Bus transportation is available to students who will attend the following schools this summer:
 Shady Hill, Saddlewood, and Oakcrest
 (Parents are responsible for pickup from Howard Academy at 5:30pm)

Kindergarten thru 5th grade only. Spaces are limited.
 Use the following link below to register:
<https://form.jotform.com/240975146318156>

For more information, call (352) 671-4735

TALENT HUNT

Saturday May 17

Start at **3:00 PM**

New Covenant Baptist Church
 606 SW Broadway St, Ocala, FL 34475

All High School Grade Levels
 Top 3 Winners Receive Cash Prize
 Applications Due Before Deadline

Ronald Jones 352-895-1429



PASSAGE Family Church
www.passageministries.org

JUDAH FEST OCALA FREE Community EVENT

Fish Fry

MLK CITIZENS PARK LOCATED AT
WEBB FIELD AT MLK RECREATION COMPLEX
1501 W SILVER SPRINGS BLVD.

SATURDAY, MAY 24TH
11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Games, Music,
and FREE food to include
fresh fish, hamburgers, hot dogs
and the list goes on...



10 Free
Concerts

Fridays, March - May | 6 - 8 p.m.
Webb Field, 1501 W Silver Springs Blvd.

Learn more at ocalafl.gov/levittamp.

March 14

**Joslyn and the Sweet
Compression**
Funk/Soul

March 21

OKAN
Afro-Cuban Jazz

March 28

The Mexican Standoff
Tejano

April 4

The Sweet Lillies
New Americana

April 11

The Dollyrots
Pop/Rock/Punk

April 18

Larry McCray
Blues

April 25

BettySoo
Country

May 2

Nattali Rize
Reggae

May 9

Larry & Joe
*Venezuelan Joropo &
Appalachian Folk*

May 16

McCrary Sisters
Gospel

@levittampocala

Thank you
to our sponsors!



A Black Tie AFFAIR

SATURDAY, MAY 3
4 PM



Aniyah Crawford
Violist



Sandra Folston
Poetess



Vince Taylor
Comedian



Pastor Joe &
Lady Joyce Maxwell
Hosts

The Webber Center
3001 S West College Rd.
Ocala, FL 34474
(Central Florida College)

Limited Seating
Purchase your tickets via
ocalatlc.org/events
or via
Zelle:
tlcocala@thelifecenter.org

For more information
contact us at 352.732.7774
or tlcocala@thelifecenter.org

COST:
\$50.00
PER PERSON

MONEY SMART TIPS

By Scott Hackmyer

TEACH YOUR CHILD FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EARLY

With large swings in stock market prices and uncertainty about government tariffs, many investors are leery of the stock market and looking for other places to put their money to work. This has caused a rise in gold prices and the precious metals market has gotten hot. When this happens, you have to be very careful about the scams that suddenly appear. I have an elderly neighbor who proudly showed me the roll of silver quarters he had just bought for \$699. He followed this up in the next few days with purchases from other dealers who called him about buying Kennedy half dollars and more quarters. He spent well over \$2,000 that week and when I Google searched the value of his coins, he paid about double what they are worth. It's almost like one dealer shares the buyer's name and phone number with other dealers once they find what they think is an easy mark. If you are tempted to buy gold, silver or other metals be very cautious from where you make the purchase. Look online to try to determine their real value then buy from a reputable dealer, preferably one that has a long-time location in Ocala, and stay away from answering offers that you get by email or phone calls.

As a parent or grandparent one of your important tasks is teaching financial responsibility at an early age. Establishing good habits early will go a long way toward helping young people make good money decisions when they get older. One way we did this when I was Principal at East Marion Elementary School and I partnered with what was then Mid-State Federal, who offered students' the chance to open savings accounts. A person from the bank would come to the school every Monday and the children could make their passbook deposit right at school. Once posted at Mid-State we would pick up the passbooks and return them to the children. Watching their savings balance grow became self-reinforcing and a goal for the children. They were proud of their growing account balances and it made them think twice before spending their money. Did they really want that new toy or game or would they rather put the money into their bank account? In this age of instant gratification and "I want it now" this was an effective tool in making sure something they wanted to buy was truly something they wanted beyond just a passing whim. As minors cannot open an account in their own name, they will need a parent or guardian to set up a joint or custodial account. With a Joint Account the parent and child both have access to the funds but the parent can limit the number of withdrawals the child makes. With a Custodial Account the money belongs to the child but the parent oversees the account until the child turns 18. I always suggest going online to find a High Yield Savings Account to maximize the interest your child will earn and review the account every few weeks with your child so they can see how their money is growing with each deposit or interest posting.

I have always been a believer in living below your means. This gives you the opportunity to build not only a rainy-day fund but significant savings over time. A man I know recently bought a new pickup truck and his monthly loan payment is more than \$850 a month. He might be able to afford it right now but if his situation changes at all in the future having that large of a payment could be tough to make. Sure enough his current employment ended and I am hoping he finds a position with matching income so that he doesn't lose that new truck. Try to keep your big purchases manageable so when the unexpected happens you still will be able to get by until life gets back on course.



Business Spotlight



Assuage
Counseling & Consulting
Bringing calm to your life storms

Business Name: Assuage Counseling and Consulting, LLC

No. of Employees: 1

Business Owner: Consuella Shaw, LMHC

Business Address: 1515 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ste. 134
Ocala, FL 34470

Business Phone: (321) 421-9932

What Year Did You Start Your Business? 2022

Hours of Operation: Monday - Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Products and/or Services:

Psychotherapy for adults 18 and older

E-mail Address: assuagecc@outlook.com

Website Address: www.assuagecc.com

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

Facebook: [assuagecc](#)

Instagram: [assuagecc](#)

What or Who Inspired You to Start Your Business? The inspiration behind Assuage Counseling and Consulting, LLC stems from both my passion for mental health and the guidance of my mentor, Elgin Carelock. With his wisdom and leadership, he recognized my dedication to the field of mental health and encouraged me to step into my purpose and create a space where individuals can find healing and support. My desire to help others navigate life's challenges, especially in the areas of grief and loss, fueled my mission to provide compassionate, evidence-based care. We are committed to walking alongside individuals on their journey to emotional well-being, resilience and transformation.

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

We take a unique approach to psychotherapy by blending evidence-based techniques with deep compassion and individualized care. Specializing in grief and loss, we recognize that healing is not a one-size-fits-all process. Our holistic approach integrates cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness and person-centered strategies to support emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. What sets us apart is our ability to create a safe, nonjudgmental space where clients feel truly heard and empowered to navigate their grief, find meaning and reclaim their strength. At Assuage, we don't just help you cope, we help you heal!

What Advice Would You Give Someone Starting A Business?

My biggest advice for anyone starting a business is to stay grounded in your "why" and be ready to adapt - success comes from clarity, consistency and learning through the challenges. Having a mentor is essential because they offer guidance, accountability and wisdom that can save you from costly mistakes and accelerate your growth.

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. Completed forms can be returned via email or mailed to P.O. Box 6212, Ocala, FL 34478.



SAVE THE DATE

The Ocala Juneteenth
Celebration Commission
presents

Stage Play: "Keep on Pressin"

Written by: Brian A. Houston

Saturday, June 21, 2025
7:00pm (Doors open at 6:30pm)

Mary Sue Rich Center
1821 N.W. 21st Avenue - Ocala, FL 34475

Tickets:
\$10 (in advance)
\$15 (at the door)

For more information:
Email:

Ocalajuneteenth2020@gmail.com



THE SIRCLE INC
Invite Everyone for...

JUNETEENTH

A Freedom Celebration

JUNE 20, 2025

MARY SUE RICH CENTER AT REED PLACE
1821 NW 21ST AVE, OCALA, FL 34475

FROM 6:00 PM - 11:00PM

TICKETS \$50 PER PERSON

Come & join us to
celebrate the day of freedom.

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT
MUSIC & DANCE
FOOD & DRINKS

For more information
Thesircleinc04@gmail.com

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

Saturday, June 14, 2025

6:00pm-10:00pm

Juneteenth Celebration Dinner & Dance Fundraiser

Mary Sue Rich Center at Reed Place
1821 NW 21st Ave, Ocala, FL 34475

TICKETS \$65 EACH

Attire: African or Business

Live Art Auction, Live Entertainment, Dinner,
Dancing, Raffles, Vendors, and more....

Contact: Barbara J. Brooks, Ph.D., President
R.A.M.A.L. Education and Social Services, Inc.
(352) 875-4237
www.ramalservices.org

Sponsorships Available!



SADDLE UP

For

BLUE SINK COMMUNITY 1ST ANNUAL Boots, Dukes & Bikes

Family Community Event

Blue Sink Community Center
11230 NW Hwy 225
Reddick, FL 32686

12pm - 6pm
5/3/2025

Entry
\$5 per motorcycle
\$10 per car
\$5 Walkups

Tournaments
• Kickball
• Corn hole

TEAM UP!

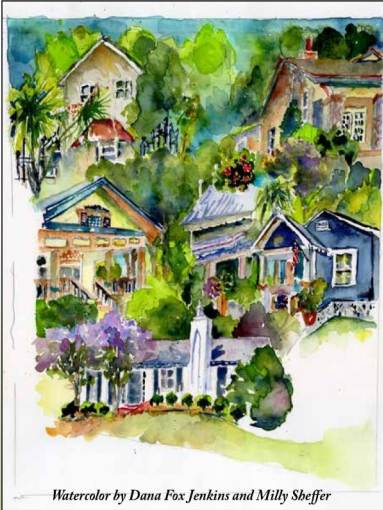
For more info please contact Glenda Roberts 352-208-7850



HISTORIC
OCALA
PRESERVATION
SOCIETY

CELEBRATING OUR 45TH YEAR

A Walk THROUGH TIME



Watercolor by Dana Fox Jenkins and Milly Sheffer

*Six historic homes
within walking
distance*

Saturday, May 17, 2025
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Tickets \$25 pre-sale, \$30 day of tour
Available at To Your Hearts Desire
in Ocala Shopping Center

For further information call Historic
Ocala Preservation Society
352-484-0502

HistoricOcala.org/SpringTour

PATTERNS OF TRANSFORMATION

DENAYA WILKERSON & MEL FIORENTINO

Thursday, May 8th

5:30 - 7:00 PM

@ the Brick City Center for the Arts (MCA)
23 SW Broadway Street, Ocala, FL 34471

Experience the dynamic fusion of movement and visual art in this engaging, interactive workshop. Join AIHOM Artist Practitioner DeNaya Wilkerson as she leads participants through the uplifting rhythms of African Dance, celebrating its joy and healing power. Meanwhile, Artist Practitioner Mel Fiorentino will translate the energy and motion into a live painting, capturing the essence of transformation in real time.

FREE with RSVP

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/patterns-of-transformation-with-arts-in-health-ocala-metro-tickets-1310564677229?aff=oddtcreator>



CHEER TRYOUTS



READY?

LET'S GO

2025

7-9 MAY,

7 NW 28TH ST.
OCALA, FL 34475

6:00 PM

VANGUARD HIGH SCHOOL

TRYOUT FEE \$30.00 - PAID ONLY THROUGH REVTRAK

The Ocala (FL) Alumni Association of
Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

POETIK EXPRESSION

Hosted by

Wanetisha Dawson Morant

Music by

DJ Damir Gamble

FRI, MAY 16TH (7-10P)
3130 E. SILVER SPRINGS BLVD
OCALA, FL 34470

Join us for an evening dedicated to the celebration of artistic expression through poetry and song while raising funds to support youth in our community.

Questions?

Call/text: (352) 682-7503

Tickets &

Performance

Sign-Up:





**FOOTBALL SPORTS CLINIC HOST:
VANGUARD HIGH FOOTBALL TEAM**



Helping heal children
and families impacted
by gun violence

JUNE 1, 2025

5PM - 8PM

WAR CRY CHILDREN AWARDS CEREMONY & SPORTS CLINIC

Celebrating the resilience of children who
have been impacted by gun-violence to reach
their fullest potential in school and in life.



**OFFICIAL
SPONSOR**



**FREE REGISTRATION
LIMITED SEATING**



SPORTS FUN * FREE FOOD

STUDEUNT ATTIRE: BLAZER/WC4P T-SHIRT

TENNIS SHOES/JEANSO



**MARY SUE RICH COMMUNITY
CENTER @ REED PLACE**

1821 NW 21st Ave. Ocala, FL 34475